

**Where the World
Is Not**



Where the World Is Not

Cultural Authority and Democratic Desire
in Modern American Literature

KIM SAVELSON



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*For Noah and Ella
And for Dede*

In these days of purposes and vexed moral problems it is hard for an author to keep himself untainted by the world. It is hard to hold fast to art pure and simple. . . . An artist should be able to lift himself up into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not one of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and reason and believe and argue, but he must create.

—Willa Cather

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Democracy Stumbling

Inventing, Democratic Desire, and the Will to Believe

In the classical philosophy, the ideal world is essentially a haven in which man finds rest from the storms of life. . . . When the belief that knowledge is active and operative takes hold of men, the ideal realm is no longer aloof and separate; it is rather that collection of imagined possibilities that stimulates men to new efforts and realizations . . . in the classic view the Idea belongs ready-made in a noumenal world. Hence it is only an object of personal aspiration or consolation, while to the modern, an idea is a suggestion of something to be done or a way of doing.

—John Dewey, “Changed Conceptions of the Ideal and the Real” (1920)¹

The idea of utility has long borne the stamp of vulgarity.

—Leo Marx, “Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept
Technology and the Rest of Culture” (1997)²

TOWARD THE end of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), we learn that as a boy Jay Gatsby had thought about becoming an inventor: he imagined he would “study needed inventions” for two hours every night. This revelation is put in the context of an allusion to Benjamin Franklin, as it becomes clear that Gatsby had sought to emulate Franklin in following a strict daily schedule. Gatsby’s father, Henry Gatz, arrives at the West Egg mansion for his son’s funeral and proudly presents this boyhood schedule to Nick Carraway, proclaiming that his son “had a big future in front of him” and that “he always had some resolves like this” (*Gatsby* 174–75).³ It turns out that Gatsby devised his schedule—accounting for every hour of the day—in September of 1906, back when he was still Jimmy Gatz. The schedule reads:

September 12, 1906

Rise from bed.6.00 A.M.

Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling	6.15–6.30	“
Study electricity, etc.	7.15–8.15	“
Work.	8.30–4.30	P.M.
Baseball and sports.....	4.30–5.00	“
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it	5.00–6.00	“
Study needed inventions	7.00–9.00	“

As critics have often noted, the appearance of this timetable at the end of the novel underscores the theme of *self-invention* (and self-improvement) that Ben Franklin’s *Autobiography* is also known for. But what should we make of the particular importance of Gatsby being interested in actual, mechanical inventing, setting aside a full two hours a day to “study needed inventions”?⁴ If, in the words of Lionel Trilling, Gatsby “comes inevitably to stand for America itself” (Trilling, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 17), the prospect of his dreaming that he might one day become an *actual* inventor, and not merely a self-made man, is a detail of considerable significance.

This detail introduces some notable complications to the prevailing idea that Gatsby’s character is above all a sheer, colossal dreamer, and in this, not very practical. While this quixotic reading of Gatsby seems almost mandatory, and remains a standard “take” on his character over the course of eighty years of criticism—deeply encouraged, to be sure, by the text itself—it is possible to read Gatsby’s romanticism differently, bringing out the implications of his associations with an instrumentalist, practical outlook. To highlight this dimension of Gatsby is not simply to say that he is, as the text puts it, “extravagantly ambitious”—a claim that can hardly be disputed—but to open up more complicated, historical questions, raised by the text, about the relations among idealism, practicality, action, and ambition (101). The narration’s references to Gatsby’s “fantastic conceits” (99) invite the reader to think about the context and connotations of his “fancies” and “reveries,” about the ways that his character fuses “romantic readiness” (2) with a distinctly functional mindset that emphasizes consequences, action, and an outcome-based approach. After all, even as he “gulp[s] down the incomparable milk of wonder” (112), Gatsby studiously resolves not to be “shiftless” like his parents (99); and we can assume that the only way he can do “extraordinarily well in the war” (150) is to combine careful planning with a skillful focus on execution. Gatsby’s consistent effort to apply his “extraordinary gift for hope” (2) to a particular end means he has a plan, and does nothing without a purpose, even as a boy. This is what Gatsby’s father, Henry Gatz, is saying to Nick—“It just shows you,” he says—when he pulls from

his pocket Gatsby's old copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* to reveal the "schedule" the young Gatsby had inscribed on the last page (174). Among the other ways that Gatsby plans to spend his time, his commitment to "study" what is "needed" in the way of inventions, presumably so that he can work at getting rich himself, is but another mark of his practical approach to achieving his dreams.

While others have observed that Gatsby believes in and is dedicated to the future—his own "future glory" (100), the "orgiastic future" (182)—I want to provoke more from this observation here by suggesting that his futurism can be understood in terms of practicality and, indeed, of pragmatism.⁵ "The pragmatist focuses on the future," as John Patrick Diggins has noted, always "looking ahead" to the "promise of success." Pragmatism thus becomes "a story of the upward movement of life, a hopeful vision that appeals to [the] romantic imagination."⁶ This futurism can explain both why Gatsby thinks he can repeat the past *and* why he thinks he can invent (something in) the future. Both assumptions are bound by the same logic and imagined inventive capacity: anything is possible, everything is open to the same "hopeful vision," as Diggins puts it (19), and time itself—history, as it were, is in flux and impossible to stabilize. This worldview essentially champions experiment, in that every thought or idea or dream must be tested and applied in order to determine its workability or validity. As William James explained in 1907, pragmatism is "an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*."⁷ In Gatsby's belief that the past can be repeated—a belief that reinvents the existing rules of time—is thus a dimension of pragmatic philosophy that proposes, as James also famously remarked in 1907, that "reality" is "still in the making."⁸ When James wrote both of these statements, he was espousing a philosophy that Emerson had underscored earlier in his 1850 essay on Montaigne, a philosophy of "fluxions and mobility."⁹ The prospect that reality is mobile and that, as Robert Richardson notes in his biography of James, the world can be seen as "pure flux having nothing stable, permanent, or absolute in it" leads Gatsby to relate to the past and the future as equally inventable: all historical time is just reality "in the making."¹⁰ If it is clear how this kind of optimistic hope—this kind of "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (*Gatsby* 2)—is associated with some of the classical premises of early pragmatism, it should be clear how Gatsby, as a student of the future, can be read as pragmatist.¹¹

In this sense *Gatsby* opens into a major debate in modern U.S. intellectual history, indicating how literary texts illuminate an important aspect of such history.¹² In quietly writing Gatsby's desire to invent into the text, Fitzgerald is accurately depicting the high profile of invention

during this time across the industrialized world and especially in the United States: the period stretching from the later nineteenth century through the early 1920s is regarded as the “golden age” for invention in the United States.¹³ At the same time, this era—compellingly described by Alan Trachtenberg in 1982 as the era of “the incorporation of America”—was fraught with controversy over the widespread, powerful influence of the philosophy of pragmatism, which not only promoted outcome-based thinking, and application, but in doing so brought into question the very idea of decontextualized value or truth. In the context of early-twentieth-century pragmatism, emphasis was placed on the end result, and “truth” was determined only in consequences, in action (“truth *happens* to an idea,” William James declared). This result-oriented agenda proved to be grounds for impassioned debate during the period in which invention became ever more visible on a broad scale, and inventors (promulgators of applied science) working within the national borders of the United States were among those heavily criticized, by a prominent sector of the allegedly “cultured” elite, for being materialistic, outcome-driven, and essentially philistine.



If *Gatsby's* interest in studying “needed inventions” embraces a thickly textured historical background, it can indeed offer something like a primer for the questions that matter to *Where the World Is Not*: How do novels that literally discuss invention and inventors, *through* such discussions, engage an array of critically important conversations and issues beyond invention? And how and to where can we trace and follow such discourses? The approach of this book at once enhances and narrows the scope of these questions by asking how such novels reflect, register, embody, and wrestle with the rise of practical thinking and pragmatism, and how, in turn, they participate in and evolve the vital dialogues about democracy, “culture,” ideas, and economic mobility that were taking place during the first half of the twentieth century.

Where the World Is Not aims to investigate the cultural, political, and theoretical stakes of fiction's attention to these matters, situating fiction within—and as a form of—intellectual history. While much has been written about the course of technology and its relationship to literature, and there are a handful of studies of pragmatism in relation to modern literary form,¹⁴ little attention has been given to the ways in which resoundingly popular U.S. novels (in this case by Frank Norris,

Willa Cather, Fitzgerald, and Ralph Ellison) host the tug-of-war between thought and action, between the democratic agenda of the pragmatist movement and the aristocratic idea of aesthetics. *Where the World Is Not* opens this inquiry, reading these novels as a way of thinking through the implications for the meaning and making of “culture” brought about by the ongoing social revolution of democratic modernity.

Where the World Is Not thus expands the scope of the current work being done on pragmatism, as well as the work being done on literature and democracy, essentially carving out an intersection of these two fields.¹⁵ It offers a fresh perspective on some of the most widely read novels of the twentieth century, changing our reception of such influential texts by suggesting that the struggle around the idea of *utility* in these novels informs the collateral debate over the rise of pragmatist thought and thus, in important respects, shapes the evolution of the *status* of ideas over the course of a half-century.¹⁶ The arguments in this study proceed by amplification: each work of literature is placed in a broader historical context, in which various kinds of writers are considered to impart critical readings of the dynamics at hand. Previously neglected or minimized strands of these texts are explored, offering a revised understanding of the interactive flow between literary texts and other cultural events and expressions. What emerges, finally, is a compelling picture of the sorts of contributions, through richly detailed characters and story lines, these novels make to the period’s prevailing disputes over thinking (both pragmatist and idealist), social reform, invention, disinterested aesthetics, individualism, “culture,” science, and art.

In examining how the collision of these many factors emerges and layers itself in selected literary texts that appear across and through different periods (including two that appear during the same year), I do not look at every instance, or even many instances, of the appearance of the actual inventor or invention in twentieth-century U.S. literature;¹⁷ rather, in this necessarily truncated study, close attention is paid to the cultural contexts of certain novels and authors who probe quite deeply into the entire constellation of meanings and literal references to this subject, representing, in particularly dramatic form, specific aspects of the issues that I wish to highlight: Frank Norris’s *McTeague* (1899), Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925) and her nonfiction writings, various writings by W. E. B. Du Bois, and works by Ralph Ellison, including *Invisible Man* (1952). The look at F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) perhaps indicates how the subject matter turns up in the most unexpected of places. Examining a handful of canonical writers makes this

study specialized, in one sense, but *Where the World Is Not* also speaks broadly to contemporary scholars and historians interested in a varying time frame: the inquiry treats the later nineteenth century, the 1920s, and the early 1950s, showing that the questions under consideration appear at different key moments over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, embodying and deepening the struggle between the abstract and the practical, between the cultural and the commercial, that turned into a dilemma and a period of growth for modern democratic desire.¹⁸

Because a considerable portion of this book is devoted to literary analysis, and also because I presume less familiarity on the part of many readers with academic philosophy and social criticism than with literature, chapter 1 is devoted to laying a historical groundwork of the intellectual and sociological ideas that will figure throughout. In this sense chapter 1 is an extension of the introductory chapter: here I will offer an anchoring—if general—analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, in order to sketch the stakes and point the way; subsequently in chapter 1, I move into a cultural analysis, retrieving the arguments raging during the later nineteenth century over “pure science” versus applied science, or invention. Advocates for pure science popularized a discourse that not only demanded that science be disinterested but claimed as well that there were no political interests in its own advocacy of such dislocation. Going beyond the specific realm of science, this movement caught the attention of the nation’s most influential, elite figures, many of them writers and intellectuals. This history is vital to the arguments made in all of the following chapters, especially those on *McTeague* (1899) and *The Professor’s House* (1925).

In both Norris’s *McTeague* and Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, we find actual characters who are inventors, and in the chapters that treat these novels, I elucidate the issues that these texts raise with the help of this “independent inventor” figure. These include the question of utility or use-value, and how this question affects the fate of aesthetics and culture; the reception of an emerging pragmatism; the growing focus on and movement for social reform; the debates over education as the custodian of classical culture; and the fraught idea of “disinterest” (some of these same issues also turn up in *Gatsby*, which I will soon return to). A contrast emerges between Norris and Cather, for the earlier Norris text appears optimistic about the possibilities presented by industry, while Cather strongly reacts against such possibilities, bringing to the surface a fierce anxiety about both the commercialism that attends the advance of industry, and the trade-in of ideals for results. Cather’s work, treated in two chapters, receives extensive analysis in this study for the ways

in which her novel *The Professor's House* crystallizes the dynamics being examined, and for the many related matters that explicitly come under her consideration.

In the final chapter I pursue the same questions into the area of overt discourses on race, looking closely at the ideas of W. E. B Du Bois and the evolution of his legacy in the work of Ralph Ellison, especially *Invisible Man*, a novel that, in the famous prologue, has Invisible Man tell us he might “invent a gadget,” and that although “invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers.” This reference to his sense of himself as a mechanical inventor is certainly what invited closer attention to *Invisible Man*, yet as with the other novels under consideration, such a literal reference turns into something much larger for the story that Ellison sets out to tell. Following along with the novel’s reach thus means understanding the extent to which the question of social reform is a question that *must* account for the aesthetic/practical dichotomy; I argue that this crisis frames the references *Invisible Man* makes to both activism and art. The final part of the study charts the course of this struggle in intellectual and literary history by looking at the influence of Du Bois on Ellison, concluding that Du Bois’ idea of “higher aims” is indeed at the heart of Ellison’s aesthetic theory, though Ellison attempts to reconcile the two historically separate realms and, like Norris, searches for a reconciliation between ideal and real, art and politics, thought and action, aesthetics and practicality. Invisible Man’s oft-quoted claim that he is a “thinker-tinker” indicates his investment in this reconciliation and his refusal to capitulate to the distinction.

Certainly, an expansive methodology animates *Where the World Is Not*, which, as a study of its chosen novels and their surroundings—their intellectual, economic, and sociopolitical contexts—assumes literature as a voice that is both indistinguishable from such contexts and pedagogically richer: literature, unlike philosophy and history, allows readers to “think with and closely experience the consciousness of specific characters,” which in turn engages readers in a process of complex learning, or knowing (what Hannah Arendt has called “representational thinking”).¹⁹ Literature, moreover, is itself actively engaged in such representational thinking, or similarly, in what Clifford Geertz has called “thick description.”²⁰ To acknowledge the special role that literary fiction plays in cultural transformation and argument, and to be able to offer a historical (re)contextualization of selected literary texts so that our sense of literature as a voice in key cultural struggles becomes more apparent, literary criticism in *Where the World Is Not* interweaves intellectual history and literary analysis, demonstrating that literature can be read as an apposite

starting point for any inquiry exploring how concepts of democracy and “culture” evolve, as a team and as antagonists, and how these concepts develop over the course of an exchange between literature and expressive formats outside of the literary imagination.²¹ As Ralph Ellison suggests in his essay “The Art of Fiction,” literature both captures and generates our worlds: “The American novel is . . . a conquest of the frontier; as it describes our experience it creates it.”²²

In sum, the analysis of novels in *Where the World Is Not* is a way of thinking with subtlety and particularity about intellectual history. I assume at the outset that during periods of rapid and monumental social change (such as occurred during the heyday of invention and the 1920s), “the literary imagination” is “faced with the challenge of ‘representing’ and interpreting the meanings of these social developments and the lives people lived amidst them.”²³ Returning to *The Great Gatsby*, where our hero’s imagined future as an inventor can be cast as part of a much larger cultural and intellectual framework, we ought to begin by asking: how can the imagination of Jimmy Gatz, and the modern literary status of scientific invention more generally, be understood in historical context? If, as has been recently argued, “Gatsby’s fate takes on mythic dimensions, becoming an allegory for the course of the American nation and for the struggles and dreams of its citizens,” revising our familiar readings of Gatsby by asking what his boyhood dreams “know” about historical-intellectual context seems a productive critical task.²⁴

Democratic Invention

Like Gatsby, many working-class boys in the United States were probably dreaming of becoming inventors in the early twentieth century: invention was an exploding field, and those who were successful at it were getting rich. While much of the industrialized world was experiencing this boom, the United States took a distinct approach to technological development. For one thing, any individual in the United States had free access to “useful knowledge” or information, and could read about and keep up with all of the activities of the U.S. Patent Office through popular magazines such as *Scientific American*. In fact, the dispersal of this information was a priority for the patent office. B. Zorina Khan and Kenneth Sokoloff report in “Institutions and Democratic Invention in 19th-Century America: Evidence from ‘Great Inventors,’ 1790–1930” (2004) that “American legislators were concerned with ensuring that information about the stock of patented knowledge was readily available and

diffused rapidly.”²⁵ The idea of Gatsby being a young boy growing up in North Dakota who studies “needed inventions” indicates that Fitzgerald knew enough about *Scientific American* and the publicity efforts of the U.S. Patent Office to assume that his character could be exposed to and influenced by these discourses.

Recently, historians have established invention as an available choice for anyone during this period—even “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere,” as Tom Buchanan refers to Gatsby. In her comparative study of intellectual property laws in France, Britain, and the United States, for example, Zorina Khan shows that “relatively ordinary individuals” with “little previous experience in invention” were becoming involved, encouraged by the U.S. intellectual property system, which “enhanced the opportunities of nonelite inventors,” people much like the fictional Jimmy Gatz.²⁶ These “nonelite inventors,” or inventors “with humble origins,” were thus able to operate within a unique legal environment. According to Khan and economist Kenneth Sokoloff, U.S. patent law “created a patent system that allowed a much wider range, in socioeconomic class terms, of technologically creative individuals to obtain property rights to their inventions than did European patent institutions.”²⁷ Unlike in Europe, U.S. patent laws were designed “to ensure that rewards accrued to the deserving based on productivity rather than on the arbitrary basis of class, patronage, or privilege” (Khan 2). It is this populist approach to legislating invention that allows a “class other” like Jimmy Gatz to believe that despite his humble origins, he can still acquire a lucrative patent, and in doing so secure a place in the upper echelon of wealthy society.²⁸

We can surmise that if Gatsby *had* in fact produced a “needed invention” instead of the varied things he ended up doing (bootlegging, etc.), he might indeed have become exceptionally rich this way. This happened to many of the era’s inventors; as Khan argues, invention contributed to the democratization of economic mobility in the United States during this period, as well as to the “industrial supremacy” of the United States in the world system.²⁹ Fitzgerald’s text thus has something crucial embedded in it about the reinforcing relationship between invention and democracy in the United States. While mechanical invention is accurately, if briefly, depicted in *The Great Gatsby* as having the potential to significantly improve the inventor’s economic status in the future—this, again, is arguably why Jimmy Gatz is interested—*The Great Gatsby* takes a different but related turn, showing us what happens when someone such as Gatz arrives to claim a place for himself in the privileged sector of society after (re)inventing himself as Jay Gatsby. Although the young Gatz correctly sees invention as a partner to democracy in the United States, in

fact a harbinger of democracy,³⁰ in that it will assist him in his quest for economic prosperity, it is arguable that he incorrectly sees social status as similarly democratic, and he certainly does not appreciate the stubborn class system that industrial invention, along with other developments, is threatening to challenge.³¹ Fitzgerald makes it abundantly clear in *The Great Gatsby* that the very idea that a class outsider can become superbly wealthy is a special problem for elite society, and so for the idea of “culture” that such a society administers and depends on.

The emphasis in Fitzgerald’s text on the dominant nature of inherited class privilege and the protected (emergent) arena of “culture” that underwrites this privilege is memorably depicted when Tom attempts to discuss the book he is reading (“The Rise of the Colored Empires”). “Civilization’s going to pieces,” Tom proclaims, espousing the arguments of the white supremacist book, which is almost certainly a reference to a real book published by Lothrop Stoddard in 1920.³² He goes on to explain to Nick that this “scientific” book is appropriately attempting to warn the “dominant race”: the “idea is that we’re Nordics,” Tom says, and “we’ve produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art, and all that. Do you see?” (14). While the gist of Tom’s remark is rather obviously ethnocentric, reflecting popular nativist sentiment of the period, there is a subtext here that moves through the link between nationalism, Nordicism, and racial purity, into the territory of the embattled ground of “culture” itself as the repository of, in the first place, science and art. What is clear from Tom’s statement is that culture—“civilization” as he calls it—is an allegedly coherent entity, one that cannot exist outside of science and art, the “things” that define it.³³

Yet at the time Tom is speaking, science and art are controversial “things”³⁴—contested territories. Neither one can claim to exist within coherent boundaries, and neither can claim to exist outside the realms of markets, politics, industry—or utility. Tom, however, does not seem to grasp this. Amid his discussion of the takeover by the “colored empires,” he arguably holds out science and art as uncontaminated, aesthetic categories, as removed entities, mentioning them only as the defining “things” of “civilization”—the reasons why the Nordic race should be applauded and protected. On the contrary, “art” and “science” are both embroiled in cultural disputes: these fluid, challenged constructs are as mobile and transracial (and transnational) as Tom’s own community (ironically, Tom does not automatically count Daisy as “white,” and he certainly does not count Gatsby as “white.” The literal mobility of these characters is also established, as they all cross national borders for various reasons).³⁵ Art and science, in forming stronger bonds with the business

of the world (thus compromising their “pure,” disinterested position and, by turn, compromising the disinterestedness of civilization or culture itself), are thus implicated in promoting a more open, socially democratic system, one that allows the growing economic and social mobility of class outsiders, and thus the “rise” of the “colored empires.”

Tom is partially correct, then, when he says that “civilization’s going to pieces”—if science has a practical application for the common good and art has to be defended against having a suggested purpose and a strategy for social reform, the alleged idea of genteel “Anglo-conformist”³⁶ culture is indeed under pressure and breaking apart; the “things” it has “produced” in Tom’s mind, its very own forms, are fundamentally contaminated in all sorts of ways (which is not to say these forms were ever pure) and might themselves help to bring about more democratic desire.³⁷ In Tom’s nativist comments we are therefore able to find a tangled reference to the role of science and art in presenting the problem of a more open society (and this is in spite of the fact that “science” is being used to authorize and bolster Nordacist claims). Science, in particular, was intimately bound up with invention during this era (and, just as vulgar, with pragmatism), and so with people of “humble origins.” From this standpoint—from the standpoint of its own expression of “nativist modernism”—*The Great Gatsby* shows itself to be deeply concerned about the social and historical realities that cause Jimmy Gatz to dream about the prospect of becoming an inventor, even if it does not pursue the plot to the extent that Gatsby actually invents something outside of his own “Platonic conception of himself.”

While Gatsby chooses to invent a new self and not a new mechanical technology, his reasons for wanting to do either are the same: his fleeting hope of imagining a successful invention can be understood as his faith in democracy—his faith in the structure of the democratic system and the ideals of democracy that guided the pragmatists and that also underwrote innovations in patent law.³⁸ Gatsby’s struggle to disown his humble origins and ascend to the heights of society is doomed, however, insofar as he is marked by the (need to) struggle, or work, for this position. Being born a class outsider, Gatsby must work and plan in a concerted fashion to achieve a moneyed status and remain above the struggle, and this practical interest fundamentally stigmatizes him *as* a class outsider. Unlike Daisy, or Tom, he must do things for a reason, and he cannot remain oblivious or “careless”—the word used to describe the astonishingly wealthy characters in the story that do not (have to) live according to a consequentialist ethos.

Daisy and Tom drift “here and there,” and spend “a year in France for no particular reason” (6); Tom “will drift on forever” (6); Jordan Baker is,

along with Tom and Daisy, deemed “careless”; and the concept of planning, having a future plan or a workable plan, is foreign to them in their abstract, for-the-sake-of-itself world: when Jordan lazily suggests that maybe they “ought to plan something,” Daisy replies, “What’ll we plan?,” and then turning “helplessly” to Nick, she asks “What do people plan?” (12). “People” here, it would seem, are *the* people—the masses—whom Daisy will never have to know or care about. And although Daisy turns to Nick to answer her question about what “people” plan, possibly implicating him as “people,” even Nick, who introduces himself as someone who has considerable “advantages” (1), does not actually need to work, for his father “agreed to finance [him] for a year” (3). Gatsby, on the other hand, is always being called to fulfill some practical duty to maintain his wealth. Even during the climactic scene in which Gatsby’s deferred dream appears to be coming to fruition, the scene in which Daisy returns to him and visits his house for the first time, the telephone rings for him—as it does at other key points, intrusively reminding us of his ties to his work—and he must tell his caller, “I can’t talk now” (95), in an effort to hide his activity. His own constant struggle to become and “stay,” like Daisy, “safe and proud, above the hot struggles of the poor” (150) clashes with his efforts to seem as though he automatically occupies his position, as do Daisy and Tom; this struggle, between his working reality and his desire to seem that he, too, is part of the idle rich, is always apparent. Even in Gatsby’s boyhood schedule, the only thing he spends more time on than studying “needed inventions” is “work,” and this he does all day, 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

If Gatsby has acquired his money by engaging in each endeavor for the specific purpose of gaining money (or “gonnections”), the text demonstrates that he must remember to hide his consequentialist, result-oriented approach and its associated implications. At one point, while admiring his own mansion, he slips up and proudly tells Nick, “it took me just three years to earn the money that bought it” (91). Nick reminds him of what Gatsby had previously told him, saying, “I thought you inherited your money,” to which Gatsby replies, flustered, “I did . . . but I lost most of it in the big panic, the panic of the war” (91). Obviously, Gatsby is inventing a past for himself so that he can hide his “penniless” origins (and it could also be said that he wants to hide the illicit origins of his income). But note as well that Gatsby has to lie about inheriting his money; he needs to hide the fact that he must *work*, and has worked (even if it’s at illegal things). We might understand this deception not from a conventional moral point of view, concerned with shame and honesty, but rather from the philosophical point of view, as an expression of pragmatist values. In

1907, a year after Jimmy Gatz was supposedly planning his schedule, William James attempted to explain “What Pragmatism Means” in relation to money and an idea of work: the goal, as James saw it, was to work at interrogating “first things, principles, ‘categories’” and prevailing truths, rather than complacently accepting the inherited meanings and functions of these abstract notions. James clarifies:

“God,” “Matter,” “Reason,” “the Absolute,” “Energy,” are so many solving names. You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest. But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more *work*, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed.³⁹

To put Gatsby’s work, or the fact that he does work, in the context of what James writes here is to realize that Gatsby is undertaking to change his reality (the “word” or concept he does not want to rest with could be “poor,” but among others, it could also be “Gatz,” as well as the “past”); this is to say that he works to change his reality with the literal cash-value of cash that comes to him *through* his efforts. All of this is in James’s explanation of what the pragmatic method, as work, has the potential to do, which is make struggle revolutionary, in the sense that the “work” James speaks of—not the leisure of acquiescence or inertia—will bring about the change of existing realities. Work, here, does not then mean tedious or futile labor, such as the “janitor’s work” Gatsby also did but “despised” and quit, precisely because such toil was “indifferent” to “destiny itself” (100); rather, “more work” means a committed refusal to submit to handed-down systems without striving to cross-examine and test such systems; such exertion, as James points out, could indeed change “existing realities” and create a new idea of destiny—and this, rather than resting with the accepted idea of a predetermined one, is the point.

While it is true that Gatsby does not have the luxury to sit around and intellectually interrogate the concepts of “God,” “matter,” “reason,” or the “absolute,” his *actions* serve to question all “foundational” concepts, which ultimately can only mean that the class system—to the extent that it is based on a certain acceptance of, or submission to, its own rules—is in danger. In sum, Gatsby’s rejection of “first things” is inherent in his ambition, and his work is at once a marker of his class standing and a way

for him to change this standing. If he is not privileged enough to ignore the prospect of “practical cash-value” or utility, this can partly explain why, in his youth, he is not spending two hours a day studying what was often referred to or thought of as “pure” science or art (to be discussed later in detail)—he is studying something useful.

The domain of utility is indeed characterized in the 1920s as a vulgar one, and one can assume that Fitzgerald is aware of the different arguments surfacing at the time about labor, leisure, class, and (elite) civilization, arguments that certainly intersect with nativism and nationalism. Speaking broadly, there were several renowned critics who agreed that work compromised any claim to being civilized.⁴⁰ The prominent “pure aesthetics” art critic Clive Bell, called by British *Vogue* in late 1924 “the most remarkable” art critic in Europe, argued in *On British Freedom* (1923) that “no one . . . can become highly civilized without a fair measure of material security” and that to ensure this security there must be a working class that serves to maintain “the existence of a leisured class.”⁴¹ As Jane Garrity has suggested, “Bell’s theory is popularly disseminated by *Vogue*” and that, “as Bell puts it,” to be entirely civilized one must “‘be free from material cares,’ and accumulate ‘some of the superfluities of life.’”⁴² If one must be “free from material cares”—be careless, essentially—to be a member of the civilized elite, then it is clear how Gatsby’s lifelong preoccupation with such “material cares” makes him unable to ever be improvident in the same way that the idle rich are. And merely having money, apparently, will not change this. Bell goes on to stipulate, “money alone is not an adequate determinant of who can or should comprise the leisured class.”⁴³

According to Bell, something more abstract than money would comprise this class. The elite subjects who make up “civilization” are characterized by ambiguous things, such as the “mind of man” and the “will to civilization”—things that are conceptual, things that cannot be acquired merely by acquiring money, and things that certainly cannot be embodied by anyone who has to work. Bell was among other writers of this period who espoused the view that “only a leisured class will produce a highly civilized” society; Aldous Huxley also makes this argument in his pointed 1924 editorial essay “The Dangers of Work.”⁴⁴ Huxley, already a well-known writer of the period, was admired by Fitzgerald; in fact, Fitzgerald was familiar enough with Huxley to name his character, Boxley, an English novelist-turned-screenwriter in *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), after Huxley. In “The Dangers of Work,” published the year before Fitzgerald came out with *Gatsby*, Huxley alludes to Bell’s theory “by passionately arguing for the virtues of a leisured class.”⁴⁵ According to Garrity, Huxley

proposes that “the dignity of labor is considerably overrated,” and in his own words, he urges the English public to “reinstating an ideal leisured society” that will cultivate “the graces of the spirit.” This can happen, in Huxley’s view, only if there are “men of leisure,” men who do not work, and so are able to “exercise [their] native powers of abstraction.” Work, in Huxley’s perspective, signifies a practical, immediate, utilitarian cause that can only compromise and prevent the purity of abstraction—and this makes it dangerous. Thus while *Gatsby* does exhibit a concern, as Robert Seguin has also recently argued, with “the real or imaginary fluidity of class positions—the apparent increase in the permeability of the upper social strata,”⁴⁶ it does this not merely by depicting the crossings of borders by class others, but by noticing the dense, practical implications of labor, or work.

If *Gatsby*’s identification with work puts him in proximity to pragmatism, it also indicates how his working ethos is dangerously anarchic: he wants to overthrow all of the systems of arrangement that maintain the social order, even the system of time itself. To be sure, anarchism is and has been linked to pragmatism, as both philosophies call for and seek to recognize the “mobilities and fluxions” that would allow someone such as *Gatsby* to imagine that he can invent the future *and* the past, overcoming the origins that actually exclude him from the “powers of abstraction,” thus allowing him entry into the form of his dream.⁴⁷ Yet, climactically, the text does not allow his dream to materialize into a reality and, instead, *Gatsby* must die. If the text cannot finally decide whether it approves of *Gatsby*’s dream, the reason is that it has deep misgivings about (his) pragmatism. Such misgivings, moreover, lead the text to distort and disfigure pragmatism, partially by emphasizing its anarchic elements.

Gatsby—the character and the text—can be read as an indictment of pragmatism, on several fronts. In the broadest of terms, the text shows a pragmatist approach to be objectionable by defining it through, or as, crude ambition and a destructive materialism. The fact that *Gatsby* has ideas is not the problem, the text suggests—everyone has ideas and dreams. The problem is that he is going too far in applying his ambition to *realize* these ideas, to work at this process, and to believe, along the way, that he can improvise anything and everything to this end. If in crucial but distorted ways this sounds like pragmatism, the text illustrates that this leads to lawlessness, and *Gatsby*’s lawlessness is shown to be the direct result of his desire to *see* results: to the extent that pragmatism encouraged an emphasis on outcome, it de-emphasized means, and in a skeptic’s view, this meant that there remained the possibility of justifying the means—any means—for the sake of the ends.

The means are thus unimportant as long as the end is reached, and this can explain Gatsby's choice to break the law, which the text disapproves of, conflating his lawlessness with murder and moral degeneracy. More than once the question of whether Gatsby has "killed a man" is raised; he himself is murdered; Wilson kills himself; and after Myrtle is killed, Gatsby does not seem to be concerned about anything outside of how Daisy is coping—"He spoke as if Daisy's reaction was the only thing that mattered" (144)—suggesting that he has become destructively outcome-oriented and willing to break all laws (even moral laws) for the results he wants. The death and devastation in the text imply the wreckage of a battleground, and there is certainly a critique here of pragmatism as playing a role in the U.S. entry into the "Great" war; this is not an inaccurate link, as John Dewey did publicly argue for this entry. If Fitzgerald's text thus contains a denunciation of pragmatism on the grounds that it leads to an establishment of result-orientation above everything else—which in turn leads to lawlessness, moral decay, and even war—it is among other intellectual texts of the period explicitly resounding this same critique. For example, in *Liberalism and America* (1919), Harold Stearns writes that "pushed to extremes, indeed, [pragmatism] becomes a justification for almost anything. . . . It is a philosophy so enamoured of mingling with the warm living stream of every day [life] that it turns with ferocity upon any claims for ethical resistance to the main currents of events."⁴⁸

But even if Fitzgerald were not blaming pragmatism for the war, as some intellectuals did,⁴⁹ the text does indicate an accusatory attitude toward pragmatism, in arguably justifying Gatsby's demise by suggesting that he brought it on himself in his overly ambitious, aggressive approach. Like Gatsby, who asks for too much by wanting to reinvent the past and the future—"you want too much!" cries Daisy, "I can't help what's past!" (133)—the text intimates that the revolutionary appeals being articulated by pragmatism ask for too much. The philosopher George Santayana, in many ways a supporter of pragmatism, notes this undercurrent of thought in his famous lecture "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" (1913), in which he wonders whether even despite James's "will to believe" doctrine—which serves to buttress religion and a belief in god as pragmatic—pragmatism is asking too much of its new modern citizens: "William James, in this genial evolutionary view of the world, has given a rude shock to the genteel tradition. What! The world a gradual improvisation? God a sort of young poet or struggling artist? . . . Is not the cool abstract piety of the genteel getting more than it asks for?"⁵⁰

Finally, the novel suggests, it is Gatsby's own willingness to believe "in the unreality of reality" (*Gatsby* 100) that dooms him (I mean to refer

here, again, to the doctrine put forth by William James in the above-mentioned 1897 lecture, "The Will to Believe"⁵¹). This fluid conception of reality is portrayed as dangerous for a number of reasons; it allows Gatsby to believe in the experimental nature of reality, and in turn, this leads him to plan for his future as an experiment—yet the experiment he chooses to undertake, Fitzgerald clarifies, at last only serves a "vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty" (99). If the text points to the uncomfortable possibility that pragmatism can become—or is already a sign of—a depraved materialism, relativism, and ambition, this amounts to the suggestion that, after all, pragmatism is really not that practical. As the story illustrates, the romantic strands in pragmatism that ask us to believe reality is still in the making *deny* the forceful, durable reality that is already made; and however much we would like to believe in the "unreality of reality," this hard fact cannot be changed by a belief in a "promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing" (*Gatsby* 100): in the end, despite all of the belief, Nick reminds us that "'Jay Gatsby' had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice" (148). Gatsby's beliefs—Gatsby's project—are just not realistic, and his delusion is only self-defeating and, in a multitude of ways, expensive, not to mention tragic (Gatsby "paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" [162]).

This kind of critique of pragmatism is not unusual, especially after World War I, a war that brought the pragmatist method into question "on a fairly large scale," as a result of the attacks of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Harold Stearns, and other "young" intellectuals.⁵² And there can be no question that Fitzgerald is well acquainted with both pragmatism and its critics; he had indeed given enough thought to the philosophical model presented by pragmatism during this period to explicitly mention pragmatism *and* William James in his short story "Head and Shoulders," which was published in 1920 in *Flappers and Philosophers*⁵³ (the reference to William James in 1920 would seem to indicate that Fitzgerald is captured in particular by James's account of pragmatism). However, like some of the "young intellectuals" writing around him, Fitzgerald did not embrace a full consideration of pragmatism in this celebrated novel; the tale told by *The Great Gatsby* distorts much of what was argued by William James (and later, John Dewey), by leaving some important qualifications out of the picture. While James did indeed suggest a version of Gatsby's idea of the "unreality of reality," even using the word "unreality,"⁵⁴ just as Fitzgerald does, James also made sure to explain in *Pragmatism* (1907) and even more so in "The Meaning of Truth" (1909) that it was "our duty to agree with reality." As James Kloppenberg notes, James "expressed exasperation at his critics' 'favorite formula

for describing' pragmatists—'persons who think that by saying whatever you find pleasant to say and calling it truth you fulfill every pragmatistic requirement.'" Making the same point that Robert Richardson makes in his biography, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (2006), Kloppenberg further argues that "looking back at his argument, it is difficult to see how anyone could accuse him of identifying truth with whatever it is convenient to believe."⁵⁵ On the contrary, in order to clarify that he was not, as Kloppenberg puts it, "counseling his readers to believe any fiction they might find expedient," James carefully explained that "Names are arbitrary, but once understood they must be kept to. We mustn't now call Abel 'Cain' or Cain 'Abel.' If we do, we ungear ourselves from the whole book of Genesis, and from all its connexions with the universe of speech and fact down to the present time."⁵⁶ History, or reality, has a central place, according to James, and should not—indeed cannot—be waved away by a belief, a fairy's wing, certainly not by pragmatism.



It is surely evident that *Gatsby* has a quarrel with pragmatism; yet, Fitzgerald's novel cannot serve to finally denounce the pragmatic argument. While the text does misrepresent key aspects of the philosophy, it maintains an overall ambivalence, putting forth a complex set of meanings and coexisting messages that cannot be reduced to a single exegesis. To read more than a total disapproval of pragmatism, we can look again to the wider implications of *Gatsby*'s inconspicuous determination to "study needed inventions," in that this imaginary future, this studious fantasy, is deeply hopeful, as is *Gatsby*. Importantly, it is not merely hopeful for *Gatsby* himself: embedded in his fantasies are the interests of his community. Unless *Gatsby* can produce something that is useful to his community, or deemed useful by his community—something needed—there will be no reward for him. This recognition by the text of how invention works in the marketplace to meet the needs of the community illuminates the pragmatic project as a promising one, a hopeful one, regardless of where or how or why the project is undertaken. Even if *Gatsby* goes on to fail, as he does, to do great things, this detail capturing what happens under the sign of invention is indicative of a basic notion of "progress" that is difficult to argue with: only with "good patent laws," Mark Twain wrote, can a "country" move forward—incentive for invention *inspires* a working-class other to *aspire* to bring something to the whole commu-

nity by paying attention to the existing market, to the future, to the idea of progress, to what might work.⁵⁷

It is worth noting that John Dewey's idea of social progress centered on a concept of social improvement through cooperative intelligence. Similarly, it is "collective invention" that both moves a society closer to an egalitarian system with accessible resources for all and signifies the cooperative intelligence that is necessary for such advancement.⁵⁸ This is why Dewey was such a strong proponent of scientific research and inquiry and, finally, invention. Dewey understood that "modern industry is so much applied science," and believed that both science and technology directed a society's potential to move forward as a collective community—to provide more for more of its members.⁵⁹ In response to Lewis Mumford's sharp critique of Deweyan pragmatism in *The Golden Day* (1926) as a philosophy that offered "no clue as to what made a proper human life outside the mill of practical activity,"⁶⁰ Dewey defended his own "idealization" of science and invention by arguing that "through technologies" even ideals could become widely accessible—"Not all who say Ideals, Ideals shall enter the kingdom of the ideal, but those who know and respect the roads that conduct to the kingdom," he wrote. Dewey's agenda was to change the fact that these "ideals" had been "monopolized in distribution" because of a lack "of those agencies and instrumentalities" with which "science through technologies equips mankind."⁶¹ While Dewey is certainly answering Mumford by indicating that he, too, is interested in what Mumford called a "full human existence," he makes it clear—both in his response and throughout his life—that such an existence must adhere to a democratic ideal, must be "born out of and must respond to the demands of democracy."⁶² Democracy, Dewey wrote as far back as 1888, was more than a governmental system; it was "a form of moral and spiritual association."⁶³

In searching out the undercurrent of this debate in *Gatsby*, it can be argued that regardless of what happens to his character, the text still signifies *Gatsby's* boyhood desire to enter the realm of invention in terms of the great promise of industrial or applied science during this era in the United States, a promise heralded by pragmatism, however naïve. If, as Dewey suggests, the promise of applied science is that it carries the promise of democracy, in the sense that democracy is a fully participatory society for everyone, with no fixed modes of participation for anyone (applied science makes this kind of participatory scheme more possible), *Gatsby's* stance toward the idea of democracy is complicated, and maybe even hopeful. As much as Fitzgerald's story signals the dangers of prag-

matism, there remains in Gatsby's practical devotion to James's emphasis on "last things, fruits, [and] consequences" an indication of something productive in the end: "Gatsby turned out all right in the end" (2).⁶⁴ From this perspective, carelessness—the opposite of work—is presented as more destructive than pragmatism. Carelessness—Huxley's and Bell's "leisure" or James's thoughtless, privileged "rest"—will not produce anything material, and there is much to be gained for everyone if "material cares" are considered in the context of action-oriented inquiry. As a class other, Gatsby *must* care, as all class others must care; and out of this pragmatism—out of this experimentation and exploration and need—emerges invention: real benefits for everyone in the community. Thoughts become things in this world of democratic desire.⁶⁵

Without Gatsby's foolish dreams of coming up with an invention—which can stand for all of the working-class others who have the same motivation during this era to study and explore and experiment in order to invent—progress, or democracy, comes to a halt. Even though Gatsby is shot down, the text—the tale and not necessarily the teller—tells us that his ideas, and his willingness to believe or dream, coupled with his determined efforts to make his ideas happen, beat on. And beating on is the future. Perhaps this is why Gatsby remains an ethical—populist—hero (to Nick, for one), even while being rich and, probably, corrupt. Not only does he refuse to stop trying, even in the face of defeat; he refuses to stop trying for a dream that is democratic, that is rooted in the very material cares that mark him a class outsider. Gatsby is decidedly not aristocratic, or exclusive, even at the height of his wealth (recall his persistent open-door policy—anyone at all can attend his lavish parties). He retains the democratic vision of his childhood, which is to say he was interested in invention—as democracy or democratic access—back in 1906. As Peter Robinson wrote in 2006, "In one sector of American life after another, technology long ago began shifting power from insiders to outsiders, from the few to the many."⁶⁶ And even if the text itself is unsure about this shift, and whether to support this kind of mobility of power and privilege, it still allows the possibility that Gatsby is not wrong to have his democratic ideas.

Gatsby is finally still "radiant" because his efforts have implications for all of us, in that we are all dependent on the "people" who would hope and, in such hoping, engage in work that will experiment with the ways in which progress can be made. In his book *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (2005), Robert Westbrook suggests that hope is vital to progress, and that if we fail to hope, we "guarantee the permanent

eclipse of an expansive democratic citizenship”—the “will to *disbelieve*,” Westbrook argues, “works in much the same self-fulfilling fashion as the will to believe.”⁶⁷ Westbrook goes on to explain that the hopeful must “expect a torrent of criticism,” all of it charging “that such faith is utopian, unreasonable, and even reckless” (240). And we can see in Fitzgerald’s text this very kind of criticism directed toward *Gatsby*. But perhaps because *Gatsby* is “faithful to the end” (*Gatsby* 99), we are allowed to retain an abiding faith in him, even as his pragmatism and his democratic hopes are shattered and shot down. The rebirth at the end of Fitzgerald’s novel is a sign of hope itself—if we are “borne back ceaselessly” we always have another chance, and the past can always become the future again. While this might be read as a Sisyphean comment about futility, about the hopelessness of it all, it is of course possible to see how the empty, abrupt space after “one fine morning—” can signify an opportunity for hope to insert itself, and in this sort of reading, the text ends by echoing what William James wrote in “The Social Value of the College Bred” (1908): “Democracy is a kind of religion, and we are bound not to admit its failure. . . . [N]o one with a spark of reason in him will sit down fatalistically before the croaker’s picture. The best of us are filled with the contrary vision of a democracy stumbling through every error till its institutions glow with justice and its customs shine with brilliance.”⁶⁸

A Plea for Pure Culture

The Pure Science Ideal

Americans, perhaps more so than people of other nations, have great faith in the idea of the outsider inventor. The stories of inventors who made it out of their garages (Steve Jobs) and those who stayed there (Philo T. Farnsworth) are part of the national mythology. Ever since Benjamin Franklin broke with his apprenticeship in Boston as a teenager and recreated himself as a freethinker and fearless inventor (a narrative, some say, he simply repeated and wrote large with the founding of the nation), amateurism has taken on different connotations in this country. Old World use of the word “amateur” intimated lower-class status, even incompetency, but in America, the land of second acts, “amateur” has accrued some of the more positive meanings we associate with the concept of the autodidact. Americans seem drawn to the story of the outsider-made-good with an intensity that has riveted the nation from the earliest amateur contests featured regularly in Vaudeville to the latest versions of such shows. . . . In America, the self-made citizen is a kind of superhero.

—Jack Hitt, “The Amateur Future of Space Travel,” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 1, 2007

WHILE INDUSTRIAL invention was booming in the United States during the decades leading up to the 1925 publication of *The Great Gatsby*—spurred on by the democratic approach of U.S. patent law—it should be clear at this point how this very circumstance contributed to an immense cultural anxiety. This anxiety, felt by what Fitzgerald called “the old American aristocracy,”¹ and all variant of intellectual figures, was more complex than mere worries about the fact that inventors of humble origins could become wildly wealthy. More than this, inventors and their inventions were being associated with the disruption and corruption of every aspect of “culture” as by definition, in Matthew Arnold’s words of 1869, a “disinterested endeavor.”² Invention, along with the parallel philosophy of pragmatism, was thus a large imaginary sign of the changing status of ideas, of the idea that knowledge was becoming experimental. To the extent that literary texts dealt with this

emerging problem, by actually including invention in narrative schemes and plotlines, the stories told are always traceable to a larger discussion about the struggle over democratic notions of social status and economic mobility that were beginning to become more pervasive, more realistic, than ever before, precisely *because* invention was having a real impact. Conversations about purity and disinterest, purpose and utility, aesthetics and art, ideas and action, are at the heart of this struggle. To paint a more coherent picture of this “dense and tense knot of social, and essentially class, relations, themselves in complicated transition,” I turn now to the heated conversations taking place outside of literature over the integrity of the independent inventor during his “golden period”: this figure was publicly debated by cultivated Americans to the extent that he forwarded the interests of practicality and not the pure project of disinterested science, even while he retained a heroic status in the popular imagination.³

In 1896, the year F. Scott Fitzgerald was born, a writer in *Scientific American* remarked on the “outpouring of U.S. patents since the Civil War,”⁴ zealously declaring that his was “an epoch of invention and progress unique in the history of the world. . . . It has been a gigantic tidal wave of human ingenuity and resource, so stupendous in its magnitude, so complex in its diversity, so profound in its thought, so fruitful in its wealth, so beneficent in its results, that the mind is strained and embarrassed in its effort to expand to a full appreciation of it.”⁵ Such an enthusiastic estimation of America’s technological advances reveals no sign of the immense controversy that had erupted in the field of scientific research over the question of what constituted “science” and, particularly, whether invention should be counted as such. Within *Scientific American*, a publication named to link national identity and scientific advance, the conflict between science and invention was thus minimized, which suggests that this publication was sympathetic to the cause of invention, or technology, for if it associated itself with the cause of “science,” it would most likely renounce invention: rather than celebrate America’s technological advances, it would promote a resentment toward those largely responsible for such a “tidal wave of human ingenuity”—the inventors themselves.

At the turn of the century, scientists who claimed a superior status for themselves and their work were stridently asserting the difference between science and invention. With the support of various influential figures from a range of fields, including America’s literary elite, this distinction turned into a sweeping critique of invention, which was blamed for (among other things) the degradation of science. Ultimately, as invention became systematized,⁶ which meant the extensive production and

marketing of inventions themselves, its high profile brought extra attention from its critics, “who insisted that invention had become an arm of industry, and could no longer be heralded as a sign of an independent spirit, for the inventors were no longer independent”⁷ but merely the agents of large corporate interests, or, just as bad, driven by their own personal profit motives. The effort to cast inventors and invention in this kind of negative light occurred alongside the effort to recuperate the inventor in his original romanticized form, or as he *once* was: an American “prototype of autonomy and experimentalism, an industrious creator motivated by his own quest to solve practical problems, and in the process, bring about results that could benefit every American.” Think, for example, of the mythical status of Benjamin Franklin. Yet while the myth of the independent inventor “sits at the heart of the American ideals of functionalism and entrepreneurial possibility,”⁸ the realities brought on by the accomplishments of these inventors always already threatened and collided with the aesthetic aspirations and social security of elite society.

In *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm 1870–1970*, Thomas Hughes points out that “a singular band of independent inventors was flourishing during the decades extending from about 1870 to 1920” (14). What can then be called the era of the independent inventors—“those individuals who were not bound by organizational entanglements” and therefore were “free to choose their own problems”—began “about the time Alexander Graham Bell invented his telephone and Edison opened his Menlo Park laboratory in 1876, and ended shortly after World War I, when industrial scientists, employed by universities, the government, and private enterprises, took the place of the independents as the principal locus of ‘research and development activity,’ the new name for invention” (Hughes 15).⁹ It was thus the independent inventors’ freedom from large-scale business concerns that defined their activity *as* independent, which points toward the relatively abstract nature of such inventing, in the sense that it could pursue all kinds of experiments and explorations, regardless of their commercial viability. In other words, although the independent inventors did spend a fair amount of time trying to make things that would be commercially successful, they also engaged in less commercial pursuits.

To be sure, independent inventing—while certainly a practical endeavor in that many of the actual inventions served practical purposes—was often carried out in an abstract sense, and so was in many ways an extremely *impractical* activity, which complicates the labeling of independent inventors in the late nineteenth century as merely “practical men.”¹⁰ Yet the fact that independent inventors were not, in the

first place, always motivated by profit did nothing to assuage the affluent critics of invention, whether educators, scientists, or intellectuals, who insisted that inventors and their products were responsible for the increasing devaluation of discovery purely for the sake of knowledge. To make their case, these critics emphasized the displacement of independent inventors, highlighting the convergence of these individuals with large corporations, which often had a specific result in mind. To a large extent this displacement did indeed occur, although it cannot entirely account for the attack on invention, which had complex motivations.¹¹

Ultimately, an unaccommodating atmosphere demanded that independents be entrepreneurs as well as inventors, so it would be inaccurate to suggest that they had nothing to do with capitalist enterprise.¹² On the contrary, although they were most excited by the practice of inventing, “they performed the entrepreneurial function of establishing companies because they wanted to bring their inventions into use” (Hughes 24). This often meant they were partners with capitalists, although, importantly, not working for them; most independents, when they “found their particular innovative talents no longer needed . . . withdrew—or were forced out—from the companies they founded” (Hughes 22), which suggests that, for all their practical intelligence, the independents were not excessively committed to the full scope of practical considerations they were faced with in such a field: their participation in the business side of things went only so far. Characteristically, “they withdrew to spaces of their own choice or design,” surrounding themselves with a few loyal craftsmen, and the proper tools and apparatus necessary to fulfill their creative drive (Hughes 25).¹³ On an obvious level, such a withdrawal reveals a need to escape the restrictions of a particular *context*, or more generally, context itself, and, as Hughes notes, it certainly parallels that of the avant-garde artists who resorted to alternative lifestyles and spaces in order to isolate themselves from the confining influences of mainstream ideology. If retreating to an isolated space is instrumental to any project challenging the status quo, the ecology of such examples suggests how isolation, at least from the hostility of convention, has always been imagined as a component of creativity in some form. Thus, the implication that turn-of-the-century artists and inventors were both creative beings in the most abstract sense, which is to say the least practical, is not far-fetched. Claire Pettit makes this point regarding inventors and artists in the mid-nineteenth century in her book *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (2004), noting that “the mental labour of mechanical inventors such as John Swan, and of literary writers such as Charles

Dickens, was constructed and discussed in very similar terms” and that, indeed, there was not thought to be a “sharp divide between the categories of literary and mechanical invention.”¹⁴ The sharp divide, on the contrary, was between these individuals and the conventional world. In some of her most influential criticism, Willa Cather aligns her theory with this observation, arguing that the “world” must all but disappear for the artist: “An artist should not be vexed by human hobbies or human follies; he should be able to lift himself into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not of them, in the world, but not of the world.”¹⁵

For the famous inventor Nikola Tesla (1857–1943), isolation, or a largely context-free existence, was the “secret of invention.” “It is providential,” said Tesla, “that the youth or man of inventive mind is not ‘blessed’ with a million dollars. The mind is sharper and keener in uninterrupted solitude. Originality thrives in seclusion free of outside influences beating upon us to cripple the creative mind. Be alone—that is the secret of invention: be alone, that is when ideas are born.”¹⁶ While this statement connects seclusion and invention, just as compelling is Tesla’s suggestion that money is *interruptive*—it interrupts privacy and solitude and in turn the purity of atmosphere that lends itself to “free” or inventive thinking. In fact, Tesla might as well have said “pure” solitude instead of “uninterrupted” solitude to make his point—while the term “interrupt” customarily means “to break the uniformity of,” the term “pure” connotes a uniformity of composition, a freedom, essentially, from “outside” influences or elements. Similarly, Cather later wrote in her 1936 essay “Escapism” that “The condition every art requires is, not so much freedom from restriction, as freedom from adulteration and from the intrusion of foreign matter; considerations and purposes which have nothing to do with spontaneous invention.”¹⁷

Tesla’s remarks reveal a distinct desire to separate invention from money (Cather engages in the same gesture in her treatise on “art”), and this desire has everything to do with the hostile response on the part of “civilized” or “cultivated” society toward invention, a hostility that sparked an aggressive campaign at the turn into the twentieth century to discredit and denounce invention on the grounds that it was a practical (read: philistine) pursuit and therefore unworthy of “cultural” status. While it is true that by the end of the nineteenth century *science* was finally becoming an acceptable part of (the idea of) “culture,” which is to say it finally earned a respectable position in the curriculum of higher learning *and* became a sign of cultivation, its burgeoning status was

reserved for unapplied scientific research. As Adrian Johns has recently put it, the imagined “ideal” of pure science was “an objective, ideologically neutral endeavor, yielding knowledge independent of the place of its creation”—science for its own sake, essentially.¹⁸ Theoretical studies in science had the approval of the cultural elite in the United States; scientific research for practical ends, on the other hand, did not, for this kind of research was considered crude: it had as its goal the use of knowledge for profit. Moreover, in the United States, many successful inventors only reinforced the already too popular European view of “America” as a practical nation with no (commitment to) culture—a nation of philistines, or “practical men” who rarely contributed to higher learning but instead were devoted to material wealth and commercial success.¹⁹

Thus, cultivated communities in the United States made it a part of their agenda to not only establish and maintain a culturally rich (i.e., simply cultural) self-image but also prove to any transatlantic critics that the United States could indeed guide the world in a “civilized” or cultural pursuit. As a relatively new territory, science provided the perfect opportunity to accomplish this kind of image alteration: it had been admitted to the canon of culture, and would only continue to gain authority. The only thing the social elite had to do was make sure that the “higher” pursuits—the abstract, idealist, conceptual pursuits—remained at the forefront of scientific inquiry, or at least received as much attention as the technological accomplishments. If science in the United States could maintain its distance from invention, in other words, the United States could lead “the science of the world,” and put itself on the map as a cultural, and not just practical, power.²⁰ Assuming the presidency of Harvard in 1869, Charles Eliot summed up this posture toward the advance of science when he declared that science “ennobles and purifies the mind.”²¹ It was, therefore, as pure and noble as any classical discipline, and according to its new status at Harvard, it could—and did—constitute “culture.” In fact, in Eliot’s view, science was the nineteenth century’s “great addition . . . to the *idea* of culture.”²² It is worth noting how Eliot equates culture with ideas, or his definition of culture *as* an idea. This is precisely the point here: culture, defined as or in the realm of ideas, needed to remain an abstract, removed, dislocated concept—a form of theory, essentially—so in order to *be* culture, science needed to remain a conceptual and not an applicable discipline. Because, as Eliot remarks, science was being accepted as a great addition to the “idea of culture,” its only potential problem was the intimacy it was developing with industrialism, and, quite expectably, Eliot and other patricians were casting this relationship as a threat to the *purity* of science, which is to say the purity of culture.²³

Even if, as President Ezekiel G. Robinson of Brown University observed, by 1914 science had “got a foothold in the curriculum which it is never likely to lose,”²⁴ the years leading up to this status were quite troubled, for as science became a major player in the marketplace, there emerged both within and outside the scientific community a heightened sensitivity to its developing reputation as a context-oriented discipline, or a discipline with strong ties to the world of business, which of course means strong ties to economics and politics; a discipline, moreover, with a specific eye on *application*, and, following this, one that exhibited a growing commitment to the most contextual of things: specialization.²⁵

The controversy over specialization, occurring mostly in the sphere of higher education and academic debate, had to do with the threat to what might be called generalism,²⁶ by which is meant the educational philosophy that privileges broad knowledge, humanistic principles, and “proper” conduct. Generalism, in other words, actively opposed specialization as a mode of thinking and learning primarily because, its proponents claimed, such a mode subordinated the values of classic humanism.²⁷ For example, as an advocate of generalism, President James McCosh of Princeton University expressed his dissent from any dominant application of the elective system in 1871 when he said, “The objection is, that it would nurture specialists without a general or comprehensive culture.”²⁸ It was then the supporters of “liberal culture” in the field of higher education who represented the academic sector of the genteel tradition by rejecting a curriculum devoted entirely to specialized learning.

The relationship of this generalist/specialist controversy to the history of science and invention, then, is that for the most part the debate was inspired by and concerned with science: it was science that was fast becoming highly specialized (and highly prized) and thus threatening to affect the whole of education and, in turn, culture itself, by promoting an end-oriented or result-oriented learning program. Whereas a generalist approach to education reflected the idea that culture existed only for its own sake—transmitting “culture” (as an end in itself) was the primary goal of a general, liberal arts education—a specialist approach, following the trend of scientific study, reflected an increasingly practical outlook that designated a purpose for everything. Science, in short, was too vulnerable to material applications to be a safe bet for an educational program that sought to maintain the internal, consummate value of ideas.

To the extent that science advanced its status, academically and publicly, it could thus discourage “a proper *balance* of character,” for its tendency toward perpetual division (into various specialties) and result-oriented research would advance a practical mindset, which would not

only degrade the value of a disinterested approach to learning (and knowledge in general) but also displace this tradition.²⁹ In effect, this meant the displacement of culture. Thus, even the educators who advocated the importance of science in the curriculum of higher education took pains to reassure elite U.S. society (and each other) that although they were allowing science to occupy a privileged place in the college curriculum, this was only under the condition that science remain loyal to the ideal of culture: it must remain an abstract pursuit, a body of knowledge and conduct that had no political, social, or economic interests. As the president of MIT declared, "Our aim should be: *the mind of the student*, not scientific discovery, not professional accomplishment."³⁰

Privileging the dislocated "mind of the student," educators and intellectuals feared that the "mind," or the ideal of "mind" as complete in itself, was becoming vulnerable to a more social, more contextual, more active ideal: the "mind of the student" was in danger of being corrupted by what was becoming the dominant ideology of scientific study (experiment in order to find answers) and professional advancement (apply those answers in order to achieve wealth and status). Evident in the discourse of these prominent public figures was the influence of that legendary definer and protector of Culture, Matthew Arnold, who wrote in 1869 in *Culture and Anarchy*, "Culture, then, is a study of perfection, and perfection which insists on becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances." In line with Arnold's dictum, higher education in the United States purported to turn away from the "outward" and from the goal of "having something." "We must beware," Johns Hopkins president Daniel Coit Gilman warned in 1879, "lest we make our schools technical instead of liberal, and impart a knowledge of methods rather than principles."³¹

"Beleaguered but steadfast," Joan Shelley Rubin writes, proponents of generalism (or Arnoldian "culture") "continued to defend their policy that the classroom was to be a refuge from *narrow* vocational concerns and a retreat from mediocrity and materialism."³² This defensive stance—taken against materialism, mediocrity, and narrowness—is indicative of a severe cultural anxiety on the part of elite communities about the idea of culture itself, and how, or whether, to reconcile this idea with the principles of democracy. The alternative to such a reconciliation, very desirable to the advocates of culture, was to find a way of maintaining the legitimacy of high culture—the classic definition of culture—as an essentially undemocratic, yet nonetheless acceptable and necessary, phenomenon that must be preserved at all costs (and ultimately something with a utility of its

own). While it is clear that the ideal version of culture was colored by democratic desire (according to Arnold, for example, culture would ideally do away with classes), the reality was less flexible and class-laden: culture was the domain of a privileged, educated minority, and serious efforts to reform this circumstance were met with serious resistance.

Returning to Tesla's remarks, he is responding to the pervasive critique being made of invention by suggesting that invention is indeed consistent with the generalist value of abstraction, which is the same thing as being consistent with individualism, in the sense that individualism is about a dislocation from the outward social (political, economic) realm. Following this idea, Tesla's remarks imply, inventors are not to be automatically aligned with practical, commercial sensibilities or agendas; they are, on the contrary, engaged in an activity of the "mind" (which he says twice), a pursuit of "ideas." Tesla reiterates that inventors thrive on the dislocation of solitude; he even advises inventors to "be alone."³³ Here it is worth pointing out that Tesla's depiction of such dislocation is also a critique of the "linear" model of innovation that pervaded (and in many respects still pervades) the science world. This model upholds the pure science researcher as the individual source for ideas, the source for inquiry and discovery that leads *next* to the practical, industrial stage; not only does such a model discount the collective community, and the intellectual exchange between technical and theoretical research that always already compromises the ideal of "pure science," but it serves by extension to gesture toward the ideal of a singular individual as responsible for any particular innovation. In his article "The Linear Model of Innovation Science" (2006), Benoît Godin shows that "linearity was a fiction," and that it was "political rhetoric."³⁴ Yet the power of this rhetoric was responsible for the commonly held belief that inventors merely applied the original ideas of pure scientists. Thus Tesla *intentionally* ignores the question of application, for as a renowned inventor, he encountered critics such as physicist Henry Rowland, who was an outspoken advocate of scientific research purely for the sake of "truth"—an advocate of "pure science." Considerably more radical than Charles Eliot, Rowland insisted that nothing done for the sake of application could claim the status of "science" and, moreover, that those who engaged in "practical" research were encouraging the degradation of science to "low, money-making levels."³⁵

As Rowland was a popular figure in his day, his views and initiatives were far-reaching, influencing a range of intellectual communities, including the literary one. In later years, for example, Willa Cather refers to Rowland in her novel *The Professor's House* (1925), drawing him into the story. The novel's fictional hero, Tom Outland, considers an option to

study at Johns Hopkins University “in the laboratory made famous by Dr. Rowland.”³⁶ This reference to Rowland accomplishes at least two things. First, it signals the familiarity that literary intellectuals such as Cather had with scientific culture and developments, and second, it suggests the support that elite, educated individuals gave to the cause of pure science, for Cather is undoubtedly sympathetic to Rowland’s cause, and goes out of her way to champion any initiative to disentangle culture and commerce, or aesthetics and action: as a student of physics, Cather’s young hero Tom Outland does indeed discover something that leads to a major invention; yet, though he “knew his idea would make money,” Tom is not interested, and he leaves it “to take care of itself”³⁷ (striking a complicated pose with regard to the discourse of carelessness found in *The Great Gatsby*). Cather’s narrative explains that in dying young, without ever having applied his findings, Tom preserves the integrity of his idea, and thus of ideas in general. He “escaped all that,” Cather writes; he “made something new in the world—and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others.”³⁸ He escapes the degradation, or as Rowland put it, “the low, money-making levels” that are reached only when an idea is translated into some form of action, which inevitably links it to the economy and the political sphere. While the explicit connection Cather makes between her fictional hero and the real Dr. Rowland signifies her support of research for its own sake, in any field, perhaps the more important point is that Cather’s narrative condemns the commercial interests that dominate scientific discovery, not scientific discovery itself.

This approach is consistent with pure-science advocacy. In the view of turn-of-the-century pure-science activists, there needed to be a distinct line drawn between business and science, and invention was to be thought of as business—as contaminated with business interests. For example, to illustrate the dislocation, which is to say the disinterest, claimed by pure science, its advocates liked to tell the story of the scientist and the practical- or business-man. Urged to apply his talents outside of research, the scientist would retort: “My dear sir, I have no time to waste in making money.”³⁹ The point of such a maxim is, clearly, to claim a higher—or highbrow—status for pure science. While it is arguable that such a claim is traceable to a particular agenda, the purpose for pure-science advocates was rather to deny this, and instead to cultivate political neutrality. Pure-science advocates therefore popularized a discourse that not only demanded *science* be disinterested but claimed, as well, that there were no political interests in its own advocacy of such dislocation. Yet the care-free, or careless, attitude expressed by those who had “no time to waste in making money” was also the attitude of those who *had* time (to engage in

science as a noncommercial program) precisely because they *had money*.

In 1887 a Cornell scientist observed this dynamic, noting the role of money in the world of scientific research: "In this country, men devoted to science purely for the sake of science are and must be few in number. Few *can* devote their lives to work that promises no return except the satisfaction of adding to the sum of knowledge. Very few have both the means and inclination to do this."⁴⁰ The ability to devote oneself to science without any promise of economic return was thus dependent on one thing: whether the researcher occupied a particular class position. As Daniel Kevles notes, turn-of-the-century American scientists "tended to come from the narrow fragment of society that called itself cultivated; most were the sons—or married the daughters—of well-to-do merchants, gentry, lawyers, ministers or teachers; almost all were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants."⁴¹ To engage in pure science was thus a privilege traceable to a distinct economic advantage. The accusation made by pure-science advocates—that applied science had only commercial motivations and thus diminished the inherent value of knowledge—must be understood, then, in terms of an anxiety about the work of the working class: the fact is that invention had the potential to disrupt class hierarchy, while science—polite science—did not.

This is not merely to say, however, that the dispute between science and invention is a microcosm of the larger dispute over the fate of "culture" in a society that was becoming increasingly dominated by technology and business interests (and along with this, increasingly, publicly influenced by women and ethnoracial minorities), although this is the case; rather, the point is to argue that the dispute between science and invention was itself the central issue, and not merely a microcosm, because it was in fact *invention* that was changing the world to such a degree that it became impossible to maintain the structure on which the (*genteel*) idea of culture relied. James Russell Lowell, the influential intellectual, diplomat, Harvard professor, MLA president, and first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, called attention to this (as a) problem when he wrote, in the late 1880s, "It may well be questioned whether *the invention* of printing, while it democratized information, has not also *leveled the ancient aristocracy* of thought."⁴² According to Lowell and many other supporters of the "ancient aristocracy of thought," then, it was because invention forwarded the interests of democracy that it was breaking the "upper-class monopoly of culture."⁴³ Lowell was not complaining about science but about the effects of practical science or technology on the salubrity of cultural aristocracy. These effects would extend, moreover, to diminish the aristocratic ideal of "thought" or "the mind" as self-suf-

ficient and not wanting of application. Thus, it might be said, Lowell was not complaining about invention but about democracy.

The End of Culture

Lowell is among others lodging the same type of complaint. Physicist Henry Rowland expressed a very similar sentiment when he noted that the flaws of American science reflected the “pride” taken in “a democratic country . . . in reducing everything to a level.”⁴⁴ American science could not advance, in other words, until a strict line was drawn between the “best,” and all the rest: anything with commercial interests was in the category of the rest, of course, and, as Rowland made abundantly clear, “the best” science could be possible only if there was a concentration of educational wealth in a small group of top-rated universities.⁴⁵ If this kind of “best-science elitism” was to be looked down on or at all discouraged in favor of a more democratic system, Rowland insisted, then American science could not hope to rival or surpass Continental scientific achievement, nor could it claim a stake in the advancement of knowledge for the sake of “truth.”⁴⁶ In Rowland’s view, something “must be done to create a science of physics in this country, rather than to call telegraphs, electric lights, and such conveniences by the name of science.”⁴⁷ Pitting pure science, theory, abstract research, or the ideal of “thought” against the ideal of—or the practical demands of—democracy, figures such as Rowland and Lowell were in essence advocating the maintenance of a monopoly, or an “ancient aristocracy,” which is to say the maintenance of a cultural hierarchy, for they anticipated the impact of democratic principles to be synonymous with the end of culture.⁴⁸

To be sure, this feared end or termination of culture as it was being imagined was synonymous with the (re)making of culture into an end-oriented, result-driven, public domain. It should be noted that in the mid-nineteenth century, this was the purpose of the educated elite: to make “culture” popular and accessible to the masses, so that it was not lost in a sea of materialism and practicality. Consider Emerson’s 1867 essay, “The Progress of Culture,” in which he endorsed a “knighthood of virtue” comprising the “few superior and attractive men” who, as the “delegated intellect,” would be equipped to “calm and guide” the people. His purpose was to guarantee “the gradual domestication of Culture.”⁴⁹ This plan backfired, or was at least abandoned by the cultural aristocracy, because this elite group came to realize that refining the masses meant an end to the most definitive and precious core of culture: its exclusivity.

Turning it into something that would be publicly accessible would only ruin it; it had to remain private and inaccessible—“where the world is not”—to remain itself.

If invention was helping to bring about this end, helping to dilute the purity and the exclusiveness of what should remain a private domain, this was because, as I have noted, its occupation was open to anyone with an interest. Edison himself drew attention to this. “Don’t go to college,” he is famed for advising young ambitious men, “Get into a shop and work out your own salvation.” The fact that invention did not require higher education was perhaps the strongest statement of its democratic custom and effect.⁵⁰ In short, invention was massively, materially influential: like industrialists, inventors became rich *and* famous without the classic credentials of cultivation, and, on top of this, in the popular, external sphere, the inventions themselves finally helped to make more opportunities accessible to more people, which meant that conditions in America became more democratic. This wedding of invention and democracy was captured by D. H. Lawrence when he complained of democracy, linking it up to Edison’s most significant invention: “The more I see of democracy the more I dislike it. It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric light and water closets, and nothing else.”⁵¹

While the late-nineteenth-century ideal of “culture” that was being shaped by genteel critics, novelists, philosophers, and educators did include a discourse concerning the vital importance of democracy (we can consider Lawrence an exception), this was more pretense than anything else, for the conditions suggested by this core group were essentially undemocratic. This is to say that, just as within scientific research, only those of the upper class were able to afford the “virtue” of a way of life free of acquisitive concerns and entrepreneurial pursuits, which was, not coincidentally, the only lifestyle deemed worthy by the cultivated set; this educated and predominantly wealthy minority insisted, moreover, that without their guidance, the majority would readily find itself entrapped in what Charles Eliot Norton labeled a “paradise of mediocrities.”⁵² The overture to democracy thus remained a formal gesture, for it was tempered and ultimately paralyzed by the more dominant anti-acquisitive, anti-materialistic attitude.

Certainly, the ethos of acquisition played a role in the field of invention: it was impossible for inventors to deny that they were profiting from the commercialization of their inventions, and that their scientific research often led to the applications of their findings, yet Tesla and other independent inventors like him were nonetheless annoyed at their critics’

insistence on the higher dignity of science for its own sake. Protesting the connotation of high virtue that went along with the term “pure science,”⁵³ inventors insisted that their work was equally worthy and that it did indeed contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge. After reading Rowland’s address “A Plea for Pure Science,” Alexander Graham Bell relaunched the magazine *Science* and declared in the first editorial, “Research is none the less genuine, investigation none the less worthy, because the truth it discovers is utilizable for the benefit of mankind.”⁵⁴ Trying, like Tesla, to propagate a view different from Rowland’s, Bell pointed out that inventors had indeed added to the building blocks of physics (consider, he wrote, the electric light and the telephone). Perhaps most significantly, Bell’s words suggest, inventors had contributed to the revelation of “truth.” While the inventor who simply appropriated science for invention might stand on a “lower plane” than the discoverer, Bell conceded, the inventor who advanced knowledge *and* patented an invention was above them both. Scientists, Bell’s magazine warned, “should cast aside all prejudice against the man of patents and practical devices, and should stand ready to welcome the investigator in whatever garb he appears.”⁵⁵

Often, as I have intimated, this “garb” was not the outfit worn by academics and scholars. It could in fact be anything at all: while Bell’s words are directed specifically at elitist scientists discriminating against those researchers who were trading on their discoveries (in many cases, they *had* to in order to stay afloat financially), he also implicitly calls attention to an overall prejudice on the part of elite Anglo-Americans against the immigrants who were pouring in from Southern and Eastern Europe and bringing their “garb” with them. Tesla himself came from Croatia, for example, and Einstein, the most famous physicist of the century, was a German Jewish immigrant. Whether in a tallis or rags, most immigrants had little opportunity to enter elite universities at this point (Einstein was an exception, because he was already famous when he arrived in the United States), so if science was an intense interest, it often had to be pursued outside the customary context of higher education, and thus often led to the commercialization of inventions that would support further scientific inquiry. Although Tesla’s words imply that invention was certainly not the vulgar, commercial endeavor it was being billed as by its critics, it was still a living wage for many of its practitioners.

While it was predominantly well-known inventors such as Bell who were outspoken in their defense of a utilitarian, action-oriented approach to scientific discovery, there were scientists, too, who dissented from Rowland’s attitude, partly because the line between science and inven-

tion was more blurry than pure-science activists were willing to admit, but mostly because they found Rowland's view to be too patrician. For instance, Thomas Corwin Mendenhall, a physicist working in the laboratory of the Weather Service, voiced this divergence when he denounced the "unfortunate and perhaps growing tendency among scientific men to despise the useful and practical in science." "The arrogance of genius," he reminded the academics, "is no less disagreeable than that of riches."⁵⁶ This criticism, entrenched in its reference to economic privilege, was most likely aimed at those men who were claiming—amidst the conspicuous privilege of their lives and backgrounds—that wealth and the refinement of intellect were two separate issues, and that the latter could be acquired (and would be rewarded) despite the absence of the former: those devoted to pure science, Rowland maintained in 1902, comprised "a small and unique" community, "an aristocracy, not of wealth, not of pedigree, but of intellect and ideals."⁵⁷

This movement to separate refinement from wealth actually predates Rowland's assertion. Rowland's specific project of promoting best-science elitism, which imagined itself as a commitment to the setting and enforcement of standards of excellence, was identical to a reform initiative in higher education that proposed a class-neutral ideal of cultivation. Charles Eliot, then president of Harvard University, laid out such a program in *Educational Reform* (1898), stating that "The University will hold high the standards of public spirit and will enlarge that cultivated class which is distinguished not by wealth, merely, but by refinement and spirituality."⁵⁸ This effort to "extend the ideal of culture or cultivation to the 'public' involves, first of all, the de-emphasis of wealth as a goal at a time when wealth was no longer restricted solely to the heirs of gentility."⁵⁹ Moreover, by juxtaposing cultivation and materialism, Eliot establishes culture as absolutely abstract, and not at all locatable in anything tangible (such as, say, money), which would suggest the futility of acquiring wealth in the quest to improve one's class status (think, again, of *Gatsby*). But, even more than this, it should be emphasized that Eliot's program stresses, in his words, "refinement" and "spirituality," and these abstractions are, by definition, immaterial, which is to say they are based in contemplation and idealism. It follows that Eliot's approach to scientific research would be protective of science as an unapplied discipline.

Indeed, Eliot's thinking can serve as a basic rehearsal of the concerns that this analysis is trying to bring to light. In his later article "The New Definition of the Cultivated Man" (1902), he reiterates and builds on these concerns. He argues that scientific knowledge is an integral part of culture, and that scientific study must be universally accepted into the curriculum

of higher education because, as he and others have suggested, it provides an environment in which students can develop a high-minded devotion to “truth.” If the determination of truth was the goal of a science-friendly curriculum, this meant that science, as the study of nature, became a new tool in the quest to stabilize “truth.” As Eliot wrote in *Educational Reform*, the study of nature encouraged habits of “candid, fearless truth-seeking,” which meant not only that science was deemed capable of fixing knowledge but also that science had no other job to do but determine “truth.” That is, it had no responsibility to apply its findings, much less play an active role in social affairs. Thus, despite his proposal to “enlarge” the “cultivated class,” he had no intentions of engaging in any kind of program that might challenge the status quo. In fact, it is accurate to say that the goal of social reform, although on the lips of elite educators such as Eliot, retained no elite support during this period if it became politically active. Yet at the same crossroads where Eliot and his contingent were setting up a liberal approach to the budding authority of scientific discourse, claiming that science would bring “truth” and would reflect an overall “aristocracy . . . of intellect and ideals,” a new, more political relationship to science was developing in the philosophy of pragmatism, and it rejected any form of aristocracy.

Proponents of pragmatism pointed out that even an aristocracy of “intellect” needed to be recognized as a function of a class system, and that such an idea could not convincingly divorce the definition of intelligence from the reality of unequal wealth and unequal opportunity. To develop the “mind” was not enough, in the view of pragmatism; there must be a goal beyond this—preferably a concrete agenda of social change. Thus, at the same time that Eliot was redefining “the cultivated man” and proposing abstractly that wealth was not necessary in order to achieve cultivation, John Dewey was proposing the redefinition of intelligence, and suggesting that there could be no abstract definitions of this or any other category that had historically functioned to reiterate class. For Dewey, the reigning concept of “intelligence” was an obvious symptom of class hierarchy, which meant it was a safeguard against a more democratic system. Science, in Dewey’s view, provided the opportunity to forge such a system: it had a material impact on the world in the form of technology, and it favored an outcome-based approach, even in the form of “pure” research. Science helped mark thought as a “working program of action” and should be understood as a tool to be used for the end of social reform. Ultimately, Dewey wrote, “democracy is estimable only through the changed conception of intelligence that forms modern science.”⁶⁰

If, as James Russell Lowell suggested, invention was having a democra-

tizing effect, and was thus leveling “the ancient aristocracy of thought,” invention was playing an important role in changing the dominant conception of intelligence; indeed, an invention, Lowell complains, was responsible for the dissemination of information or thought. Pure science, on the other hand, to the extent that it did manage to retain its detachment (by the 1920s the boundary between pure and practical science had eroded considerably), had less effect on the public.⁶¹ As Rowland proclaimed, it was an “aristocracy” of “intellect and ideals,” so it intended to remain isolated from social, political, and economic conflicts. It was essentially a private enterprise, and thus represented the privatization of an entire field of knowledge: its discoveries were not meant to be translated into terms that would be readily accessible, either discursively or materially, to those outside its ranks. And while the disapproval of any relationship to the marketplace—the processes of production and commercialization—by pure science does suggest that pure-science advocates were expressing a discomfort with the transitions and commodifications in and of “culture” in the United States, something that certainly had its downsides, the agenda of these advocates made them, as a matter of course, antagonistic to the idea of the public, whether this was their chosen sentiment or not.

The field of invention, by contrast—and by definition—had a direct link to the public and, at its core, sought this relationship. Providing for the public was, and is, the basis for invention (recall Gatsby’s dream to provide something useful to the public by studying “needed inventions”). As Alexander Graham Bell pointed out, the “truth [invention] discovers is utilizable for the benefit” of the public. This sentiment was shared by John Dewey, who argued that the “best” scientific research was the kind that provided the model of a community committed to the socialization of intelligence. “Everything discovered,” Dewey wrote, “belongs to the community of workers”: “Every new idea and theory has to be submitted to this community for confirmation and test. There is an expanding community of cooperative effort and of truth.”⁶²

The expansion of this cooperative community, Dewey noted many times, was largely dependent on industrial production, for this was the only way to successfully carry out the publicization of knowledge, which was, in effect, a process of democratization. In other words, a fully democratic society was one in which socialized intelligence prevailed, Dewey insisted, and this goal could be met only with the help of industry. With this point in mind, I now turn to a fictional account of an independent inventor in Frank Norris’s novel *McTeague* (1899), for in this story can be found a larger, richer narrative about the advancement of a cooperative

community through the procession of industry. Through the character of Old Grannis, Norris presents the dilemma posed to individuality by commercial interests, and charts the course by which the goals of industry and the market instigate a turn toward a more socialistic, participatory, cooperative environment on the part of private citizens or individuals.

The Romance of Process

Means Meets Ends in Frank Norris's McTeague

The late nineteenth century saw major innovations in printing technology, such as . . . book-binding machines, which led to the mass production of cheap books, journals and newspapers. The growth in the available sources of information, particularly in the print media, answered the needs created by . . . increasing divisions of class and ethnicity within the population.

—Daniel G. Williams, *Ethnicity and Cultural Authority from Arnold to Du Bois* (2006)¹

The ulterior problem of thought is to make thought prevail in experience.

—John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1929)²

ACCORDING TO Frank Norris's most recent biographers, his "vital accomplishments" as a "literary artist and insightful observer of American life" are what "account for his present high status in U.S. cultural history."³ Norris indeed enjoys such a status; as the author of a series of critically acclaimed novels—all written by the age of thirty-two, when he died suddenly of appendicitis—Norris was praised by his contemporaries, especially after he published *McTeague* (1899). Generally appreciated as a "naturalist" work, *McTeague* was influentially identified in 1987 with the "logic of naturalism"⁴ and has a long history of being read as a "tragedy," a story filled with characters "moving visibly toward objective doom."⁵ Donald Pizer has recently argued that in this novel Norris emphasizes "man's propensity to violence, on his unselective and uncontrollable sexuality, on his all-consuming greed, and on his distrust of the outsider."⁶ In a similar turn, Clare Eby has lately called it a "novel about going down," one that considers the "truth-value of ugliness."⁷ Speaking of his own novel, Frank Norris addressed its unpalatable aspects by commenting that he "never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies." Instead, Norris insisted, "I told them the truth."⁸ After reading the novel, Willa Cather, for one, agreed. The year it was published, Cather

wrote an admiring review, praising Norris for striking “deep down into the roots of life and the foundations of Things as They Are.”⁹ As a contemporary of Frank Norris’s (he was born only three years before Cather, in 1870), Cather read *McTeague* and encountered the story of doomed characters such as McTeague, who is left out in the middle of the desert handcuffed to the body of his wife’s cousin, whom he has just murdered; McTeague’s wife Trina, whom he also murders; Maria Macapa, the Mexican cleaning lady who is murdered by her husband, Zerkow; and Zerkow himself, the red-headed Polish Jew who is subsequently found drowned, “floating in the bay near Black Point,” after cutting Maria’s throat.

If, as Cather suggests, Norris’s text strikes “deep down” to represent “Things as They Are,” we can assume she is remarking on the novel’s unabashed portrayal of violence, poverty, and general depravity in the life of the urban underclass. Few works, the book jacket claims, “have captured the seamy side of American urban life with such graphic immediacy as does this portrayal of human degradation in turn-of-the-century San Francisco. Its protagonists—men and women alike—are shown as both products and victims of a debasing social order.” Yet, in the midst of all of this doom, I want to suggest that these reiterative readings of *McTeague* can be complicated and perhaps revised; when looked at from a certain perspective, Norris’s text provides one of the most optimistic visions of a new social order to be found in this entire period of literature. While both twentieth- and now twenty-first-century *McTeague* criticism mostly passes over this fact, noticing primarily the book’s “pessimism”¹⁰ and its representations of iniquity, calamity, and dissolution, I will argue that the hopefulness in the text is one of its defining features. To make this argument, I focus on the often ignored or underanalyzed plot of Old Grannis and Miss Baker, a pair of characters—Grannis especially—who remain consistently visible throughout the novel, and who, in the end, neither die nor murder, but rather live to achieve happiness, relationship, and profound fulfillment.¹¹ Under the sign of this romance, we find that *McTeague* makes a distinct commentary on the powerful changes being wrought by invention and mechanization at the turn into the twentieth century, echoing and even foreshadowing the suggestions made by some of the most influential, expectant intellectuals of this period.

We are introduced to Old Mr. Grannis in the first few pages of the book. He is a “gentle, simpleminded old man,” an “Englishman” who lives in the same boarding house as McTeague.¹² We learn shortly after this that Old Grannis has a special relationship to Miss Baker, who lives in a room “adjoined [to] that of Old Grannis” (16), and that “separated only by a thin partition of their rooms” they had “come to know each other’s

habits" (17). Grannis's favorite habit or "occupation" is binding pamphlets with his self-made bookbinding apparatus (17). He is an independent inventor whose invention provides his *raison d'être*: it brings him the only pleasure he knows, and he values it more than any other object. As Norris probes the complex of an independent inventor's relationship to his invention, he charts the course by which Grannis's bookbinding device becomes public—how it is noticed and finally bought by a "firm" that pressures Grannis (with "quite a sum" of money) into selling it along with the patent rights. He simultaneously tells a parallel tale of tacit love come late in life between Old Grannis and Miss Baker, the "little" dressmaker who lives on the other side of the "thin partition" dividing their rooms.¹³ The shift from private to public thus characterizes the fate of both the invention and the affair, which are closely related.



The romance between Grannis and Miss Baker occurs and is conscientiously preserved in the most delicate fashion: it exists for many long years without the couple formally meeting or talking, which is to say that their relationship exists without public form, without any external expression whatsoever. "Singularly enough," Norris writes, "they were not even acquaintances; never a word had passed between them" (16). With nothing having passed between them, which is to say no exchange, the relationship of Grannis and Miss Baker initially stands for a profound isolation. Thoughts, which they have constantly about each other, never erupt into action. Because they never *act* on their desires or ideas concerning one another, they, as well as their ideas, remain isolated, alone, and illusory. What this means, of course, is that they remain *ideal*. The isolation represented here is therefore characterized or described by a deep chasm between ideal and real. Sitting "through the hours of the afternoon," only "listening and waiting" (17), each performing a secluded task of his or her own, Old Grannis and Miss Baker are the perfect examples of idealism, in the sense of allowing thoughts to remain abstract and unapplied. This dichotomy between thought and action—ideal and real—was a concern for Norris, a premise that can be gleaned from his commitment to understanding and challenging the distinctions between romanticism, realism, and naturalism.¹⁴ The same dichotomy was also a growing concern of some of his contemporaries, such as the philosopher John Dewey, who began a campaign for the unity of thought and practice in the early 1890s. Life itself was a business, he said, a transaction between thought and the world: "The mind must give meaning, ideas to the world that

confronts it," he wrote in 1892, "and in return for its investment the world gives back truth and power."¹⁵ For Old Grannis and Miss Baker, the mind is their only meaning, and they are not confronting the world— or each other— with their ideas, though there is no question that they are romantically involved.

Norris notes the romance of this scenario with a certain critical edge. For example, Miss Baker, who cannot work up the nerve to talk to Old Grannis, but talks *of* him to McTeague, fantasizes that Old Grannis is "the younger son of a baronet; that there are reasons for his not coming to the title; his stepfather wronged him cruelly" (19). The narrative voice Norris supplies is critical of Miss Baker's musings, insisting that she is merely romanticizing the life of Old Grannis. "No one had ever said such a thing," Norris's narrator tells us: "It was preposterous to imagine any mystery connected with Old Grannis. Miss Baker had chosen to invent the little fiction, had created the title and the unjust stepfather from some dim memories of the novels of her girlhood" (19).¹⁶ Because there is no interaction between Miss Baker and Grannis, and thus no way for either character to locate the other in social terms, Miss Baker is able to create romantic, idealized versions of Grannis's life; yet it is not on Norris's agenda to promote such idealism or to present his characters as disillusioned once they finally meet. On the contrary, Norris seems intent on demystifying whatever illusions would keep these characters apart.

In favor of the *consequences* of their "love," Norris's narrative suggests that these consequences would not depreciate the idea that each labors separately to keep alive by avoiding any exchange with the other (if for some reason their paths cross, both become "tongue-tied," embarrassed; they pass each other with "averted eyes," and make a hasty retreat [16, 94, 136]). Norris's critique of (their) idealism is thus not absolute, and does not privilege exchange (or conventional consummation) above all else. His narrative rather suggests that while result-orientation is important, it needs to account for the romance of process: ends must not replace or function to devalue means, ends and means must be formed within and sustain an organic relationship. To make this point, Norris plans the unfolding of the story so that initially it affirms the ideal or abstract nature of the relationship: the appreciation that Grannis and Miss Baker have for each other subsists (for 250 pages out of a 340-page book) without either of them possessing an agenda to activate or realize it. Described by Norris as "motionless" and "abstracted" (135), they continue their *affaire de coeur* through a private process—a daily process—of mutual reverie. In their imaginations, they are presumably fulfilled in the way that they

“keep company.” Every afternoon, and some evenings, with the partition safely between them, Old Grannis binds pamphlets with his coveted binding device while Miss Baker drinks her tea. Simultaneously together and alone, they share without transaction. Norris gestures toward their satisfaction in this arrangement:

Old Grannis heard the clinking of the tea things and smelled the faint odor of the tea. It seemed to him a signal, an invitation. He drew his chair close to his side of the partition, before his worktable. A pile of half-bound *Nations* was in the little binding apparatus. . . . [He] set to work.

It was their tête-à-tête. Instinctively they felt each other's presence, felt each other's thought coming to them through the thin partition. It was charming; they were perfectly happy. (99)

On separate sides of the wall, Miss Baker and Old Grannis are “perfectly” happy because, as the term indicates, there is nothing but an abstract ideal for both to imagine. Only “thought” occurs. As the narrative unfolds, however, Norris considers the limitations presented by the partition—which allows things to remain just “thought” or idea(l)s—and indicates that Grannis and Miss Baker are simulating a togetherness that they will only truly experience once the “partition” is no longer between them. While certainly proposing the value of action overall, it becomes evident that Norris is also guiding the reader to savor the process that characterizes the conversion of an idea into a reality, which is to say that he is less committed to criticizing idealism than to refuting the dualism of the real and the ideal.

This dualism is increasingly troubled in the story by the advent of commercial interests. To make this argument, it is important to emphasize that the “partition” disappears as their obstacle only when Grannis sells his binding device.¹⁷ In its independent state as an object with merely personal value, the binding device is the very thing that *keeps* Grannis on his side of the partition, and the partition is the very thing that enforces the ideal nature of their relationship. Thus, it is only after he becomes a participant in the world of exchange that he has the opportunity for an actual, active partnership with Miss Baker. What this means is that the commercial, industrial world more than makes this partnership possible: it makes it happen. It accomplishes this by imposing on Grannis a dislocation from his invention and the practice associated with it, which helps him to experience a dislocation from an insular sense of self.

The partnership thus goes beyond the convergence of Old Grannis

and Miss Baker, and serves to symbolize the broader conjoining of the practical and ideal spheres that, separated by a historical “partition,” are coming together in this story, signifying a deeper thematic undercurrent that speaks to the changes being brought on by industry. The story of Grannis and Miss Baker in *McTeague* is thus an occasion for Norris to provide a vision of the action-oriented industrial world as a potentially new form of social cooperation, a form that will have potentially positive—fulfilling—effects. First, as the story tells it, the overcoming of the partition as a dividing device between the ideal worlds of two individuals allows those individuals to coalesce and, in turn, make their ideals real; among other things, this strongly suggests the intersection of the real and the ideal as an opportunity to formulate a cooperative, a community.

In other words, rather than seeing industry as precipitating a loss—the loss of individualism and self-sufficiency—Norris’s story considers the mutual benefits of a new industrial order in which the traditionally capitalist concepts of self-sufficiency and independence are replaced by the more socialistic values of interdependence and cooperation.¹⁸ Second, the individuals, on opposite sides of the gender divide, enter into a mutually desired, mutually beneficial partnership that, having been facilitated by the intervention of business interests, can only suggest how such interests benefit the cause of gender transition.¹⁹ At the very least, this says that the dualism of gender is complicated in the process of dismantling the dualism of real and ideal (or pure and practical), and that the intervention of commerce is conducive to social community. When Frank Norris illustrates this point at the turn of the century in *McTeague*, it is important to show, he is anticipating the thought of influential intellectuals such as Walter Lippmann and Lewis Mumford, who would argue something very similar shortly thereafter.

In *Drift as Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (1914), which according to James Livingston remains Lippmann’s “most provocative and political book,”²⁰ Lippmann emphasized the “discipline of cooperation,” and suggested that “men and women” needed to take an interest in “collective property.” He looked forward to the time when such community would “socialize the home,”²¹ and argued that a sense of “social property” should be the alternative to the “self-sufficient individualism of the older family,” in which the “lordly male” remained morbidly isolated from the domestic sphere, while the female was expected merely to “obey, to wait on” the male.²² As he put it, there was “one fact” that was “written across the whole horizon, the prime element in any discussion,” and this fact was “the absolute necessity for a readjusting of woman’s position.”²³ This, of course, entails the readjustment of gender overall,

which means as much for the man's position as it does for the woman's. Furthermore, at the center of such reform, Lippmann proposes, is the "economic revolution" brought on by modern industry. As if describing the circumstances of Grannis's new wealth, Lippmann insisted that the new possibility of economic acquisition paved the way for the reformation of subjectivity, and that based on a model of cooperation, it would transform ideals into reality. "In the midst of plenty," Lippmann wrote, "dreams have a basis in fact" (125).

By providing a fictional account of the role of economic surplus in the relationship between "dreams" and fact, Norris thus precedes—and animates—Lippmann's model. "I never dreamed of having so much money," Grannis tells Trina, which is to say he certainly *did* dream of this, but never considered it possible that such a dream would turn into a reality. He also never thought it possible to be engaged in regular interaction with Miss Baker, in the sense of the two acting out their feelings (when she finally takes the first step to interact, Old Grannis exclaims with joy, "I hadn't dreamed!" [251], even though he had dreamed of it, every day). Now that men such as Grannis were, as Trina puts it, coming "into money" (242), there was finally an opportunity to materialize their dreams. Upon "giving up" his job, Grannis is noticeably perturbed by the convergence of a "dream" and a fact in his life. Expressing his dismay to Trina, she replies with "a good piece of advice," telling Grannis: "Now, I want you should go right in and speak to [Miss Baker] just as soon as she comes home, and say you've come into money and you want her to marry you" (242). The gist of Trina's advice to Grannis is nothing less than to take action. Grannis only protests this with "Impossible—impossible!" He is still hesitant to believe in the compatibility of (his) thoughts with practical reality, and perhaps, in the meeting of the pure and the practical. In his view Miss Baker is out of his reach, as any ideal would be. Forgetting that he is now financially secure, and that this indeed makes a difference, he insists that Miss Baker is "such an estimable lady" that he could not possibly appeal to her, even though, as he admits to Trina, "I love her" (242).

Emphasizing his characters' sense of propriety, Norris makes a point of signifying gender customs as a barrier: it is Miss Baker's status as a "lady"—and an "estimable" one at that—that keeps Grannis from approaching her and, by the same token, keeps her from approaching Grannis.²⁴ What I mean to emphasize here is that the fulfillment of classical gender roles means the maintenance of an ideal, which, like other ideals in the story, is presented as a barrier. Miss Baker is thus initially flustered when she violates the ideal of her gender role by *acting*, which by

nature violates any ideal—she is on the verge of literally and metaphorically crossing boundaries here, merely by appearing at the “threshold of [Grannis’s] room” (250). Following the action through, Miss Baker goes so far, “at last, after all these years,” as to “push” the door open. At this point, she worries about how “unladylike” this is: “What she had done seemed to her indecorous beyond expression. It was an enormity. Fancy, she had gone into his room, *into his room*—Mr. Grannis’ room” (250). Mr. Grannis’s room is on the other side, in many respects. With this action, Miss Baker sets off a series of disruptions. In addition to disrupting the classic distinction between thought and realization, she disrupts the ideal of femininity, which, inevitably, disrupts the ideal of gender as it pertains to masculinity.

What occurs with this convergence of imaginative and practical is thus the refiguration of gender, which is also the refiguration of class, and, as argued above, what follows is the formation of a more cooperative, social environment.²⁵ To be sure, Grannis is transformed upon receiving the “check” from the “firm,” yet this happens alongside the transformation that occurs in the character of Miss Baker; both become open to a partnership that brings the very basis of gender into question, for both must compromise their traditional gender roles in order to realize their “long retarded romance” (136). This does not come easy, of course; nor does it happen right away. Tracing the course of these amendments, we find Norris signaling a persistent hesitancy. When the “people at the bookstore” where he buys his pamphlets first approach Grannis about his “contrivance for binding books,” he reacts with fear and anxiety, for the sale of his invention seems to require a relinquishment that has broad implications. He tells Trina: “‘He offered me quite a sum if I would sell him the right of it—the—patent of it—quite a sum. In fact—in fact—yes, quite a sum, quite.’ He rubbed his chin tremulously and looked about him on the floor” (241). Grannis is clearly not jumping at the opportunity to sell his binding apparatus. However, as hesitant as Grannis seems here, the next time we encounter him he is “in his clean, well-kept little room in his cushioned armchair, *his hands lying idly* upon his knees” (248, emphasis added). Norris informs us that “Old Grannis’ occupation was gone. That morning the bookselling firm where he had bought his pamphlets had taken his little binding apparatus from him to use as a model. The transaction had been concluded. Old Grannis had received his check. It was large enough, to be sure, but when all was over, he returned to his room and sat there sad and unoccupied” (248). If the point of this episode is to convey a loss—because Grannis has traded his invention and practice in for money, his hands have suddenly become idle, and his sense of

self is thrown into a crisis of sorts—Norris specifies this loss as more than the loss of Grannis's reclusive, independent activity.²⁶ If we recognize that the activity fulfilled Grannis largely because it made him feel connected to Miss Baker, what Grannis fears, on the contrary, is the loss of an ideal that is not at all about his own masculine individuality, but rather can be traced back to the ideal of sociality. "The absence of his accustomed work seemed to leave something out of his life" (249), Norris tells us, but the thing left "out" is not the work itself: it is the thought of his relationship with Miss Baker. Norris explains:

It did not appear to him that he could be the same to Miss Baker now; their little habits were disarranged, their customs broken up. He could no longer fancy himself so near to her. They would drift apart now, and she would no longer make herself a cup of tea and keep company with him when she knew that he would never again sit before his table binding uncut pamphlets. He had sold his happiness for money; he had bartered all his tardy romance for some miserable bank notes. He had not foreseen that it would be like this. A vast regret welled up within him. (249)

Norris emphasizes here the loss of a "fancy" or an ideal that sustained Grannis even while it remained completely abstract. But with the passing of this phase of their relationship, Grannis finally discovers a sensation more fulfilling than anything he had known during his isolated reverie, and it has the ring of emotionalism and connection:

Old Grannis leaned his face in his hands. Not only did an inexplicable regret stir within him, but a certain great tenderness came upon him. The tears that swam in his faded-blue eyes were not altogether those of unhappiness. No, this long delayed affection that had come upon him in his later years filled him with a joy for which tears seemed to be the natural expression. For thirty years his eyes had not been wet, but tonight he felt as if he were young again. He had never loved before, and there was still a part of him that was only twenty years of age. . . . He did not hear the timid rapping on his door, and it was not until the door itself opened that he looked up quickly and saw the little retired dressmaker standing on the threshold, carrying a cup of tea on a tiny Japanese tray. She held it toward him. (249–50)

Repeating his use of the term "threshold" three times, Norris clearly indicates that Miss Baker and Old Grannis are entering into a new phase of relations that can be read as symbolic of the social conversions taking

place. Careful to represent each character's reluctance, he indicates through them the cultural anxiety that would inevitably accompany the crossing of such thresholds, an anxiety traceable to, as Alan Trachtenberg puts it in *The Incorporation of America* (1982), the "invasion of the marketplace into human relations" (144).

For example, earlier in the novel, before Grannis trades in his invention, Norris conveys the strong sense of security that each character derives from remaining loyal to conventional gender roles. Briefly rehearsed, according to nineteenth-century gender ideals, men are simply more active, making and doing things with their hands (the binding apparatus, for instance). They are also less emotional than women. Women are less active, less assertive, and if they do engage in manual activity, it is something domestic, like making tea or sewing (Miss Baker is a retired seamstress).²⁷ Norris alludes to this dichotomy in the text, often associating "doing nothing" and "idle" hands with the ideal of the feminine. Miss Baker is said to be sitting "in her room, her hands idle in her lap, doing nothing, listening, waiting" (17), while Grannis is fully active, however alone, on the other side of the wall. When Maria comes to Miss Baker for junk, she is again "sitting," with "her hands resting idly in her lap" (33). The disparity between the activity enjoyed by Grannis and Miss Baker is highlighted by Norris and is an important theme in this drama. When Grannis is not binding, he is working as an "expert dog surgeon" (13); when Miss Baker is not "doing nothing," she is invariably preparing her afternoon tea. While each character performs actions associated with gendered subjectivities, both, as noted, worry at first when it appears to them that they are not fulfilling these ideals; this anxiety is arguably the upshot of a transitional period in which gender roles are evolving toward a more fluid construction. "I'm so ashamed," Miss Baker exclaims before she realizes how welcome she is in Grannis's room. "I don't know what you'll think of me," she continues, "improper . . . unladylike—you can never think well of me" (251).

For Grannis's part, he is correct in anxiously anticipating that he will not appear the same to Miss Baker without his activity and apparatus—and indeed he is not the same—but neither is he completely inactive. When Miss Baker steps outside her gender role and into Grannis's room, Grannis rises to the occasion by stepping outside his own masculine subjectivity, and into the sphere of domestic activity. As Miss Baker stands in the doorway weeping, Grannis offers her help: "'Let me—,'" he proposes: "'I'll take the tray from you,' cried Old Grannis, coming forward. A tremulous joy came upon him. Never in his life had he been so happy. At last it had come—come when he had least expected it. That which he

longed for and hoped for through so many years, behold, it was come tonight. He felt his awkwardness leaving him" (251). Indeed, in transgressing his gender role, Grannis has begun to replace a reclusive lifestyle with a less individual approach that lends itself to cooperation and social engagement. In addition, he signifies this deep sea change by expressing an emotionality that was previously denied. Similar to Walter Lippmann, Lewis Mumford later called this trade-off the emergence of a "social and participating self." "Man's defense" lies not in the "narrow, isolated ego," Mumford wrote, but in "that self which we share with our fellows."²⁸

If the self that Grannis finally shares with Miss Baker is his social self, then he discovers through (a) relationship, that the "narrow, isolated ego" that characterizes the ideal of masculine subjectivity is impoverished. So while Grannis does compromise his strictly masculine identity, such a compromise does not leave him inactive. On the contrary, it provides him with new activity, even in the most concrete sense of manual occupation: "he came toward her and took the tray from her hands, and turning back into [his] room with it, made as if to set it on the table. But the piles of his pamphlets were in the way. Both of his hands were occupied with the tray" (252). Grannis has Miss Baker help him by clearing away his pamphlets, and he proceeds to fix their tea. Norris is emphatic about his hands no longer being idle, however domestic the activity they perform. While Norris signals these developments as positive—an outlook that is echoed later in the social criticism of Lippmann and Mumford—his hopeful depiction is in contrast to the bleaker picture painted by other novelists, such as Willa Cather, for example. She would later point to such domestication as degradation in her 1925 novel *The Professor's House*, which is treated in depth in later chapters. Notwithstanding the fact that this book came twenty-five years after *McTeague*, Cather is not optimistic like Norris about the effects of commercial interests. In the passage that conveys the professor's thoughts on what would happen if Tom Outland had lived to see his invention marketed, we find a deep-rooted cynicism.

In this passage, it is worthwhile to note, Tom's hands are the symbol of his independence, his active capacity, his freedom; ultimately, they symbolize his masculine self: in the event of his commercial success, Godfrey fears, his "hand[s]" would become "the instrument of a woman."²⁹ They would be domesticated toward some end that has nothing to do with the insular, independent, abstract nature of creative manual activity. This, Cather implies, is the price of exchange. There are, of course, other aspects of exchange that corroborate it as an account of domestication. For Thoreau, the result of exchange, or selling one's labor, is to greatly diminish the possibility of human freedom. To the extent that such freedom is a

masculine-bound idea, as is self-reliance, the effect of exchange would be to strip one of this subjective status, essentially the status of an individual. One would then become more a thing than a person, and would be unable, as Thoreau puts it, to “sustain the manliest relations to men.”³⁰

But this, I would argue, is precisely Norris’s point: the “manliest relations to men” can be sustained only in an atmosphere of gender (and so class) restriction, and Norris is considering a new environment in which there is less self-reliance and more interdependence. The exchange that takes place in this story—Grannis’s invention, exchanged for money, leading to the exchange that finally occurs between him and Miss Baker—is the exchange of individuality for relationship, an exchange not exactly at the heart of Thoreau’s agenda in *Walden*. It is important to note, however, that this is not the equivalent of exchanging the enjoyment or experience of the process for the end result. This is to say that while Norris does indeed permit a reading that is not critical of industry (which is business-based, and so after the end result), he is not necessarily endorsing ends over means.

In other words, in contrast to the Thoreauvian ideal of reclusion, so apparent in *Walden*, and so dependent on anti-industrial sentiment, Norris shows the intervention of industry to precipitate the fulfillment of personal dreams; yet an uncritical reading of industry in this story does *not* mean the advocating of commercial interests, which are concerned first and foremost with monetary profit. While Grannis did indeed acquire money through his exchange, it was not money he was after but the situation that money would make possible. Norris perspicuously contrasts him to Trina, for whom money is an end in itself. Trina hoards her money, finding “bliss,” as Georg Simmel puts it, “in the sheer possession” of it.³¹ The aesthetic nature of such an impulse is signified as a problem in Norris’s text, and is contrasted to the more pragmatic approach embodied in Grannis, who finds no value in money unless it promises to bring him happiness.³² Recall what Norris writes about Grannis’s frustration after selling his binding apparatus: “He had sold his happiness for money; he had bartered all his tardy romance for some miserable bank notes. He had not foreseen that it would be like this. A vast regret welled up within him” (249). Money, Norris insists, does not bring Grannis fulfillment, even though he is poor and has been poor all his life. Whether or not Grannis temporarily became victim to the pecuniary motives of his fellow boarders (Did he sell his invention for money? It is more plausible that he sold the invention only because he thought it would make him a worthy suitor for Miss Baker), he nonetheless recognizes his sale as a

mistake during the short time in which he is bereft of both his invention and Miss Baker.



When Alfred Kazin termed *McTeague* “the first great tragic portrait in America of an acquisitive society,” he meant the stories of McTeague, Trina, Marcus Schouler, Zerkow, and Maria.³³ He, like several other more recent critics (already named), neglected to consider Old Grannis and Miss Baker, whose story is prominently woven throughout the novel along with these others. While these other characters develop tragic relationships to money, Old Grannis and Miss Baker signify just the opposite, as they develop a thriving—ideal—relationship in the midst of a newly commercial, or “acquisitive” society. I want to illustrate now that the realization of this ideal is dependent on Norris’s indication of a certain disinterestedness, particularly when it comes to money or acquisitive ends.³⁴ To make this point—one that is intimately related to the points made thus far about the exchange of individualism and self-sufficiency for community and interdependence—there needs to be a more thorough reading of Grannis’s character. This reading is based on the premise that such disinterestedness is the quality Norris highlights most in Grannis throughout the novel, and finally, that it is the quality that characterizes the lovers’ relationship overall.

Far from the World

Even when Grannis is still living in a realm of pure fantasy and desire regarding Miss Baker, only thinking of being with her while binding his pamphlets, he is not concerned with the achievement of a particular end outside of this act. He is only focused on his activity (binding) and the idea of Miss Baker’s presence on the other side of the wall. In effect, Grannis’s character does not come off as conventionally goal-oriented in any respect. He invents something, but not in the interest of marketing it; on the contrary, he has made this thing to use it himself. For Grannis, the meaning of the invention lies in the very act of binding that the invention has been designed for; he never himself considers the “value” of his device in any other sense (“it occupies one” [32], Grannis answers, when asked why he is always binding books). Certainly the activity of binding comes to take on other imaginative aspects, in that it is the thing Grannis

does while Miss Baker drinks her tea, but its association with Grannis's fantasy only further emphasizes that it is not a means of achieving anything except its own process. Norris clearly intends to emphasize the ideal quality of this cycle, in order to provide a contrast to the greed for money expressed by his other characters. While they all seem to have what John Dewey calls "an end-in-view," for Grannis (who seems to follow Dewey's philosophy), "The end-in-view is not just a remote and final goal to be hit upon after a sufficiently great number of coerced motions have been duly performed [as with wage labor]. The end-in-view is a plan which is *contemporaneously* operative."³⁵ Thus, the question of what Grannis is interested in—what he wants to acquire or accomplish—is posed in the terms of personal, not financial, fulfillment. This is not to say that Grannis accomplishes nothing: he does, of course, accomplish the task of binding—but to no linear end. He does so continuously. When he is finished binding a set of pamphlets, he just gets more. It never crosses his mind to sell his invention, or even to sell the bound pamphlets.

His binding is then a practice marked by continuity; his actions are not determined by a desire to condense the time between the present and the attainment of an end. The merit in this kind of living, articulated later by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (1934), is that it opens a window on "experience in its integrity."³⁶ Criticizing the function of time as an obstruction, Dewey wrote that all too often the "means cease to act when the 'end' is reached" (201). The problem, as Dewey isolates it, is that "one would be glad, as a rule, to get the result without having to employ the means" (201).³⁷ Dewey warns of the dangers of separating means and ends and granting superiority to the end. In the context of such narrow result-orientation, Dewey argues, human activity ceases to be "artful"; it is artful only when the "forces that are congenial, that sustain not this or that special aim but the process of enjoyed experience, are set free. That release gives them ideal quality" (190).³⁸ Though Dewey believed that human activity or experience in which means and ends were intimately linked like this had "become a sideshow,"³⁹ Old Grannis and Miss Baker provide a fine example of artful living, before they actually meet, and after. The "ideal quality," to use Dewey's words, that makes for the "process of enjoyed experience," permeates Norris's descriptions of the Grannis–Miss Baker affair. As Norris tells it, even after they are together, they are happy just to be in each other's presence, so much so that they do not even need to talk: "After that [after they finally meet each other and settle down to their first shared tea] they spoke but little. The day lapsed slowly into twilight, and the two old people sat there in the gray evening, quietly, quietly, their hands in each other's hands, keeping com-

pany, but now with nothing to separate them" (254). The "process of enjoyed experience," an experience without "this or that special aim," is at the heart of their affair, from the very beginning. In the end it is their togetherness—and so union—that fulfills them, more than either could fulfill themselves without the other.

In fact, there are no special aims for Grannis and Miss Baker at all, at any point in the story. Early on in their story, when the two elderly people are still shying away from any actual encounter with each other, Norris writes that "they were, nevertheless, in a little Elysium of their own creating. They walked hand in hand in a delicious garden where it was always autumn" (136). This, it is critical to note, is precisely what he writes at the close of their story, which is to say that their "Elysium" is not limited to the circumstance of their remaining isolated individuals, but can indeed be available to them in *reality* if they both show a willingness to cross certain boundaries in order to unite their separate realms. In other words, if they can value relationship, and sociality, they will achieve happiness. In the last installment of their story, after they overcome the partition, the "Elysium"—a place or condition of ideal happiness—thus still describes their affair, even now that it has become real with interaction, or side-by-side togetherness:

It had come at last. After all these years they were together; they understood each other. They stood at length in a little Elysium of their own creating. They walked hand in hand in a delicious garden where it was always autumn. Far from the world and together they entered upon the long retarded romance of their commonplace and uneventful lives. (254)

Norris's portrait is of a relationship that comes as close as it can to a pastoral romance—a charmingly simple, idyllic affection that need not focus on any particular end outside of being together. "Far from the world," or far from the competitive activity or routine of conventional, commercial society, these two sustain the idealism of their beginnings by realizing the Elysium they enjoyed while separated by the partition. "Far from the world" also indicates, of course, that their relationship has none of the practical trappings of romance. There is no question, here, that Norris eschews the sexual, and gestures toward a presexual economy. He presents the ideal as the pure process of a shared inner feeling in the presence of the other. The two lovers understand each other without talking, and fulfill each other without seeking the end of sexual consummation. Means and ends are "hand in hand" here; there is satisfaction without the telescoping of time.⁴⁰ What this means is that there is no linear under-

standing of time for Grannis and Miss Baker, no loss; in their little Elysium, autumn just continues to repeat itself. They live each moment as if the clock were restarted, never having to feel nostalgic: time is always before them.

Neither is moving through time to achieve a “special aim,” but rather lives in time, acts in time, as a fulfillment. Before meeting Miss Baker, it helps to recall, Grannis lived this way as an independent, or more accurately, private, inventor. Through his character Norris comments on, and in fact inverts, the mythology of individual ambition in the context of American market culture: whereas most inventors would delight in being paid so handsomely for their work, and would be inclined to sell the model while retaining the patent rights (in a profit-based endeavor), Norris gives us the feeling that Grannis had no such interests in mind. As much as binding means to him, he would gladly trade this hobby to sit with Miss Baker (he did), and if this were for some reason impossible, he would rather have sold *only* the patent rights, if anything, and kept the original device to/for himself, so he could continue to perform the meaningful activity of binding that signified the unspoken contract between him and Miss Baker (putting ends and means on the same scale). While Norris is clearly registering a growing trend of his day—that of industrial organizations purchasing invention patents from independent inventors, in effect buying them out and shutting them down—he is also making a similarly historical point about the difference between meaning and value (i.e., ends or goals, which usually have to do with money).⁴¹

The difference, or rather the impulse to differentiate, between meaning and value is historically bound as far as the late nineteenth century saw an unprecedented rise in factory-based production: factories, cropping up all over America, announced monetary exchange-value as the definitional purpose of value itself. The rate at which factories were being built even scared many businessmen, who worried that “there were too many factories for the economy to absorb.”⁴² Hence, what was heretofore unimaginable for Norris’s generation in terms of production capacity now became an unchecked reality: the rapid pace of technology at the turn into the new century made it possible for any idea to become a manufactured product on the largest of scales.⁴³ If such a preoccupation (with pumping out products for profit) naturally leads to an experience and interrogation of things and actions in the context of a perpetual race to the designated end, then meaning as an idea outside of this paradigm gets trampled. The philosopher Hannah Arendt has written extensively on the subject of meaning and its fate in a bottom-line culture.⁴⁴ She suggests in her

still-pertinent work *The Human Condition* (1958) that in such an environment, meaning can be interpreted *only* in terms of an end.⁴⁵ Significantly, Arendt is prepared to indicate this axiom as a problem, for, she counters, meaning “must be permanent and lose nothing of its character, whether it is achieved or, rather, found by man or fails and is missed by him.”⁴⁶ This claim—that meaning is not contingent—is considered by Norris, who proposes, like Arendt, that the idea of meaning does not belong within the sphere of results, but unlike Arendt, suggests that rather than being “found,” meaning is made: it is made in the process, and the process is not separable from the end. This is why, and how, *relationship* emerges in Norris’s novel as the saving form of an otherwise doomed society.

This is demonstrated, again, in the encounters between Grannis and Maria Macapa. When, in the very beginning of *McTeague*, Maria roams the boarding house looking for junk to sell, she rummages about in Old Grannis’s closet shelves and finds, among “hundreds” of bound pamphlets, an old pitcher. “Here’s this old yellow pitcher,” she announces to Grannis. “The handle’s cracked; you don’t want it; better give me it” (32). But, Norris writes,

Old Grannis did want the pitcher; true, he never used it now, but he had kept it a long time, and somehow he held to it . . .

“Oh, that pitcher—well, Maria, I—I don’t know. I’m afraid—you see, that pitcher—” . . .

“Why, what’s the good of it?” persisted Maria. He could give no sufficient answer. (32–33)

Grannis cannot come up with an adequate reason for why he wants to keep the cracked pitcher because there *is* no reason outside of his own ineffable attachment to it. This should, of course, be reason enough—he has had it (“kept it”) a long time, so it has a kind of sentimental value for him—but Maria persists in asking him what the “good” of it is, and finally, in the face of Grannis’s inability to articulate the meaning of the thing outside of its utility or exchange-value, she takes the pitcher, leaving Grannis frustrated in his feeble attempts to make her understand that the thing is meaningful to him in spite of its apparent uselessness.

Maria sees the worth of the pitcher only as a potential source of money, while Grannis relates to it as a memory that must be kept, a material sign of the relationship he has to his own past. He has made it mean something, and wants to continue to make it mean something. Thus, even though Grannis either refuses to or cannot see the thing in terms of its monetary worth, this does not mean he fails to understand that ideas or

ideals can be represented in real, material form, and ultimately in interaction, and are more than just imaginary phenomena. He is persistently resistant only to the narrow definition of value that Maria presents, not to the idea of value itself. His problem, in essence, is that things *are* of use to him, but in a “far from the world” sense, which is really a “far from the profit motive/economy sense,” for this model dismisses the process, and hence, the relationship.

Maria also points out the futility of Grannis’s favorite activity, telling him, when she finds all of his bound pamphlets, “they ain’t no good to you” (32). Of course, in Maria’s definition of value, or “good,” she is right: the pamphlets sit in Grannis’s closet and so fail to bring him any monetary gain (in fact, they cost him, for he purchases them without any return). Neither the pitcher nor the pamphlets then represent anything, in Maria’s view, except what they can be sold for. But to Grannis, these things are significant primarily because he is attached to them in the social and emotional senses: though he has no mind to sell them, they provide him with a sense of his past and a sense of purpose in the present. They are representative of other things that he values (memories, Miss Baker, etc.), and so stand for a chain of attached links that form a concept of his personal place in the social world.

While the emphasis here is clearly on a mode of valuing that has nothing to do with money, it remains to be said whether this suggestion about meaning, along with Norris’s signaling of a new era in which a more cooperative, interdependent society would emerge, is really a call for social reform, for Norris stops short of politicizing this story. According to my argument, Grannis is portrayed as the hopeful harbinger of a new era. This new era would come in the wake of industrial advances, for such advances would provide the economy necessary for reform, and the reform would have everything to do with the advent of more cooperative, interdependent relationships, not only between people, but between means and ends. Unlike the other characters in *McTeague*, Grannis is not a symbol of greed and the ethos of masculine individualism, this chapter has argued, but rather a symbol of sociality and, perhaps somewhat sentimentally, love. Grannis and Miss Baker live happily ever after, in an “Elysium of their own creating,” and thus signal the possibilities after the partitions have been removed. This affair can reanimate the whole novel: it stands for the new organic *relationship* between process and goal, ideas and reality, masculine and feminine, individual and community. In this sense, Norris signifies himself as a pragmatist thinker, or at least a pragmatist sympathizer, for he anticipates much of Dewey’s philosophy.

Certainly his rendition of such thinking is much less politicized, if it is at all. The portrait he provides, merging thought and action, ideal and real, is disarmed: he retains his distance and ultimately holds back from expanding on the social and political implications of the Grannis–Miss Baker story, going only so far as to indicate that this unification can bring romance, love, and greater personal ease, not the more controversial and more difficult goals of broader social, political, or economic reform (something like a revitalized, new democratic order). Yet, because the story of Grannis and Miss Baker is not threatening (it is a rosy picture, and they are *elderly*, which diminishes their power), because it is a positive vision of the changes occurring, it forecasts a bright future for the agenda of pragmatism, which is just on the verge, at the time *McTeague* came out, of becoming a full-fledged movement. Ultimately, then, the drawback from a more discernible political statement works strategically to defuse the threat that came with the dismantling of a partition between thought and action. After all, turning ideas into reality, and forcing ideas to account for reality, did not come across as a harmless endeavor to those who saw “culture” infringed by such an agenda.

“Where the World Is Not”

Cultural Interest and Disinterest in Willa Cather’s The Professor’s House

Living cultures do not, in any case, evolve from purity into contamination; change is more a gradual transformation from one mixture to a new mixture, a process that usually takes place at some distance from rules and rulers, in the conversations that occur across cultural boundaries.

— K. Anthony Appiah, “The Case for Contamination” (2006)¹

Pragmatism has been a controversial philosophy under attack from a diverse range of critics from the moment James delivered the lecture that gave the term currency in 1898.

— Robert Westbrook (2005)²

IN WILLA CATHER’S *The Professor’s House* (1925), the conservative construction of the “idea” as inviolate emerges as a critical strategy that both articulates and combats a growing sense of anxiety about the coherence of social reality. Cather describes her hero, a scientist and inventor, as an idea (96). He is excessively talented in the realm of ideas (so of course he is a “careless experimenter” who “never acquired a nice laboratory technic” [126–27]), and has “never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas” (236).³ For Cather to speak of a scientist/inventor in these terms is for her to enter directly into one of the most explosive and far-reaching debates of the twentieth century, a debate that has emerged in and transformed every aspect of U.S. culture, from the fine arts, to education, to politics, to law: the postbellum struggle between idealist and pragmatist thought.⁴

Not only does *The Professor’s House* explicitly address these competing trajectories and their respective visions in the story it tells—a story that at every turn articulates the distinction between an abstract pursuit (something done for the sake of itself, or for the sake of knowledge, such as “pure science”) and a practical pursuit (something done for the sake of

results, i.e., commercial exploitation, utility, or profit, such as industrial or applied science)—it wrestles with its own place in this story, which is to say that the distinction between the pure and the practical, between culture and utility or “art” and business, is only nominally reinforced in the polemic of *The Professor’s House*, for both Cather’s subject matter and her own position as artist blur the lines of this dichotomy: she assumes art as a vocation, and in order to criticize the presence of economics and industry in literature, she must tell a story that centralizes technology, commercialization, and money. Cather’s exploration in this regard can be seen as broadly influential; she was a powerful literary figure during this time, and the effect she had on other writers of her era has been widely documented (Fitzgerald, for example, is said to have modeled *The Great Gatsby* on Cather’s work, even writing her to apologize for an “instance of apparent plagiarism” in his portrayal of Daisy).⁵ In particular, I want to show how the distinction at the heart of Cather’s aesthetics and at the heart of aesthetics in general at this time is defended precisely because it is under pressure from all sides, and that, above all, its crisis marked a crisis in or of “culture” that has extensive implications for democratic thought.

Just Thinking

At the time Willa Cather published *The Professor’s House* in 1925, though the dwindling romance of the independent inventor continued to persist in popular conceptions of invention and technological change, most inventors had long since “sold out.” In defiance of this new circumstance, Cather’s text anachronistically employs the character of the independent inventor; it recuperates this figure as a disinterested scientist, and in this way voices an opposition to the modern incorporation of science, which domesticated the independent inventor, turning him into a vehicle for large-scale manufacturing and profit. The goal of modern industrial use of technology—to transform science into capital—is everywhere criticized in this novel, as Cather makes her way through a thicket of complicated issues pertaining to what she calls the “new commercialism” (PH 120), including a patent-rights dispute. The dispute is over a discovery (and subsequent invention)⁶ made by the ardent, imaginative youth Tom Outland, the character whom the novel memorializes and largely revolves around. An orphan son of pioneers, Outland is portrayed in wistfully romantic terms; as one character remarks, “Sometimes I think he was just a—a glittering idea” (94). This association of Tom with *ideas*—to the

extent that he himself is described as a “glittering” one—signifies Cather’s attempt to bolster the waning status of ideas as such in a society that exhibits a preference for action and application. Valuable in themselves, Cather asserts, ideas should not, as a matter of course, be subjugated to or superseded by (their) application in practice. Cather’s historian (Godfrey St. Peter) suggests as much early on in the narrative, declaring “lots of things” are “better” as “just” ideas: when his daughter wants to “build [him] a little study in the back of the new house,” insisting that she has “such good ideas for it,” Professor St. Peter replies, “Oh, thank you, Rosamond. It’s most awfully nice of you to think of it. But keep it just an idea—it’s better so. Lots of things are” (47).

This posture toward ideas can be understood as a reaction to the rise of a pragmatist consciousness in the United States, and as a defense of the spirit of the absolute or abstract idealism that dominated U.S. philosophy and thought in general around the time Cather came of age.⁷ During the years Cather attended college (1890–95), although idealism dominated academic philosophy, its authority became increasingly embattled as the United States experienced the first surges of a new school of thought, led by the likes of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. The intellectual struggle developing in the academy echoed tensions in the society at large, so while the pragmatist critique of idealism was only just starting in the 1890s, it steadily gained momentum, both within and outside the academic community—after all, one of the projects of pragmatism was to bridge the gap between philosophy and, as John Dewey put it, “the problems of men.”⁸

By the start of World War I, idealism had lost its dominant stature. The new approach—an empirical, particularistic approach that championed the scientific method—was distinctly *unidealistic*, calling for a hardened interrogation of social issues in an attempt to prompt action, not abstract contemplation.⁹ Cather’s classical liberal education, conducted at a time when idealism was still preeminent (even Dewey himself was still backing away from idealism, or as he called it, neo-Hegelianism, in 1894),¹⁰ was thus immersed in a system of thought reflective of universal principles—a system of thought that pervaded literary studies as well as philosophy.¹¹ The definitive aspect of this system was its investment in absolute truths, which is to say truths (and thus a Reality) that existed above and beyond philosophical or critical inquiry. Such a view of truth meant, in the most basic sense, that truth came before its verification: “true” ideas would still be true whether or not they were tested in experience, whether or not they worked.¹² This kind of assumptive reasoning was criticized by the pragmatists, who argued that ideas were hypotheses or plans of *action*, the

truth of which rested on their ability to "work" in experience: if proposed ideas could provide solutions and direct consequences, then they could be accepted as true. In this sense, the truth of a proposition was not found but "made" through the process by which it was verified. Idealist critics of pragmatism found this conception of truth not only incorrect, but sacrilegious, and, along such lines, an imminent threat to the discipline of philosophy itself. This is because, as Dewey noted, philosophy had always advanced the notion of a "higher realm of fixed reality of which alone true science is possible and of an inferior world of changing things with which experienced and practical matters are concerned."¹³

The danger, from an idealist point of view, was that the pragmatist conception of truth went beyond a theoretical critique of absolute idealism: as indicated above, the pragmatist critique of idealism's reluctance to put ideas into action—or to even acknowledge the value of application or practical thinking—bore within it "not only a proposal for a radical transformation of the substance of philosophy but also of the social role of the philosopher."¹⁴ Criticizing absolute idealism's remoteness from the concrete particulars of human experience, pragmatism sought to refigure the role of the philosopher as an active participant in policymaking, particularly in the realms of politics and economics. This would, of course, alter the historically insulated position of the philosopher, a position that depended on—and had always been protected by—the continuation of the division between the world of ideas, on the one hand, and the world of practical reality, on the other. Similar to pure science, philosophical idealism sought to keep up the "partition" between thought and action. As Dewey saw it, philosophy needed to stop *thinking* and start *doing* (it needed to challenge the "partition" Norris uses so tellingly in *McTeague*). If philosophy did not become an active participant in "the living struggles and issues of its own age and time," Dewey wrote, it would only "maintain an immune monastic impeccability, without relevancy and bearing in the generating ideas of its contemporary present." The alternative for philosophy was to embrace its ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice; then, Dewey argued, philosophy would be "respected, as we respect all virtue that attests its sincerity by sharing in the perplexities and failures, as well as the joys and triumphs, of endeavor." By ignoring the responsibility to account for its own discourse, and by refusing to consider its own contribution to the genteel tradition, philosophy would remain "snugly ensconced in the consciousness of its own respectability."¹⁵ In short, Dewey urged the fusing of thought and action, philosophy and politics—philosophy and social reform. He thereby rejected the definition of philosophy in this period as a discipline isolated from social issues.

The push for action and social location that came to pose a challenge to this system—a push that occurred not just in philosophy but also in such ostensibly diverse fields as law,¹⁶ literature,¹⁷ and the social sciences—found many articulate opponents. Cather was one of them.¹⁸ When her professor stakes out definitive ground against result-oriented thinking in one of his lectures, he expresses Cather's own misgivings. "The fact is," Godfrey St. Peter tells his students, "the human mind, the individual mind, has always been made more interesting by *dwelling* on the old riddles, *even if it makes nothing of them*" (54–55, emphasis mine). Godfrey's lack of concern as to whether thought will produce action—his ambition, indeed, to promote just the opposite—pits him squarely against the principles of hard-line pragmatism. Exhibiting and in fact *teaching* a belief in the importance of action-free contemplation, Godfrey indicates a strong commitment to the internal consistency of ideas, to the dualism between thinking and acting that philosophy has historically relied on to define itself, and in this, he defends a dominant conception of the philosopher as a mandarin of the *mind*. "Mind," Cather insists in this passage ("the human mind, the individual mind") is the thing in itself. Godfrey's pleading for its legitimate separation from material consequence thus points up the spirit of idealism, as does his faith in the universal nature of human being (there is an eternal, invariable set of questions confronting the human mind, and these are, according to Godfrey, "*the old riddles*").

Stressing the importance of the "interesting" over the useful, Godfrey casts his vote in favor of, as he puts it, "pomp and circumstance," which is, again, to lobby for the life of the mind and the age-old tradition of philosophy. Like so many absolute idealists, who conceived of philosophers as those who would "perform in an almost ministerial fashion," combining "mild exhortation with a defense of fundamental verities" as they proclaimed "the basic worth of human existence and traditional institutions,"¹⁹ Godfrey reiterates the sacred place of philosophy in history—as a matter of the mind—and urges his students to think about thinking in such a way as to appreciate mind over matter. What this philosophical position amounts to, finally, is a dislocation from all things social: to reinforce the classical dichotomy of theory and practice (such that theory will remain itself: pure conception), attention is shifted away from the specific social context in which the mind functions. This means, particularly, away from the agenda of social reform that brought pragmatic principles to the fore in the first place. In Godfrey's insistence that "just" thinking about things or entertaining ideas is often "better" than the translation of thought into action, we can find a contempt for a world that is choosing to turn cultural forms toward an end. In other words, if the stuff of cul-

ture—literature, philosophy, music—is to become the domain of social purpose and political commitment, this, Godfrey suggests, will put an end to culture.²⁰ Godfrey is thus distraught over a world that is losing respect for—or worse, unable to comprehend—the insular value of speculation, contemplation, theory, and philosophy—all of which are not merely different from practical activity, but, according to some of pragmatism's critics, *superior* to it.

Such a hierarchy is of course requisite to the aestheticism that Cather endeavors to reinstate, and points to a cultural hierarchy that must further entrench class divisions in order to preserve classical aesthetics. Positing the "disinterestedness" or self-sufficiency of aesthetics, Cather's idealism clears the way for intellectuals and artists to meet only the internal demands of their form, not the discourse of social responsibility that pragmatism helped to develop.²¹ Even in Cather's earliest writings, there is a distinct resentment toward the merging of "art"—as a/the form of "culture"—with an agenda. As Bernice Slotte has similarly remarked, Cather "obviously resented attempts to make art itself lower than theory."²² As far back as 1894, in an essay Cather published while she was still a university student, she wrote: "In a work of art intrinsic beauty is the *raison d'être*. Any piece of art is its own excuse for being. . . . No man, or woman, is ever justified in making a book to preach a sermon. It is a degradation of art. . . . An artist should have no moral purpose in mind other than just his art."²³ And then, in an unmistakable response to the rising tide of pragmatism, as well as other movements calling for social reform and the revision of art forms (such as literary realism), she writes:

In these days of purposes and vexed moral problems it is hard for an author to keep himself untainted by the world. It is hard to hold fast to art pure and simple. . . . An artist should be able to lift himself up into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not one of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and reason and believe and argue, but he must create.²⁴

Wishing, perhaps, that she herself could attain such transcendence, Cather adhered throughout her life to the theory of theory, which is to say the model of a remote, unencumbered cultural form that could itself exist only in the mind. As Janice Stout has recently argued, Cather invested a considerable amount of time and energy in convincing her readership that she was indeed committed to this doctrine.²⁵ Yet Stout asserts that the construction of Cather "as a detached aesthete, removed from the motivations that commonly energize people, disinterestedly pursuing her art,"

is simply not accurate, and that even if such a view has been reinforced, as she notes, “by the James Woodress biographies,” as well as by Cather herself, “this construction of her—this reading of her that emerged in the course of what were unmistakably biographical narratives—was unduly restricted” (Stout 64). On the contrary, Stout agrees that despite a “recognition of the very real evidence of [Cather’s] own insistence on setting herself apart . . . she was fully grounded in her world, not at all detached from it or indifferent to it” (Stout 64). Yet Cather’s claims of detachment and the idealistic principles outlined in her essay above, which demand that the artist be “where the world is not”—that the artist “hold fast to art pure and simple”—are, even thirty years after she wrote the passage, constitutive of her cherished philosophy, and have by the 1920s become the driving force behind her work. She indicates this through the views of Godfrey St. Peter, who further proclaims his allegiance to the aesthetics of the theoretical (here a redundancy) when he responds to his wife’s complaint of becoming more and more withdrawn from the particulars of family life and the world in general by declaring that the “habit of living with *ideas* grows on me” (141, emphasis mine). This “habit” develops, as I have been arguing, as Godfrey becomes increasingly disdainful of the changes wrought by pragmatism, which Cather’s narrative documents, both generally and in detail.²⁶ To the degree that these changes affected and were intended to affect higher education, Godfrey experiences many of them first-hand.

Living “with ideas” grows on Godfrey to such an extent, in fact, that he begins to disengage himself from *all* context and *all* action.²⁷ When his doctor asks if he is “low in [his] mind,” Godfrey replies with an emphatic “No,” and explains that he is “merely low in energy. Enjoy *doing* nothing.” When his doctor persists, Godfrey repeats, “As I tell you, I enjoy doing nothing” (244). Finally his doctor endorses his isolation and inactivity: “Then do it! There’s nothing the matter with you. Follow your inclination.” Although Godfrey has, up until this point, led quite a practical lifestyle as an intellectual (“All his life his mind had behaved in a positive fashion” [239]), he is now finding that all of his social commitments—his occupation as professor, his histories, his role as father and husband—can be reduced to “a result of the high pressure of young manhood” (241), and that he is “solitary and must always be so” (241). This is, of course, a drastic turn away from the 1899 story of Old Grannis in Norris’s *McTeague*, who slowly works his way into the realities of cooperation and community, only to be rewarded by such sociality. Cather’s Godfrey is instead signaling a need to retreat from just this kind of impulse. He is even unable to identify with his vocation during this crisis

(he is suddenly "not a scholar," for this, I guess, seems far too worldly), and opts to embrace a new idea of himself as "a primitive."²⁸ Godfrey's "inclination" or "habit" of "living with ideas" is, as Cather's narration astutely acknowledges, to "[fall] out of all social relations" (250), and thus at last to approach the Truth, which is neither contextual, nor determined through action: "now [Godfrey] thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was the Truth" (248). Endorsing an idealistic or antipragmatic conception of Truth here, Cather signals the threat of context (and duty) to the sanctity of such notions.²⁹ Cather's particular brand of primitivism, then, emerging in Godfrey's desire "to run away from everything" (251) and repudiate what is "ordered from the outside" (240) is at its most suggestive a longing for what can be considered an Arnoldian sense of disinterestedness, which, in terms of aesthetics, means an ideal of neutral, natural, context-free—indeed duty-free—aesthetics. Popularized by Matthew Arnold, perhaps the most influential disseminator of the aesthetics Cather wants to resuscitate, this ideal is firmly rooted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the tension between the abstract (the disinterested, the pure) and the practical (the interested, the social, the purposeful) became a central problem to, and even an emergency for, the idea of "culture."³⁰

Referring to the "practical spirit and its aims," Arnold wrote in 1869 that "if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting," then such aims must be utterly abandoned. Criticism, he further argued, "must be apt to discern the spiritual shortcomings or illusions of powers that in the practical sphere may be beneficent."³¹ As a critic—a critic of culture—this is exactly what Cather sets as her mark, having Godfrey carry out such discernments in *The Professor's House*. My evocation of Arnold here is thus certainly understandable in terms of Cather's own evocation of his doctrine, yet the especially important point to signify and elaborate on has to do with Cather's twentieth-century version of Arnold's critique of science: Following him closely, she in effect replicates his statement that science only brings humanity an impoverishing "knowledge": a "Knowledge," Arnold writes, "not put for us into relation with our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty, and touched with emotion by being so put; not thus put for us, and therefore, to the majority of mankind, after a certain while, unsatisfying, wearying."³² The tiresome aspect of science—the failure of science—is, Cather agrees with Arnold, its habit of stripping away all beauty and emotion, all splendor and grandeur—everything, essentially, that has retained the status of the unworldly, the unexplainable.

Like Arnold, who nostalgically looks back to the ways in which the “Scripture and the Church . . . so deeply engaged men’s hearts, by so simply, easily, and powerfully relating itself to their desire for conduct, their desire for beauty,”³³ Godfrey criticizes science for taking the “richer pleasures” (55) away and extols religion and art (“they are the same thing, in the end, of course” [55]) for giving “man the only happiness he has ever had”:

As long as every man and woman who crowded into the cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principal in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing. The king and the beggar had the same chance at miracles and great temptations and revelations. And that’s what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own individual lives. (55)³⁴

In its efforts to explain everything literally, Cather contends, science steals this “mystery and importance,” replacing it with facts; it then only adds to this impoverishment by supplying “ingenious toys” and comfort. In other words, the kind of knowing or knowledge offered by science is readily, purposefully translated into a tangible result, so it *is* therefore contributing to the diminishing status of ideas. The thrust of Godfrey’s argument is then an alarmist response to the disappearance of (the) imagination: What role does the imagination play, Godfrey laments, if every question must be answered, every idea made a practice? What is *left* to the imagination, he asks, and what is left *of* it? Where is the Arnoldian “sweetness and light” of the mind’s eye? The context for Godfrey’s dismay at the voracious pace of industry can be facetiously elucidated if we compare this well-known saying of Arnold’s—that “culture has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light,”³⁵—with the new meaning “light” took on just a decade after Arnold wrote these words: *electrical* light eclipsed Arnold’s poetic idea of “light,” and the passion of the day brought General Electric, not “the characters of perfection” Arnold spoke of.³⁶

The Business of Science

The dominance of science in Cather’s America, the ascent of science to an unequalled position of cultural authority, is thus a *problem*, because it profoundly disrupts the authority—the supremacy—of the purely conceptual; concurrently, it diminishes the power of disinterestedness as an ideal. This

is because in Cather's world, science no longer represents its capacity to be a disinterested, conceptual pursuit; it is rather almost entirely eclipsed by its industrial dimension.³⁷ "Science is not a thing apart," said the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1922, "it is the bedrock of business."³⁸ Yet Cather's novel suggests that this highly unfortunate circumstance can be controlled and even reversed, as long as science is returned to its original—pure—state: as long as it is returned to thoughts and ideas. Her heroic Tom Outland, having little interest in science outside of the contained, secluded domains of experimentation and intellectual curiosity, exemplifies a time in the past when scientists and people in the United States appreciated science as a field of inquiry that had relatively little direct impact on the practical world. These people were the "pure science" advocates discussed in an earlier chapter of this book; they believed that a practical scientist (which often meant an inventor) participated in the vulgarization of the discipline by exploiting it for commercial purposes; science could not be part of "culture," the argument went, if it was about utility.³⁹ The rhetorical force of this argument can be measured by the striking appeal of "pure scientists," such as British physicist John Tyndall, who merely *explained* things on the lecture circuit, which was precisely why his 1872 tour was so popular: he gave prominent U.S. citizens the sense that they understood and were part of (an) elite culture, a culture characterized by theory, ideals, refinement, and a disinterested search for truth. In short, aristocratic or genteel U.S. citizens could and did embrace science as culture in itself during this time—after all, it was characterized by a distinctly European sensibility (its famous men were all Europeans), and, as I show earlier, it had become the leading signet of higher thought throughout Europe.⁴⁰

Pure-science patrons in the United States were thus the most "cultivated and intelligent people," in the phrase used to describe Tyndall's Manhattan audience;⁴¹ they were "patricians, aristocrats, land owners, and other prominent citizens, all seeking to distance themselves from the rest of the country" (Kevles), which (they believed) preferred to celebrate technological advancement. "To applaud science," writes Daniel J. Kevles, "was to set oneself apart socially in a country so exuberant over mere gadgets and machinery. To discuss it was to mark oneself as a cultivated man."⁴² The difference between science and technology was thus equal to the difference between the theoretical and the practical, or the cultural and the philistine. The point, however, is not simply that this difference is apparent in the interwar years, although it most certainly *is* carried over into the twentieth century. The point is rather to argue that this difference, inscribed in *The Professor's House*, surfaces in this novel precisely

because the 1920s saw the gap between science and technology closing up. Cather's quarrel is thus not with science, or even the situation of science having split into two warring camps, but rather with the fact that technology is closing in on science.

When her professor disparages the contributions made by "science" (54) he is then really expressing his (and Cather's) animosity toward technology. Precommercial science is acceptable to Cather in the same way that the classic texts are acceptable to her; it is uncommercial, or at least she wants it to be, unlike industrial technology or the new, mass-marketed popular literature she writes so disapprovingly of in her essays. In *The Professor's House*, an important indicator that Cather does not disapprove of science overall is her acceptance of it as a legitimate and necessary part of the college curriculum; she links it to the humanities (which further indicates science as a fundamental aspect of the "purely cultural studies" she wants to preserve). Still another important clue to Cather's respect for science as opposed to technology is her mention of Sir Isaac Newton when discussing the difference between the "major arts" and industry in her renowned 1936 essay entitled "Escapism" (she groups Newton with Tolstoy, Goethe, Viollet-le-Duc, and Descartes). As a physicist of the seventeenth century, Newton was more of a "natural" philosopher, which, in a sense, is exactly how Cather would like to imagine and keep science: as "natural philosophy." It is arguable, then, that Cather is supportive of the division crystallizing between pure and practical science, for it meant, at least, that there would remain a formalist, aestheticist approach in (or to) this field, which is to say a cultured or cultivated approach.

Obviously, to the extent that science became divided into "practical" and "pure" categories it produced cultural hierarchy within its own ranks. It thus epitomized—and fostered—the difference between the pragmatic and the ideal: although considerably practical when compared with literature or "art,"⁴³ it was considerably abstract when compared with its application, and it was only the abstract pursuit of science that could, as Charles William Eliot put it, "[ennoble] and [purify] the mind."⁴⁴ Yet there were few who could afford to pursue science in this abstract sense—few had the chance to become so ennobled and purified. As Cornell scientist William A. Anthony aptly expressed in 1887, "In this country, men devoted to science purely for the sake of science are and must be few in number. Few *can* devote their lives to work that promises no return except the satisfaction of adding to the sum of human knowledge. Very few have both the means and inclination to do this" (Kevles 26). Kevles corroborates this point, observing that "American physicists [at the turn of the century] tended to come from the narrow fragment of society that called

itself cultivated; most were the sons—or married the daughters—of well-to-do merchants, gentry, lawyers, ministers or teachers; almost all were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants" (26). Thus attention must be paid to the issue or function of privilege in a society that is arguing about which kind of culture *to* privilege—the old, classical Culture of entrenched class interests, or a new, aspiring democratic culture that recognizes such entrenchments, and pragmatically seeks to modify them.

Disinterest, Democracy, and "Culture"

Before Cather, Arnold anticipated the end of culture if culture were to be turned toward an end, so he threw his weight behind a defense of culture as utterly abstract, advancing a cultural aesthetics that was fundamentally incompatible with an ends-oriented structure. Without the "free disinterested treatment of things," he wrote, "truth and the highest culture are out of the question."⁴⁵ In his recommendation on how to attain truth, and, by extension, "culture," Arnold claims that the way to these ideals can be "summed up in one word,—*disinterestedness*," and argues that the only way to maintain disinterestedness is to keep "aloof from what is called the 'practical view of things,'" to "leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications" (248–49). Sharing this perspective, Cather's professor finds himself attracted to Tom Outland *because* of Tom's "belief in" (or "dream of") "self-sacrificing friendship and disinterested love" (151). Much of what the professor admires about Tom has to do with this elegant naïveté, which makes for what he calls Tom's "sumptuous generosity" (103), in both the material and the spiritual sense. Reviving the professor's faith in the idea of disinterestedness, Tom thus represents the professor's idealistic longing for precommercial science and/or a precommercial world, which is largely why he is so refreshed by Tom.

Tom is, above all, a sign of the imagination: He is said, in fact, to have brought the professor a "romance" of "the imagination . . . a kind of second youth" (234), a description that pits Tom firmly in the realm of ideas, or, what amounts to the same thing, in the realm of what can be thought of as Old Romance.⁴⁶ In contrast to New Romanticism, the kind advanced by Norris in *McTeague*, in which the romantic aspects of life are held accountable to social realities, and finally romance and practicality engage in a hopeful depiction of their reconciliation, "Old Romance" describes a set of ideals that must retain their ethereal status, which means there can be no relationship between such ideals and the practical realities

of social life: like Tom's character, Old Romanticism champions a heightened interest in the imagined asociality of nature and an emphasis on the individual—the individual's expression of emotion and imagination.

Just as Tom is capable of bringing a romance of the imagination back to the professor, Cather tries to bring the same kind of "second youth" back to the sphere of (pure) culture, and is already recognizing C. P. Snow's "two cultures"⁴⁷ in the making. Cather's ideas about these two cultures are quite unlike Snow's, however. Rejecting the structure of meanings produced by the applied science of modern industry, Cather was willing to let one culture (the "humanistic") colonize the other ("the scientific," or for her, more particularly, the practical or applied). In the 1920s U.S. context this meant, as I have generally noted, a rejection of the message being delivered by pragmatism. This message, destabilizing on many fronts, now needs to be discussed more specifically by focusing on one of its most revolutionary aspects: its insistence that the time had come to implement democratic principles so that women, immigrants, racial minorities, and working-class others could access the benefits of the newly emerging nation. Cather was right, then: "culture," as she saw it, *was* at stake, for John Dewey and other prominent intellectuals determined cultural revision as part of the solution, and saw science as a key to this revision. "Democracy," Dewey wrote, "is estimable only through the changed conception of intelligence, that forms modern science."⁴⁸ Still later, Dewey wrote in *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), "the crisis in democracy demands the substitution of intelligence that is exemplified in scientific procedure for the kind of intelligence that is now accepted."⁴⁹ Pragmatism was the logic of this new conception of intelligence, "deployed to close down an Old World cultural aesthetic at odds with both science and democracy in order to erect a system more responsive to both" (Diggins 212). Thus, to the extent that *The Professor's House* comes out against the consequentialist values (and function) of modern science, it reveals its trouble with the promise of a more democratic society, which, at its core, is at least the promise of equal opportunity and a more dynamic social order.

If Cather's Tom Outland is portrayed as a scientist in the Old World sense of natural philosophy—as an extraordinarily creative individual who possesses the aptitude, vision, and temperament of an artist—he represents, in this respect, the classical version of science (as a cultural endeavor) and so upholds a classical distinction between culture and commerce. He is a rare breed, Cather intends to say, a throwback to another era in which, as Thomas Kuhn puts it, "little cleavage was felt between the sciences and the arts."⁵⁰ Through the memory of Professor St. Peter,

Cather thus sketches Tom as a modern Renaissance man. Weaving Tom's short history in and out of the professor's long one, Cather gives us a sporadic account of Tom's life, cloaking his character in mystery until the middle of the book. It is only at this point that we finally hear from Tom himself; significantly, this is the only part of the narrative delivered in the first person. An assiduous amateur archeologist while living in New Mexico, Tom leaves the mesa (about 1906) at twenty years old to seek a university education in Michigan; upon graduating, he takes a post as a research assistant in the university physics department, and begins the experiments that ultimately lead to his reputation as a "brilliant young American scientist and inventor." Soon after completing his experiments and securing a patent, he hastily decides to leave the country (with the missionary priest who had been his teacher in New Mexico) to aid in the European war effort. He dies in World War I, not yet thirty years old.

Exercising her own version of the unique strain of romanticism present in many modernist texts, such as Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, discussed earlier⁵¹ (in Cather's case, an Old Romanticist viewpoint), Cather insists that Tom's imagination cannot be categorized as science-bound, in the sense of facts and literalism. Above all, this makes Tom elusively special: "Always had something in his voice, in his eyes" (112), the professor reminisces. Moreover, because Tom is "very different" (112) in the professor's view, he helps Godfrey "experience afresh things that had grown dull with use" (234). Tom is thus also a symbol of renewal: "To share his thoughts was to see old perspectives transformed by new effects of light" (234).⁵² Significantly, the emphasis here is on "thoughts" and "perspectives," both of which are conceptual, and, furthermore, in this case being transformed by what is arguably an Arnoldian kind of "light." Moreover, the "new effects of light" that Tom inspires are the effects of idealism and, certainly, are particular to his character. Tom is clearly set in contrast to Cather's conspicuously Jewish character, Louie Marsellus—a "practical man," as Cather calls him. Marsellus, in fact, speaks of himself in these terms. You "haven't begun to find how practical we can be" (139), he exuberantly tells Godfrey. When Godfrey's wife, Lillian St. Peter, suggests that Godfrey and Marsellus "lunch with the scholars while Rosamond and I are shopping" (138), Marsellus looks "alarmed" and proclaims his allegiance to the more practical, commercial activity of shopping, rather than agreeing to partake in the academic meeting of the minds that a scholarly lunch would entail. "It is to be understood that I always shop with you. I adore the shops in Paris" (138), he tells Mrs. St. Peter.

The binary distinction Cather articulates through the two characters of Tom Outland and Louie Marsellus is, moreover, a polemic about the

parasitic nature of practicality (which cannot be ignored for its anti-Semitic implications).⁵³ As will be elaborated shortly, the distinction that Cather's text makes between practicality and "culture" is, among other things, an embedded reaction to the new visibility of cultural minorities in the public sphere, and this means Jews, such as Marsellus, who, she implies, represents the parasitic nature of the relationship between ideas and application. As Professor Crane sees it, "Marsellus gets the benefits of my work as well as Outland's," a complaint that pits technology against science and one which amplifies the claim made by U.S. pure-scientists during this period that the progress of practical science depended on the advance of abstract (i.e., pure) science. It is telling to look at this argument alongside the critique of mass culture put forth in the first three decades of the twentieth century by intellectuals and other high-cultured critics who essentially declared that those who were part of a mass (or "low") culture were in need of, and dependent on, those who were part of "high" culture in order to appreciate "art," and advance as—or develop into—cultured folks. This highbrow/lowbrow split, placing workers, or the practical set, on one side, and thinkers, or the intellectual set, on the other, provides a paternalistic, condescending model that serves among other things to claim a monopoly on culture.⁵⁴ The point here is that Cather strategically positions engineers or industrialists such as Marsellus (actually he is both) on one side, and theoretical physicists, such as Crane and Tom, on the other, in order to rejuvenate such a rift. As Crane claims, he himself is "an unpractical man" (130). This, presumably, makes him a dependable source in the novel, so when he assesses Godfrey as "disinterested" (129), the reader is sympathetic, and likely convinced.

Historical Idealism

As Cather paints a picture of mutual respect and admiration between Professor St. Peter and Tom Outland—both are described, by others, to be "disinterested"—she shows each to be deeply appreciative of the other's life and work, and delineates a bond that has everything to do with each man's veneration for a *worthy* past.⁵⁵ The extraordinary paradox that Professor St. Peter has won his renown by writing of Spanish adventurers (i.e., imperialists, plunderers) thus underlines the contradiction that characterizes the circumstances of this novel, for with the power to decide upon a historical consciousness, Professor St. Peter has used this power to render a past in which these men are cast as heroes. His version of the past is thus already corrupted, which is to say the privilege paid to history

in the novel provides the site of its most fundamental fissure. Just as St. Peter can glorify the explorations of these men while scoffing at the contagion of practical application and profit motives, Cather overlooks the brutal aspects of nineteenth-century American history, insisting instead that the story of this era is exemplary, and that "no new story" is yet "worthy" enough to "take its place."⁵⁶

If Cather's narrative can be read as an attempt to negate the present in favor of the more "worthy" past, this investment is marked by her participation in the construction of a mythical status for the (idea of the) independent inventor: in her view, such an individual can have a place in this past,⁵⁷ for he worked in an isolated fashion only toward his own internal satisfaction. He could thus signal the present need for a new, equally "worthy" story in which science is rescued from industry and restored to its rightful position outside the realms of money and politics. The reason, then, that Tom is Cather's hero is that he holds the moral high ground—he embodies what Cather elsewhere calls "moral aestheticism"—and the reason he holds the moral high ground is that he champions the value of culture. Yet in the end, it is not just culture, or even Native American culture, that finally fulfills Tom and opens the way for his success. It is an image of classical culture, in the form of a classical education, that delivers Tom. Originally a working-class character (a manual worker), Tom crosses class lines to become an educated young man, a successful university student.

Indeed, this development tells a relatively accurate story. In the decade before World War I, universities across America finally began to open their doors to a less-privileged class of individuals, as well as women in general. But I would argue that Cather's hero might signal not so much her approval of this transformation as her belief that such a system could not finally work, and would, in fact, put the whole idea of culture in jeopardy. As much as she dotes on Tom, exhibiting him as the ideal balance of mental and manual labor—a man who can use his head and hands together, and produce something great—her narrative links him up with the fantastic cliff city civilization, which has been extinguished: the text indicates the *impossibility* of the convergence of the mental and the manual, for Tom dies (his death associated with "glory" [31]) just as the Cliff City *must* die.⁵⁸ In other words, because Cather wants in the first place to keep culture alive, in its classic, genteel, idealist sense, she ultimately discounts the possibility of a workable union between thinking and doing (her position is thus a long way from the hopeful vision of Frank Norris, who declared the potential rewards of such a union in *McTeague*).

The elaboration of this strand of argument is dependent on a close look at Cather's attitudes about the new definitions and accessibility of a college education, for it is here that we find her most articulate statement about the incompatibility of culture with anything practical or applied, and observe how central this conflict of interests is to the evolution of cultural aesthetics in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It is Cather's decision to take up the issue of education that indicates a sense of broader cultural urgency: she uses the medium of the novel to participate in a crucial public debate about the precarious fate of "culture" when science and business finally negotiate to take their third partner: education.

Classes and Masses

Willa Cather's "Purely Cultural Studies" and the "New Commercialism"

One need not be a Deweyan pragmatist to recognize that the relationship between public schooling and democracy is a conceptually tight one.

— Robert Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (2005)¹

Democracy is a requirement for experimental inquiry in any area. To reject democracy is to reject the idea of being experimental.

— Hilary Putnam, "Between the New Left and Judaism"²

Classes and Masses

If something cannot at once have a claim to the cultural pedigree Cather talks about in her well-known essay "Escapism" and be common, this is a point that Cather makes in *The Professor's House* when, for example, she depicts the violation that seems to be permeating the professor's life, and blames the ubiquitous insatiability of commercial culture. Even the university is not exempt. Along with a precious few colleagues, the professor must "struggle to preserve the dignity of the university, and their own," for the "State legislature and the board of regents seemed determined to make a trade school of the university" (120). Cather was not alone in her alarm, or at least not alone in her apprehension of this new movement. The *New Republic* noted in a 1922 editorial on "the American College" that the "abandonment of the aristocratic ideal [of culture] in fact brought about a great increase in the number of students able to enter college, while the retention of the ideal in name constituted a powerful inducement to them to do so. The college became one of those democratic institutions . . . whose function . . . seemed to be to give exclusiveness to the masses."³

Adamantly opposed to the “new commercialism,” Cather writes, to “the aim to ‘show results’ that was undermining and vulgarizing education,” the fictional historian Godfrey St. Peter is active against the movement and finds himself fighting the board of regents, which tries “every year” to “diminish the number of credits required in science and the humanities” and instead allow “credits for commercial studies” (120). Such a program infuriates the professor, for in seeking to “abolish the purely cultural studies” it will do away with serious “scholarship” and thus degrade the purpose of the university, which, he feels, is not commercial. As we are given a sampling of the courses that are to replace those in science and the humanities—“book-keeping, experimental farming, domestic science, dress-making, and what not”—it becomes clear that the new curriculum, rather than encouraging the students to cultivate any desire for knowledge as its own result, is designed to prepare them for a life of wage labor, which is to say a life marked not by intellectual freedom and growth, nor by the Thoreauvian spirit of independence that comes with such things, but by an anti- or ahistorical commitment to production that devalues imaginative capacity and announces the individual as merely an automaton, an assurance to the smooth functioning of industry.

What’s anti- or ahistorical is the fact that these courses did not examine the history of industry and the relationship of the individual to it; they did not take as their point the teaching of a comprehensive perspective in which a student learned, as John Dewey put it, the “historic background of present conditions.”⁴ Women who enrolled in domestic science, for example, were taught a certain approach to running, or managing, the home. “Efficiency” was the motto, and learning useful skills did not require a knowledge of history in general; it merely required that women learn the skills being taught so they could manage their homes more efficiently. The kind of historical dislocation in vocational education described here was a concern of Dewey and of Jane Addams, both of whom were prominent voices in the field of education around the time Cather was writing. They both saw trade-training as flawed in practice, partially because it failed to incorporate industrial history and, by extension, social reality. This, however, is not to say that Cather shared Dewey’s and Addams’s agenda, because she did not. Rather, the point is that for reasons different from those of Dewey and Addams, Cather saw a problem in the implementation of an ahistorical, industrial training curriculum. Her problem with it had to do with the effects of a changing student body, so to speak.

The student body, in other words, was literally changing. For one thing,

the “commercial” courses that Cather names—especially “domestic science” and “dress-making”—are particularly telling and need to be looked at in the context of the gendered terms they signify. This is to say that vocational training (in general) strikes Cather as a turn away from the self-sufficient individualism of the older society *toward* a more feminine—and for Cather, less appealing—figuration of identity; this new feminine ideal announces, among other things, the disappearance of what Walter Lippmann called “absolute possession” when describing in 1914 (the passing of) that sense of self traceable to a model of subjectivity rooted in the virtues of self-determination and free agency.⁵ If science is about domesticity, and making is about dresses (if books are to be “kept” and not written or read), then the new commercialism endeavors to bring about an essentially domesticated individual, an individual stripped of the fundamentally masculine trait of independence; an individual who can be, or is, appropriated by others, and finally implicated and utilized in a collective industrial effort.⁶ The feminization of individuality—the loss of individuality—seems to be on Cather’s mind as she attacks the “aim to ‘show results’” as an invasion of sorts, as a direct affront to the idea of education.⁷

But education is about culture, as Cather herself suggests—for her it is defined in (or by) a “purely cultural studies.” Here we see, then, how her fear has less to do with her desire to save or produce the individual than with her (undemocratic) desire to protect or reproduce pure *culture*, which, to her mind, resides in “science and the humanities” and, of course, is utterly distinct from commerce.⁸ Certainly she shows herself to be aware that culture and education are reducible, on some level, to one another; this, presumably, is why she opposes the changes in educational ideals that, since the late nineteenth century, have virtually transformed every level of education in the United States. In the end, what she is resisting—knowingly, in an important sense—is a transformation in culture itself. Nothing less than a cultural revolution is taking place if what is “purely cultural” is being alloyed by something else, something that, in Cather’s view, is directly opposed to the very definition of culture.

Cather’s perspective then advances a notion of “high culture” that, grounded in the concomitant notion of the “high arts,” is (or should be) a description in itself of higher education: When she elsewhere⁹ describes the “major arts,” naming poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, and music, when she includes in her discussion of the “arts” references to mathematician-philosopher Descartes and physicist-philosopher Newton, she alludes to all the subjects that make up a classic liberal arts curriculum and so constitute pure culture.¹⁰ Arguing that art and industry

are antithetical spheres, Cather scoffs at the possibility that artists (a category that, in her mind, includes the old, classical school of natural philosophers, architects, mathematicians, and physicists) could or should be expected to “materially help” solve any real social problem. “Industrial life,” Cather proclaims, “has to work out its own problems.”¹¹ And she conducts her whole discussion in the context of a vision that sharply divides between culture and utility, or art and commodity: “Economics and art are strangers,” she finally writes. In 1936, it is worth detouring to note, this is not merely a resistant statement, but an intensely reactionary one—reactionary in large part to the New Deal, which Cather makes reference to when she mentions in this same essay the “head of the Works Project” (aka the WPA).

The WPA, an organization established in 1935 to put the unemployed back to work in public service projects such as building bridges and roads, was one of the most important agencies created by the New Deal.¹² Cather strives to demonstrate her point about the separate spheres of art and industry, or culture and economics, by rhetorically asking what would happen if the head of the Works Project “Had to write a dozen songs a day.”¹³ Her point is that this would be as preposterous as an artist being expected to become involved in the business of business. Cather was against the notion that an artist, or art, had or should have any substantial impact on industrial life or routine, on political issues or social controversies; in this article she articulates this stance when she attacks the reformist agenda for demanding that “the composer should be Citizen Beethoven, the painter Citizen Rembrandt, the poet Citizen Shelley,” and that “they should step into line and speed their pen or brush in helping to solve the economic problems which confront society.”¹⁴ What I have argued in general, here, is that Cather opposes socialization, in the form of cooperative, industrial efforts, and so forth, but in this instance—in the particular example of this article—this opposition is more clearly discernible in the context of the specific historical moment of the New Deal: she is reacting against the socialization of the State, because this means in the first place (to her) the socialization of—the loss of—an exclusive idea of “culture” or art, which, it turns out, is based on a bright-line class division.

During the reign of the New Deal, social legislation was at its height in America, so Cather’s remarks in this article are more entrenched in a critique of the State than anything she says in *The Professor’s House* or her other 1920s material. For example, to argue her position for the artist as legitimately and necessarily—even naturally—removed from the realm of economics and politics, Cather calls up the old poets and philosophers

(the “Hebrew prophets and the Greek dramatists”), declaring, “Since no patriarchal family was without its hatreds and jealousies and treacheries, the old poets could not see how a great number of families brought together into a State could be much better. This seems to be the writer’s *natural* way of looking at the suffering of the world.”¹⁵ The writer is thus naturally supportive of the idea that economics and art are “strangers,” which is to say that any writer who supports or seeks the engagement of these two distinct realms is, *de facto*, a stranger to art.

Cather’s commitment to protecting the “artist” from what she calls the “intrusion of foreign matter” thus reinforces her insistence that economics and art are strangers, which is the same thing as saying that culture and economics (or aesthetics and economics) are strangers.¹⁶ It follows, then, that we can identify such “foreign matter” as anything that she associates with economics: Whether it’s the Jewish character Louie Marsellus, a feminine presence at the college, or the idea of the vulgar (an idea Cather intimately links up with money, and a class-invested category on its own), the intrusion of “foreign matter” is not only threatening dominant culture, but threatening the chance for culture, as Cather’s aesthetics define it, to remain dominant. A “science and humanities” curriculum—a liberal arts curriculum—as the embodiment of pure culture, *not* pure individualism, is therefore the only appropriate subject matter for “higher education,” which, until the twentieth century, functioned as a bastion of “culture” insofar as it was inaccessible to the majority of United States habitants.¹⁷

What really concerns Cather, then, is the relationship that *institutionalized* education has to *classical* culture, and whether or not the former would ensure the authoritative survival of the latter in 1920s U.S. social realms. Visible as a public issue, this relationship received a good deal of political attention. Calvin Coolidge, for example, made frequent speeches on education, as both president and vice president. Sharing Cather’s concerns, Coolidge told the American Classical League of the University of Pennsylvania in 1921 that “Modern civilization dates from Greece and Rome,” and that “the fundamental things that young Americans should be taught” were “Greek and Latin literature.”¹⁸ But the more interesting point here is that we can find in Coolidge the same privileging of culture over individuality that we have seen in Cather.¹⁹ Coolidge, too, suggests that the purpose of education is to ingrain culture, not cultivate individuality: “We did not acquire our position through our own individual efforts,” he insists, and “it is only by intense application that the individual comes into the . . . possession of the heritage of civilization.”²⁰ Notwithstanding the narrow definition of “civilization” in this remark,

indeed the statement goes so far as to suggest that the survival of culture requires the sublimation of individuality, and that the development of the individual as such must be checked, for individuality can exist only at the expense of culture. The “intense application” that Coolidge urges is the course of a classical education, which—for him and Cather both—restores education to its natural function and in doing so restores the proper symbiosis of formal education and classical culture. The goal for Coolidge is to ensure the “heritage of civilization,” which strongly deemphasizes the position of individuality (or, it might be added, individual cultures).

Looking back at Thoreau for a moment—a good example of someone who tried to initiate an individuality by distancing himself from cultural distractions—this relationship is what he implicitly gets at when he writes in an 1850 journal entry, “What does education do? It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook.”²¹ Taking Thoreau’s “straight-cut ditch” to mean the rigidity of what education imparts—in a word, culture—his statement is instructive insofar as it criticizes formal education for producing conformity. In the mid-nineteenth century, Thoreau thus asks and answers a question that Cather considers seventy-five years later from quite a different perspective: what Thoreau says education does is what critics of 1920s America, such as Cather, say it *should* do. This inversion of the spirit of Thoreau’s remark is due to the crisis in or of culture that Cather and her contemporaries felt they were facing.²²

Thoreau, on the other hand, in criticizing “education,” indicates that his problem is with the very classical “culture” that Cather and her contemporaries exalt. Fully aware of the custodial relationship between institutional education and classical culture, Thoreau suggests for his moment that the crisis occurring is not at all a crisis in or of culture, but one in or of individuality. Although he indicts commercialism for suppressing and even extinguishing the individuality of the individual, he says little to suggest an anxiety about a disappearance of or encroachment on classical culture (it is arguable that his lamenting of the passing of the “art” of agriculture is an exception). In fact, his remarks on education, exemplified above, suggest just the opposite. His disdain in *Walden* for the “common course” of instruction is based on his interpretation of school as a domain removed from real life, where individuals do not learn the practical realities of living but gain a limited knowledge based on a distant cultural curriculum.²³ Therefore, unlike Thoreau, whose remarks predate the national debate over the proper place of vocational education in a general educational curriculum, and who is not talking about vocational education anyway but *regular* or normal schooling, Cather is not dispar-

aging the effects of education in general—far from it. She is deprecating institutional education for agreeing to transform its (definitive) role from the custodian of “culture” into the partner of industry, and perhaps, in the process, democracy.

Yet if Cather’s investment in the “straight-cut ditch” of culture far outweighs her investment in the “free, meandering brook” of individuality, then she is exemplary of a need articulated in the 1920s to cement an idea of culture in a stable, classicist paradigm that constitutes the very idea of, and is systematically transmitted through, education. This paradigm is, as I’ve noted, hostile to or anxious about “foreign” or outside influences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cather counts women or the influence of a feminine ideal as such a “foreign”—and therefore adulterating—force. Unlike Norris, whom she admired as a writer, Cather did not see the advent of a feminine influence in a positive light. On the contrary, as pointed out earlier, she was threatened by such a development.

The Professor’s House is certainly not the first place where Cather implies the connection between practical pursuits—which have brought mass production, or mass culture—and a feminine ideal. In her essay “The Novel Dêmeublé,” published in 1922, she criticizes modern industrial manufacturing as a quantity- not quality-based enterprise that satisfies those who “want change,” and who thoughtlessly become engrossed in commercial culture, buying—and buying into—the “cheap” forms of amusement it offers: “Does anyone pretend that if the Woolworth store windows were piled high with Tanagra figurines at ten cents, they could for a moment compete with Kewpie brides in the popular esteem? Amusement is one thing; enjoyment of art is another.”²⁴ Cather’s reference to the “Kewpie brides” is one sign that she is associating a symbol of mass production with a feminine ideal. The celluloid Kewpie Doll, patented by New York author-illustrator Rose Cecil O’Neill in 1909, was not a “bride,” nor was it even necessarily a female figure.²⁵ Yet Cather thinks of it as feminine, probably because it was purchased for girls, not boys—girls, not boys, played with it and wanted it. Certainly it fares well as a representation of mass production; quickly and cheaply made, the Kewpie doll typifies the culture Cather imagines herself to be so against: a mass-market culture in which Kewpie dolls supersede Tanagra figurines in stores and dressmaking supersedes the classics in college curriculums. What Cather writes above in 1922 is thus analogous to what she reveals in *The Professor’s House*: her animus toward commercialism as a feminine phenomenon, or more specifically, a sign of feminine inferiority.²⁶ In fact, Cather’s notorious problem with women writers points toward the same association of mass culture with feminine subjectivity.

While it is true that Cather dislikes the mass culture of commercialism because it suggests the prevalence of femininity, the aim here is to show that the implications of this claim exceed the category of gender, and reach beyond the “woman question” per se to a problem with the arrival of immigrants and the influences of different ethnic groups on the specific cultural aesthetic that she wants to preserve. In other words, the attention Cather pays to education in this novel, the anxiety she expresses over the fact that a classical education is being supplanted by an “aim to show results,” is part of a greater anxiety about the demands being made by industry—demands that put the very notion of cultural boundaries at risk.²⁷ Industry, or corporate capitalism, is implicated in Cather’s narrative because its *practical* requirements include a more cooperative social environment and an expansion of the working population in order to grow itself, which means that even colleges must cooperate in the training of a new workforce. In Cather’s case, her opposition to commercialism therefore cannot be explained as simply a reaction against the downsides of the commodification of American culture. Although this is accurate to some degree, her position is much more complicated than this.

While Cather insists that the primacy of the individual must be preserved, her stance emerges as supportive of individuality in a *theoretical* sense, or, supportive of the theory of individuality. In other words, she is hard-pressed to support the reality of individuality if, or perhaps because, this reality is a challenge to culture, which relies on a distinct social order. This social—or class—order is in direct opposition to individuality, for its real effects are to form groups and, importantly, one of Cather’s favorite things: standards. Thus Cather is for the idea of individuality, but she fails to account for or forward the reality that this idea could inspire, namely, a more egalitarian or socially mobile society in which every individual is provided with equal opportunities and in which “culture” does not stand in the way of such a provision in order to maintain itself. What this means is that Cather’s interest in individuality is in stark contrast to that of John Dewey, who called for “Individuality operating in and for the end of the common interest.”²⁸ If Cather’s support for individuality then goes only so far, and tends to remain in the abstract, what we get in Cather is an anti-egalitarian polemic that has its roots in a profoundly undemocratic philosophy. To save culture, she must turn away from any movement for social reform, and from any reconciliation with social reality in general.

She rejects the social reality of industrialization because she associates it with adulteration—with the appearance of women and immigrants, and the presence of class others. After all, the reason why the

college is giving courses in domestic science is that women are now there in enough numbers to warrant such a curriculum;²⁹ and the reason why vocational courses in experimental farming and managerial skills (such as bookkeeping) are being taught is that, as professor St. Peter claims in a conversation with a colleague, there are questionable transformations occurring: "There have been a great many changes . . . and not all of them good. Don't you notice a great change in the student body as a whole, in the new crop that comes along every year now—how different they are from the ones of our early years here?" (42). When his colleague asks in what respect, St. Peter answers, "in the all-embracing respect of quality! We have hosts of students, but they're a common sort" (42). The curse of the common is thus the curse of the common people. The invasion of "common" people is the invasion of a practically oriented, commercial society and, it is worth adding, a common culture that all might share. Cather's discourse on this "new crop" of students explicitly includes women, of course; the professor quips that "Nowadays the girls in my classes who have a spark of aptitude for anything seem to think themselves remarkable" (52), suggesting the new ambition women expressed upon being granted the opportunity for higher education. This "new crop" of students, therefore, is a diverse group ranging from women, to immigrants, to children of the working class, and Cather's depiction of it is relatively accurate. In fact, she provides a somewhat accurate picture of an important movement in American educational reform, one that is pertinent enough to look at in detail.

In her presentation of the professor's views concerning the university's changing curriculum, Cather expresses her own resentment toward the increasingly prevalent emphasis in American education on industrial training.³⁰ By the time she began *The Professor's House* in 1923, the vocational education movement had made its mark on university curriculums across the country, yet its emergence as a popular dispute can be traced back to the decade before World War I, when American educators were embroiled in a debate over vocational education in secondary schools.³¹ Eventually erupting into a large-scale struggle between competing visions of educational reform, this debate was "touched off in 1906 by the report of the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technical Education, which found that thousands of the state's young adolescents did not attend school and were stuck in dead-end industrial jobs without hope of advancement because they lacked the necessary skills."³² Scores of students who were interviewed expressed the uselessness of the curriculum—they "indicated that they had left school not because of pressure to contribute to the income of their families, but because they were alienated by

a school curriculum that had little to offer them."³³ The report finished by saying that schools were not preparing students with "industrial intelligence" and suggested that secondary schools switch from "cultural" to vocational education. This study roused opponents of the schools, "many of whom had been impressed by the example set in Germany, where those deemed unsuitable for university study were directed toward vocational and technical education."³⁴

Following this study, a forceful movement developed for vocational training programs. Directed by a powerful lobbying organization—the National Society for the Production of Industrial Education—

and supported by a diverse range of interest groups including not only educators, but the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce, the American Federation of Labor, major farm organizations, and settlement workers, this campaign culminated in the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917, which provided federal support for vocational education. As an important part of a broader effort to address the educational needs of a corporate industrial society, the movement for vocational education helped transform the high school in the United States from an elite institution closely connected to the nation's leading colleges and enrolling a mere 6.7 percent of those fourteen to seventeen years of age to an institution of mass education enrolling 32.3 percent of that population and committed to fostering the social efficiency of the children of the nation's working class.³⁵

While it turned out that the prospect of vocational education gained broad support, its supporters could not agree on how such industrial training should be carried out. At the heart of this disagreement, it seems, lay the issue of class. For example, the most pressing question facing the supporters of vocational education was whether to work this training into the public school system as it stood, or to make an entirely separate system for it. Robert Westbrook notes, significantly, "Business and labor split cleanly on this issue, with businessmen acting as the strongest advocates for a dual system" (1991, 175). Essentially, a dual system meant a kind of class education in that it would entail, as John Dewey put it, a "fostering and strengthening [of] class divisions in school and out." Dewey scoffed at such a program, noting that "those who believe in the continued existence of what they are pleased to call the 'lower classes' or the 'laboring classes' would naturally rejoice to have schools in which these 'classes' would be segregated. And some employers of labor would doubtless rejoice to have schools, supported by public taxation,

supply them with additional food for their mills." More democratically inclined others, however, "should be united against every proposition, in whatever form advanced, to separate training of employees from training for citizenship, training of intelligence and character from training for narrow, industrial efficiency."³⁶ It was not, then, industrial training per se that Dewey opposed, but the segregation of this kind of education (literally and psychically) from the more cultural curriculum favored by college preparatory schools (this could only "accentuate all undemocratic tendencies," he wrote in 1913). If Dewey saw the prevailing educational practice as the institutionalization of the philosophy of profoundly anti-democratic thinking (which is not necessarily the same thing as anti-individualism), he was certainly not alone. Other progressive thinkers, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, paid close critical attention to the alliance of privilege and philosophy, which, as Dewey wrote, equated "the educated class and the ruling class."³⁷

If, as Dewey would agree, the issue of class is really indistinguishable from the issue of wealth, it stands that the "ruling class" is at a financial advantage, and that this moneyed class is at the center of a tangled web woven to protect its own interests. One way of protecting the interests of this class is to protect the vitality of culture (read: Culture); culture, in a circular turn, must be protected from any *vulgar* association with money. Cather, for her part, shares this agenda to keep culture and economics separate, but *not* because she is intent on protecting the interests of the wealthy. Actually, Cather would ideally isolate culture from wealth, if this were possible, and endorse the cause of culture without ever endorsing the cause of the wealthy (part of the argument here, of course, is that this is not possible). In the view of purists such as Cather, money is ideally thought about in an abstract sense, which makes it possible to represent it as a problem that should or could go away.

The dislocated position from which Cather critiques the marketplace or exchange holds that almost any association with money is a debasement, because money turns everything into a commodity. While this might be true, Cather's critique does not address the problem of the "haves" and "have-nots." In an abstract way, she rather focuses her attention on the problem that (monetary) exchange has taken over as the bottom line—the end of all ends—and thus can only sully the ideals that must stay afloat to constitute pure culture or, its closest relative, true meaning. With these points in mind, I now turn to the representation of money in *The Professor's House*, beginning a close reading of this overt theme with the premise that, for Cather, profit motives and exchange devalue and precipitate the end of doing things only for the sake of doing them.

Money and Exchange

As the novel opens, Cather's award-winning historian Godfrey St. Peter is poised between the old house he is reluctant to leave and the "new house into which he did not want to move" (built under his wife's supervision out of the five thousand pounds that came with the Oxford Prize for history). Poised between the past and the present, Cather's historian is loath to accept the financial consequences of what is referred to as "his experiment" (his eight-volume study, *Spanish Adventurers in North America*); his apprehensive, even agitated manner suggests that the award money has tarnished and perhaps robbed him of the experience he so treasures: the *process* of creating, or making. When his wife asks him one day whether there is something he "would rather have done with that money than to have built a house with it," Godfrey replies, "Nothing, my dear, nothing." Godfrey, in other words, does not want to *do* anything; he does not want to fulfill such practical goals. He tells Lillian:

If with that cheque I could have bought back the fun I had writing my history, you'd never have got your house. But one couldn't get that for twenty thousand dollars. The great pleasures don't come so cheap. There is nothing else, thank you. (23)

"If with that *result* I could have bought/brought back the fun of the *process*, I would have," Godfrey essentially says, indicating first of all money as a result, and second, that (upon its arrival) the "fun" is over. He would rather relive this fun—the making of his history—than have "what were called rewards" bestowed upon him for the finished product. While this passage urges us to understand that he has a profoundly personal relationship to his work process, it goes further than this by claiming that the pleasure of his making process is extraordinary—so extraordinary that even twenty thousand dollars is no compensation. He thus makes a case for "the great pleasures" as definitively uncommon, and not at all subsumable under the principle of practicality. We might say that the experience of the creative process, remarkable and rare, is "fun" for Godfrey because more than anything else it allows for a free hand—it is an abstract venture entailing exploration and discovery. For him, then, creative process is a live moment, a moment of mystery, a synonym, perhaps, for the condition of being free. In the midst of such process, outcome is never certain.

If we can trace the professor's fondness for writing to this kind of unknowability, or unaccountability, I think we are again touching upon

the concept that is central to Cather's aesthetics: she imagines herself to be committed to the idea that anything truly meaningful cannot be accounted for and is therefore essentially impractical, especially when it comes to creative inspiration. Even her professor espouses this, telling his students that "believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives" is "what makes men happy" (55). In other words, whatever forces (or discourses) conspire to explain and predict—for instance, practical science, which is what the professor is criticizing when he makes the above remark—"impoverish" rather than enrich human life. However, there is a paradox worth noting here, for Godfrey's work is to write history, and he does imagine himself to be bound by the idea of historical reality. Within this idea, narrative outcome *can* be circumscribed by ostensibly determinable events that have already occurred. The story he tells, therefore, is not entirely open-ended, for as "history," it should adhere to the available "facts," which is to say its construction should be less innovative than explanative.

Following this, Godfrey constructs his narrative according to the "original" manuscripts and diaries written by the Spanish explorers, even retracing their steps on a trip to the Southwest with Tom (235). What Godfrey writes is thus to some extent already determined by these historical materials. Yet as much as he seems committed to rendering a historically accurate account of the Spanish explorations, it is also quite clear that his project evolves in light of his own personal development; the more invested he becomes in his narrative, the more it comes alive as a creative, imaginative, even abstract, work. While the "original" documents might continue to provide a basis for the story he tells, Godfrey seems to be an approving—if surprised—witness to the unfolding of his own narrative. Rather than knowing what he will say next, or what he will conclude, he appears to discover his direction gradually, as he goes along: "When the whole plan of his narrative was coming clearer and clearer all the time . . . his relation with his work was becoming every day more simple, natural, and happy" (23). If, as this suggests, Godfrey is becoming more involved "every day" in exploring his own inner imagination and creative potential, in following the direction that spontaneously unfolds before him, then the subjectivity of "history" is laid bare here: narrative outcome is not only de-emphasized, but presented as an evolving discovery that occurs during the writing process. His work is thus being represented as art, or as Cather's idea of art: it is individual, and shuns context. It is being removed from its social location (like Godfrey himself), its political implications.

It is a paradox, to be fair; Godfrey delights in the unpredictable pro-

cess of his work, even while he retains an investment, as a historian, in stabilizing the past. After all, in a classic sense (and Godfrey is certainly, like Cather herself, a classicist), history is in the business of retrieving, preserving—rehearsing—the past, shaping the past for the larger community. Fixing the past, however, as a civically minded duty, begins to become less important to Godfrey than the private fulfillment and enjoyment he derives from his own creative process (he “hadn’t cared a whoop” [23], Cather writes, what other scholars or the greater historical community thought about his work). Godfrey is isolating his work along with himself, and becoming less responsive to the community’s ideas and needs. Turning away from historical writing as a goal-oriented activity, in which the historian provides a public with a memory of its past, Godfrey revels in his own *private* experience, in the dimension of unpredictability and chance, of discovery and invention, that makes the process of writing “a great pleasure.”

Following this, it is easy to see why he detests the overbearing presence of the market: in addition to making his discoveries part of a common knowledge pool, and thus ruining their pristine meaning for him, exchange insists on an end to the very process he finds so pleasurable. Money (as the feature of exchange) is the sign of an ending—of a hard certainty that stops the life of process in an unremarkable way; it is a form of accounting, in every sense of the word. To prolong process, or even retrieve it, is what Godfrey wishes were possible, although he knows it’s not; even he must succumb to conclusion (he has, after all, completed his eight-volume study). The next best thing, of course, is to *remember* the fun he had writing his history. In fact, all he has left of this process is the memory of it; he is therefore intent on protecting this memory from desecration, which, for him, means protecting it (at least as long as he can) from becoming “commonplace.”

To keep something from this cruel fate, Godfrey believes it must remain free (again, as long as it can) from any exchange with money. Indeed, such an exchange has the retroactive power to render a cherished memory as common as money itself. A particularly powerful manifestation of this idea occurs in “The Family,” when Professor St. Peter’s daughter Rosamond wants him to accept some of the returns from Tom’s invention, arguing that “You were the best friend he had in the world, he owed more to you than to anyone else” (48–49).³⁸ Exasperated, the professor explains why he “couldn’t possibly take any of Outland’s money”:

Once and for all, Rosamond, understand that he owed me no more than I owed him. Nothing hurts me so much as to have any member of my

family talk as if we had done something fine for that young man, brought him out, produced him. In a lifetime of teaching, I've encountered just one remarkable mind; but for that, I'd consider my good years largely wasted. And there can be no question of money between me and Tom Outland. I can't explain just how I feel about it, but it would somehow damage my recollections of him, would make that episode in my life commonplace like everything else. And that would be a great loss to me. I'm purely selfish in refusing your offer; my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue. (50)

In an effort to preserve the purity, and in fact the pleasure, of his memory, the professor needs to keep this memory separate from the currency, so to speak, that collapses everything into the same category: money. Money, Godfrey maintains, has the power to level the remarkable.³⁹ It notably diminishes boundaries that mark distinctions, allowing for a type of mixing that prevents distinction and purity. After all, its fundamental purpose is to provide a *common* denominator. Furthermore, money blurs the conceptual line between the commonplace and the uncommon because its context, exchange, disrupts the potential power of the means in the means-ends relationship, which is to say it makes this relationship a hierarchical one and puts ends on the topside. Cather, of course, prefers the process—which does not care about the outcome, or the exchange value—to be the privileged part of this dichotomy. As I argue above, money signifies an ending because it threatens to replace the mystery—the freedom—and the independence of process (as a personal phenomenon) with the conclusion inherent in exchange.⁴⁰ It is a fundamentally practical system.

The process in this particular instance is the process of memory—the ongoing relationship the professor has with Tom in his recollections. To introduce the “question of money” into this process is to begin to “settle” this question: Rosamond pleads with her father, “we think you ought to let us settle an income on you. . . . That is what Tom would have wanted . . . If he were alive” (49). But Tom is dead, indicating that the concept behind “settle” is death. Burial, in fact—they want to settle an income *on* Godfrey; in effect, this would bury the memory of Tom that Godfrey holds dear, the memory of the past that Godfrey depends on for his own self-concept.⁴¹ This instance thus also points to the process inseparable from that of memory: the process of self, the cumulative process by which the self comes to be defined as *itself*. In much the same way that Thoreau conceived of exchange in *Walden*, we find Cather suggesting here that exchange threatens the life of the self.⁴² This is what makes the

professor's refusal to accept money from the revenues generated by Tom's invention "purely selfish": it is merely his survival instinct. His impulse to protect or save the self he knows is thus dependent on the protection of his memory. The exposure he fears, moreover, has everything to do with the social. In the conversation with his daughter Rosamond, she expresses her suspicion that her father disapproves of her wealth: "I think you feel I oughtn't to have taken [the money from Tom's estate], either" (50), she worries out loud. Godfrey replies: "You had no choice. For you it was settled by his own hand. Your bond with him was social, and it follows the laws of society, and they are based on property. Mine wasn't, and there was no material laws in it" (50). Therefore, Godfrey insists, he has no reason to participate in or cooperate with social imperatives, especially when it comes to the market. He is free to continue to cultivate his idealism.

Striving for the privacy and abstraction of this removed position, the professor makes it quite clear that his memory of Tom must be preserved *as is*: as an almost mystical dimension of his imagination that, in its utter uniqueness, can reassure him that his "good years" were not "largely wasted." The "great loss" of this memory thus can only bring another great loss—the loss of his self. The professor's anxiety about such a loss can stand for a more general anxiety of Cather's, about the passage or destruction of a specific way of conceiving the past, for in this past certain distinctions are safe; of course, the very fact that this past signifies a past time—a different historical moment—suggests the present as the context for any view of the past, which is to say that historical narratives and personal memories construct a past out of a particular way of conceiving of the present. Cather's idealization of the past—the professor's idealization of the past—seems all the more beleaguered if we acknowledge the insurmountable differences between one historical moment and another. But this is partly my point; Cather does not acknowledge these differences, and her harkening back to the ideas of Thoreau, for example, indicate a dated polemic about, in this case, the self and exchange.

In a discussion of Thoreau's *Walden*, Michael Gilmore writes that to engage in exchange "is [for Thoreau] not merely to debase the self but to extinguish it, to hurry into death."⁴³ The implicit similarities between Cather's text and that of her predecessor are extensive. Professor St. Peter seems to share Thoreau's sense that "The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom of fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling."⁴⁴ For the moment, let's take the "finest qualities" of our nature to mean the remarkable ones, those that make us stand out as individuals. The "most delicate handling," the handling that would ensure preserva-

tion, would then be the most *private* handling. The more public something is—the more public the handling of something—the less likely the thing is to receive “the most delicate handling” possible. Or, such delicate handling would be more likely to occur in a less common sphere.

St. Peter’s remarks to his daughter, while equating money with the vulgar and exchange with the commonplace, reveal his efforts to preserve his memory by handling it delicately—privately. Moreover, they indicate the indistinguishable functions of preserving and remembering: both entail keeping, which usually requires some degree of privatization. St. Peter’s disdain for the common is also an angle of Thoreau’s critique in *Walden* (he calls the nineteenth century “trivial,” and declares he will not live in it;⁴⁵ he also scorns the “‘common course’ of instruction”;⁴⁶ and he delivers “a lengthy diatribe against fashionable literature and the public that devours it”).⁴⁷ As Gilmore argues, the independence from exchange advocated by Thoreau does not, as civic humanists would have it, finally promote an active devotion to the “common good”; rather, this kind of self-sufficiency becomes, in *Walden*, “a private virtue—a virtue without civic consequences.”⁴⁸ The kind of withdrawal that Gilmore notices in Thoreau’s text is also at the heart of Cather’s narrative, as her historian becomes ever more reclusive, until finally he “[thinks] of eternal solitude with gratefulness” (248) and senses that he is falling “out of his place in the human family, indeed” (250).

Self-Sufficiency and Moral Victory

Like Thoreau, Godfrey becomes more and more of a recluse, moving toward a dislocated existence in which he will have no social responsibility and no need to cooperate with market exchange. Yet this is not to say that Cather advances a philosophy of anti-production, although she comes awfully close in the story when the professor nearly dies (in an ambiguous incident that one might interpret as a suicide attempt). Cather suggests, in this text and elsewhere, that production without selling, without exchange, is consistent with the idea of disinterest and the ideal of true (abstract) meaning: one receives, or benefits, from one’s actions, but not in dollars. The economy in this circumstance is private; it is the inner, individual economy of the self, of self-fulfillment and self-sufficiency. In this economy, labor has (only) private value. This is, again, an indicator of the kind of individualism Cather supports, as well as the kind of individuality she finds threatening: one is private, without “civic consequences,” and therefore acceptable. The other has consequences, is

driven by democratic desire and thus geared toward securing a democratic reality, something that obviously has social, political implications. Cather's text advances the virtue of a more private practice of individual labor, connecting it, as Thoreau does, to independent "labor of the hands." Similar to Thoreau, whose "labor of the hands" can be any kind of work, including intellectual ("My head is hands and feet," Thoreau writes, "I feel all my best faculties concentrated in it"⁴⁹), Cather emphasizes the hands (23, 103, 236) as a sign of independent productivity.

In pointing to the necessity for *meaningful* independent labor, for meaningful relationships to the environment and one's activity in it, Cather does not confine meaningfulness to the immaterial domain; on the contrary, in Cather's view, the material world—material production, material things themselves—can legitimately be of great value to an individual, if the individual is involved in a personal relationship with the material.⁵⁰ Above all, the possibility for meaningful independent labor and meaningful relationships to the world requires a personal investment, which is to say a will to value the thing according to something like its "meaning," and not its status in terms of money or exchange. Cather imagines that as long as such an investment occurs, material concerns need not be subordinated to other, less tangible ones. In this instance, material concerns *are* spiritual, moral, aesthetic, and so on.

The point here is not, however, that conventional, money-oriented materialism is ever condoned by Cather—the point is that "material" does not encompass money in this scenario. The problem with money is precisely the fact that it is not really material, but rather something that material is exchanged for; as I have illustrated, Cather reiterates Thoreau's contention that the process of such exchange extinguishes the self and/or the meaning, or intrinsic value, of the traded thing. Approaching this problem more abstractly, I would say that whereas money is closely related to material, in that it can be exchanged for material, it is not itself a representation of anything in particular outside of exchange. It cannot itself be grown or independently made (except illegally). It is not something that an individual can work with manually; it in fact displaces the independent value of manual labor, which, for Cather, has everything to do with the generation of self. As I suggested above, it is not then materialism, *per se*, that Cather finds problematic. On the contrary, she shows herself to be quite fond of things and surroundings. Her opposition is to a specific *kind* of materialism, perhaps in her view the most common kind, in which things do not signify—and thus are not valued according to—an idea of meaning that can, in turn, be traced back to a context that exists outside of the marketplace. In Cather's conception, this context must be

at the heart of materialist sentiment if that sentiment is not to be reduced, finally, to an association with money. She makes this clear in "Nebraska," a 1923 essay in which she glorifies the work of the pioneers, while writing disparagingly of the generation to take their place:

With these old men and women ["rugged figures in the background which inspire respect, compel admiration"] the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested character. They can look out over those broad stretches of fertility and say: "We made this, with our backs and hands." . . . The generation now in the driver's seat hates to make anything. . . . They want to buy everything ready-made. Will the third generation . . . be fooled? Will it believe that to live easily is to live happily?⁵¹

Ready-made things lack a moral component because they have no discernible past, Cather seems to be saying; because the history of their materialization is not accessible, because they are encountered by the greater population on the shelves of a store, they cannot constitute a moral victory. Instead they signify and compel a mode of acquisition that Cather finds stultifying. Furthermore, ready-made things do not provide the kind of memory or context that one can "look out over" with a sense of holistic accomplishment. In one sense, the emphasis here is on nothing less than a commitment to history, a commitment to knowing and remembering the past—not necessarily the nation's past, but a more private, personal past. The idea here, more specifically, is that there should be a shared past between the individual and the material object/environment. The ideal circumstance for the achievement of Cather's "moral victory" would then be a situation in which such a shared past could occur, and we are directed to conclude that this could not happen in the event of a purchase. It is the actual process of making, with the hands, that makes a moral victory possible. Moreover, according to Cather, making with the hands not only tests character but also produces self. Yet insisting that the self must be made with the hands is less a literal demand than it is desiderative of a laborious process. Without this process (which often *does* entail some form of manual engagement), the self will be alien, and on some level, prevented: it will be as distant, as unknown a notion as the processes that produce the "ready-made."

It is then the symbolic aspect of the material that gives it its integrity, or its representational integrity: In the scenario of pioneer life provided by Cather above, nothing is replaced. Rather, the moral is represented

by the material. Money, on the other hand, is a substitute, a symbol not of itself but of replacement. Because, as Walter Benn Michaels puts it, money “cannot be reduced to the thing it is made of and still remain the thing it is,”⁵² whatever is exchanged for money is thus replaced by, at best, a representational ambiguity (think of how the professor jealously guards his memory, in which, he feels, survives the only representation of Tom). Money, in other words, is a floating signifier; it is the sign of a sign. In turn, because money must depend on exchange for its value and meaning, it comes to signify something that Cather seems loath to admit: the dependency of meaning (or the contingency of representation). Buying things ready-made is thus a problem for Cather because these things are so removed from what they symbolize that they cease to symbolize at all. For Cather, their meaning is *replaced* by their materiality—they are purely, or merely, material.

As she indicates in the passage above, the process of making, of individual manual labor, constitutes the intangible (“moral”) aspect of the made thing; the idea of this creative labor process, as a source of self-generation, is lost in the activity of producing and exchanging ready-made things. The purpose or motive behind such activity is as fatal to meaning as a broken use-thing is to utility. Mass produced, “ready-made” things are not the symbol of a process of making, are not the symbol of a “moral victory” or any other aspect of the immaterial that might define meaningful practice and, with this, the self; indeed they are not the symbol of any individual idea, except the intention to exchange (just as money can only be purchasing power, or the idea of what one intends to buy with it).⁵³

In lucid terms, Cather’s article “Nebraska” reiterates a distinction between mental and manual labor, which is to say a class distinction, and even legitimates such a distinction by declaring manual labor the more moral. By the time Cather wrote this article in 1923, the “displacement of men by machines” had become almost a cliché of the new cultural critique, which focused on the issues pertaining to a consumer society; the function of Cather’s glorified portrayal of pioneer production-based values is thus to construct a moral framework—a moral difference—that will help to solidify the difference between capital and labor, or enhance the difference between the producing class and the consuming one.

Part of the problem in the 1920s, of course, is that this difference is receding, as mechanization of commodity production threatens to eliminate it. This is exactly why we can point to Cather’s approach as an instance of the new rise of cultural authority: the very essence of her essay declares a cultural authority by declaring the moral superiority of a

labor practice that can be associated with a particular class. She is telling her readers *who* wins moral approval (the manual makers), and so telling them about a fundamental difference between moralities, or moral lifestyles, and in turn, between classes. In other words, to declare the moral superiority of manual labor—from the standpoint of an intellectual, educated, privileged writer—is to affirm the difference between the manual and the mental that historically describes class difference. It is also to establish a new educational relationship between classes, in which an intellectual elite presides over and monopolizes “culture” in the United States, and thus constantly redraws the line between classes. By glorifying the manual labor of pioneers and criticizing capitalists, Cather is certainly expressing her respect for physical labor and by extension craftsmanship, but she is also participating in the reorientation of “American” culture around the differences between those who, as she puts it, “live easily,” and those who do not.

In *The Professor's House* we can find the same argument for manual work in Cather's depiction of the hero, Tom Outland. Cather wants to suggest (like Thoreau) that without exchange, the self is cultivated simply, actively, in the context of independent “labor of the hands.” In the second book of *The Professor's House*, “Tom Outland's Story,” we explicitly encounter the idea of the self as inextricably bound up with the creation and discovery of things, with a process of exploring and making that is both physical and metaphysical. The conflict that animates this section of the novel is over the relics that Tom and his close friend Roddy dig up while living near the “Cliff City”—the nickname for the “little city of stone” (179) that Tom finds while he is working out on the mesa. While this section of the book gives us a glimpse of Cather's utter reverence for the practice of craft, exemplifying this practice both in the modern project of excavation and in the ancient life of the tribe itself, it also speaks directly to the problem of exchange, and the damage it can effect. To begin, this section of the novel is the most transparent in terms of expressing Cather's views on art as the domain of culture. We learn from this story how culture cannot be—or simply rarely is—popular or popularly accessible.

The highly dramatic, emotionally raw exchange that occurs between Tom and Roddy after Tom learns that the mesa things have been sold serves to clarify the meaning of the things to Tom, specifying that they were neither things he intended to use, necessarily, in a direct sense, nor things he intended to sell, but rather things that he wanted to see preserved, appreciated, understood, and kept safe. Although Roddy has sold the things in hopes that Tom will go to school with his share (“That

money's in the bank this minute, in your name, and you're going to college on it," he offers in his own defense), Tom is irreconcilable:

"You think I'd touch that money? . . . [D]id you ever think I was digging those things up for what I could sell them for?"

Roddy explained that he knew I cared about the things, and was proud of them, but *he'd always supposed I meant to "realize" on them, just as he did, and that it would come to money in the end.* "Everything does," he added. (220; emphasis added)

But Tom does go to college, though it is unclear whether he uses any of this money to go. The upshot of Roddy Blake's explanation is that caring about things—a private experience—and "realizing" on them—a public one—need not cancel each other out. He seems surprised that Tom cannot be comfortable with caring about something *and* selling it (like Grannis in *McTeague*). But Tom insists the two are mutually exclusive. Roddy, who can be read as a sign of the potential merging of moral motives with capital gains, disappears after this argument, never to be seen by Tom again. The reconciliation he offers between these two domains is thus dismissed.

Between Roddy and Tom, the problem ultimately rests in their different ways of conceiving value. In the course of their discussion, Tom tries to "make Blake understand the kind of value those objects had had" (221) for him. The "kind" of value that Tom speaks of, he wants to believe, is not something that can be accounted for; it never occurs to Roddy, however, to value something in this way. He is so entrenched in commodified thinking that everything, including the Cliff City relics, is always already a potential commodity. "I didn't know you valued that stuff any different than anything else a fellow might run on to: a gold mine or a pocket of turquoise" (221), he tells Tom. Valuing something differently is then valuing that thing against, or outside of, its exchange value; it is a kind of valuing that focuses on the object in a nonsubstitutive way.

Uncoincidentally, Cather associates this kind of value with the idea of art; art, she writes in a 1920 essay, is something "where the values are intrinsic and have nothing to do with standardized values."⁵⁴ In an essay published in 1936, Cather refers to the actual people who inspired her Cliff City narrative to articulate her idea of art as something that cannot be explained. "Why did they take the trouble?," Cather asks about the "Indian women in the old rock-perched pueblos of the Southwest [who] were painting geometrical patterns on the jars in which they carried water up from the streams." "These people," Cather continues,

lived under the perpetual threat of drought and famine; they often shaped their graceful cooking pots when they had nothing to cook in them. Anyone who looks over a collection of prehistoric Indian pottery dug up from old burial-mounds knows at once that the potters experimented with form and colour to gratify something that had no concern with food and shelter. The major arts (poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, music) have a pedigree all their own. They did not come into being as a means of increasing the game supply or promoting tribal security. They sprang from an unaccountable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man.⁵⁵

To try to account for art is thus in Cather's view a futile, perhaps even damaging, endeavor. Art has no reason other than itself—as Cather puts it in another essay called "Light on Adobe Walls," art is "concrete and personal" and is "no good at all unless it is let alone to be itself."⁵⁶ If Tom Outland wishes in the end that the Cliff City things had been "let alone," this is because he has discovered them as art (certainly we can infer from the above passage that Cather considers the bulk of them to be art), and experiences a personal attachment to them as such. When he tells Roddy that the things "were something that had been preserved through the ages by a miracle" (220), he is expressing Cather's belief in the "eternal material of art,"⁵⁷ her belief in both art's permanence and its inexplicability. But understanding the things as art does not make them any less historical for Tom, or, rather, any less meaningful as historical artifacts. It is in fact precisely their historical significance that Tom cites when castigating Roddy for selling them. Arguing that they are America's ancestral inheritance, and that they "belonged to the country" (219), he criticizes Roddy for selling his "country's secrets" to Germany, "a country that's got plenty of relics of its own." This kind of nationalist discourse, attached to the meaning of the objects, draws a distinct boundary between cultures and between nations, suggesting that there is more to art than a purely personal, dislocated status.

Furthermore, if the relics are indeed "the country's secrets," as Tom calls them, Cather is making explicit the interchangeability of their meaning and mystery: the mystery of the relics points to the secret aspect of meaning itself. Like art, it is something that defies explanation and, importantly, has no determinable public use-value. Art and meaning, the concepts behind culture—behind the idea of cultural authority—point up this authority as private and largely inaccessible. Why the relics lasted through several centuries is a mystery, and it is the mystery that is the fundamental argument for their meaning. The paradox that I pointed out earlier, concerning Cather's insistence that meaning cannot be accounted

for, arises here, as Cather's statement about the "pedigree" of the "major arts" defines culture against the idea of the commonplace. The "pedigree" is thus the very opposite of the common, and so is violated by the common.

Meaning and Exposure

In Book II of *The Professor's House*, in which Cather tells the story of Tom Outland before he arrives at the university, a hostility and anxiety emerges in Tom's worry that the Cliff City civilization might be ruined if it becomes "exposed," so it is to this part of the novel that I now turn to elucidate Cather's problem with the idea of a more public culture—which is to say not only a mass culture, but a culture inextricably linked with the political sphere, a link that can only diminish the meaning of (the highest form of) culture as an independent, unworldly expression.

In Book II, "Tom Outland's Story," Cather advocates without reservation the irreproachability of a civilization "cut off from other tribes," a self-sufficient civilization that "made their livelihood secure" by farming (197–98). Having "overcome the worst hardships that primitive men had to fear," this tribe became craftspeople, making all kinds of tools, producing art, and otherwise subsisting on the work of their own hands. They "developed considerably the arts of peace," we learn, entertaining an interest in something beyond plain survival: "There is evidence on every hand that they lived for something more than food and shelter" (197). They lived, in other words, for something more than the practical necessities. The things left behind by this civilization—art, tools, the city itself ("more like sculpture than anything else" [180])—testify to its containing a "superior people," a people, "perhaps, too far advanced for their time and environment" (198). It follows that this chapter sets out to contrast the motivation of a hurried, commodity-driven production culture with the more "advanced" culture of the Cliff City tribe, a culture that privileges contemplation and the aesthetic value of everyday surroundings and activities. These are a tribe of "thoughtful people" (197), who, unlike the people of Cather's century, "built themselves into" the materials and material surroundings they produced (199). Certainly Cather wants to signal that to build their selves into their work is something that took time and care. "One thing we knew about these people," Tom takes pride in telling Godfrey, "they hadn't built their town in a hurry. Everything proved their patience and deliberation":

The cedar joists had been felled with stone axes and rubbed smooth with sand. The little poles that lay across them and held up the clay floor of the chamber above, were smoothly polished. The door lintels were carefully fitted (the doors were stone slabs held in place by wooden bars fitted into hasps). The clay dressing that covered the stone walls was tinted, and some of the chambers were frescoed in geometrical patterns, one colour laid on another. In one room was a painted border, little tents, like Indian tepees, in brilliant red. (190)

The significance that Tom attributes to such careful, enduring craftsmanship can be traced to its power to indicate its own process. This is essentially what he is describing above—the visible evidence of a process, particularly a process of handwork that signifies a personal investment. There is something more in this work, Cather wants to say, than the mechanism of trade or even the principle of utility. There is what I earlier called representational integrity: the finished product does not eclipse the process that produced it, so it stands for *itself*, which is the same as saying that it stands for the process of its creation and, importantly, for the motives behind its creation, which translate directly into the site before Tom's eyes.

The question of why the tribe constructed such a beautiful, “worthy” (198), “sacred spot” (199) is central to Cather's project. She raises this question to emphasize the inexplicability of their motivation; they made it, Cather writes, simply because they had “some natural yearning” (199). If it is indeed impossible to account for the motives of the tribe, this is precisely what impresses and captures Tom, what makes the mesa “a religious emotion” (226) for him. When Father Duchene tells Tom, “Your people were cut off here without the influence of example or emulation” (199), we can hear Cather glorifying their self-sufficiency and ability to live in isolation—in a sense without a context. In this abstracted environment, she stresses, they did not forsake the immaterial aspects of life, but celebrated such aspects in “religious ceremonies and observances” (198), artwork, and other customs. Above all, the people of this tribe “built themselves into this mesa,” having nothing to gain but a collective sense of fulfillment and personal gratification, from the labor itself, and from the environment it produced. As Tom is well aware, the Cliff City tribe did not engage in production—in the way of tools, surgical instruments, artwork, architecture, and so forth—to reap a monetary reward. Their motive was not to substitute, but to subsist—spiritually and aesthetically (as well as physically). Production for these “fine people” (191)

was a contained enterprise, having nothing to do with commodification. Everything they produced is thus still present—signifying its own process of materialization—in a sacred environment that has endured on its own for centuries. Thoreau wrote in *Walden* that labor of the hands “has a constant and imperishable moral.”⁵⁸ This maxim, a central theme in Cather’s work, can also be located at the heart of Tom Outland’s story. When he first sets eyes on the Cliff City, he is astonished by the sculptural work of it, and following this, struck by its “immortal repose.” “That village sat looking down into the canyon with the calmness of eternity” (180), he recalls. The emphasis Cather places on the city as hand-carved, joined with her emphasis on it as immortal and eternal, certainly suggests the link between labor of the hands and a constant, imperishable moral. For Cather, it is the moral of meaning itself.

This moral of meaning is distinctly illuminated in the passage in which Cather discusses the tower that stands in the middle of the city. Tom notices something “symmetrical and powerful” about it; he likens it to a sculpture in itself, and says, “I’d never seen a tower like that one. It seemed to mark a difference. I felt that only a strong and aspiring people would have built it, and a people with a feeling for design” (182). In the same breath that Tom expresses his admiration for the form or “design,” he mentions the hardship of completing such a structure, indicating his sense that the tower must have been the most difficult, time-consuming project. He concludes that the tower is the “fine thing that held all the jumble of houses together and made them mean something” (180). An idea of meaning, directly related to the manual labor Tom discerns, thus stands at the center of his attraction to this civilization.

Furthermore, the tower embodies an idea of meaning because of its associations: it was built to be observed, *as* the center, or to provide a material incarnation of center. It was also, importantly, built as a place to facilitate observance. If, as Father Duchene thinks, it was used for “astronomical observations” (197), it can be thought of as something that brings the people closer to an idea of immortal presence: to look out on the constancy of the stars is to encounter the eternal. Tom thus mentions this tower in a gesture toward the timeless, independent—constant—nature of meaning, and how it inheres in this handmade city, regardless of its visibility to the outer world. The city itself exemplifies the “constant and imperishable moral” that Thoreau spoke of, “hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries, preserved in the dry air and almost perpetual sunlight like a fly in amber, guarded by the cliffs and the river and the desert” (180).

Meaning, then, far from being entirely intangible or immaterial, emerges here in concrete form—in the form of things and surroundings.

Because things and surroundings must be kept, or keep on their own (like the Cliff City), meaning also thus emerges as a phenomenon in need of some degree of privacy: Cather suggests that the only reason the City relics survived intact is that the City was unexplored, and/or “inaccessible.” Yet, this is where she runs into a problem in her argument, for such an implication manifests a contradiction: how can meaning be at once immortal *and* vulnerable to common exposure? Cather cannot, I think, have it both ways. What *is* meaning, or rather what is the point of it, if when it is discovered it begins to disintegrate (or, worse, is already lost)? Looking in the text, we find that however immortal Tom considers the meaning of the remains to be, he nevertheless expresses concern early on about making “our discovery any more public than necessary” (183). Like the professor, who seeks to privatize what is precious to him, Tom has an impulse to keep the City from becoming commonly accessible. “We were reluctant to expose those silent and beautiful places to vulgar curiosity” (183), he exclaims. Worried that such exposure would disrupt the sanctity of the City, Tom is nonetheless intent on having a trained archeologist come out and “study the remains” (199). In his mind, the “proper specialists” (199) would appreciate the site and, most importantly, “understand it” (202). Imagining that these scholars will discern even deeper, hidden meanings, Tom anticipates their arrival as an opportunity to have the City (and its contents) properly looked after. In bringing back “men who would understand it,” Tom tells himself, “I would have done my duty by it” (202).

The emphasis on the necessity for understanding is highly visible in this section of the novel, and should be considered in relation to the text’s approach to the problem of meaning itself. The question of what Cather means by the term “understand” is then an important one; though her use of the word is quite conventional, a special definition of it can be located as it functions in the preceding context. What Cather seems to be getting at is the ability to perceive and comprehend the significance of; meaning is then the operative concept here—the thing to be understood. To understand is to recognize, know, or grasp (some form of) meaning. The men who would understand the City are, in Tom’s mind, able to do so because they have been trained; in turn, because of their knowledge base, they can situate the existence of the City in a historical context, which, the narrative implies, will enhance the overall significance of the discovery. These men, in other words, will understand the City *better* than Tom and his comrades, because of their historical knowledge.

Tom’s grasp of its significance is portrayed as more visceral; he knows that the site has meaning, but this is as far as his knowing goes (for

instance, when he finds three bodies “wrapped in yucca-fibre,” he speculates about the circumstances, but ultimately defers to the authority of the specialists. “Of course,” he says, “an archeologist could have told a great deal about that civilization from those bodies” [193]). Tom’s sense of the importance of his finding is thus, to some degree, context-free; his desire and subsequent search for the specialists who can provide the proper context suggests that it is difficult to gauge meaning, and even more difficult to fix it, without a framework. The framework, finally, emerges as classical training, or a classical education. Tom wants scholars to come out to the mesa precisely because of their cultural training, which is to say their cultural pedigree. But what happens, instead, is that he becomes embroiled in a battle over politics and economics, and learns that his belief that culture is independent and removed from political disputes is an ideal, and that the men he encounters merely want to “realize” on things.

It is Father Duchene who encourages Tom to go to Washington, and convinces him that an archeologist will be sent who will “revive this civilization in a scholarly work” (199), thus reassuring Tom that the meaning in these remains will be affirmed and safely kept. Tom’s impulse to keep the site private is only tempered, therefore, by the opportunity to have the discovery immortalized in writing. If this is his “duty”—to protect the Cliff City through a scholarly narrative—then its meaning is not as self-sufficient as its “immortal repose” might suggest; rather, it is dependent on its surviving materiality in the form of a narrative that properly understands its past, and the mere fact that it was written proves its importance in the present. Certainly this illuminates the role of scholarly writing in the construction of meaning, and more particularly, history and historical narrative as indispensable to this construction. Meaning, in other words, is a function of history; it has a pastor, perhaps, in the role of the past in the present. Yet the role of meaning is brought into question by the text, even as Cather strives to fixate it, for *if* it is something that must be accompanied by (nothing less than) a heightened understanding, its existence is contingent.

I am arguing that Cather is caught between two competing versions of meaning: on one level, she seeks to reify meaning outside of history, so as to eliminate the possibility of meaning being dependent on understanding (which, in turn, is dependent on knowledge and memory). On another level, however, she insists on the indispensability of history to any understanding of meaning, locating meaning in a structure of knowledge that must be retained in order for that meaning to survive. Essentially, Tom would only trust the archeologists as, say, Meaning Keepers, because they have historical knowledge; his desire to keep the City a secret except

from those men who would understand it is a good example of Cather's investment in understanding, and, conversely, her lack of faith that such understanding will occur, barring the most limited circumstances. This lack of faith is at the heart of Cather's impulse to deny the historicity of meaning; offended and troubled by the notion that meaning is in need of understanding, she defensively maneuvers to isolate meaning from the common sphere and thus from the possibility of being missed, or misunderstood. Ultimately, this leaves meaning in a highly privatized sphere.

Paradoxically, this sphere turns out to be, for Tom, the most public of forums: it is writing that he turns to, to secure the meaning of his findings. It's as if he believes that what's written is safe, and in this regard, private. In his view, the written achieves permanence and inaccessibility to anyone who would revise his inscriptions; we know this because Tom places such importance on the work of writing as a way of protecting his findings. Before he is "let down" (212) by the men who he had imagined would be the mesa's Meaning Keepers, he has complete faith that their scholarly work would not only recognize and revive the civilization, but effectively preserve it *as is*. For Tom, the public aspect of writing is overshadowed by the hermetic privacy of the written: once something is written, it is inoculated. The work of writing is therefore a crucial part of Tom's project; not only does he dream of having the history of the Cliff City written (by the appropriate scholars), but he keeps a diary himself, in which he enters "a minute description" of everything he and his companions find, along with sketches and diagrams (238). In an effort to be as thoroughly dedicated and reverential as the Cliff City people themselves, Tom is very careful to treat each discovery, each "specimen" (189), with the utmost respect and appreciation. Whether it's a "beautifully shaped" water jar, a pair of moccasins, or a painted cloth or piece of pottery, he keeps a record, writing down "just where and in what condition we had found it, and what we thought it had been used for" (189). Every evening, Tom recalls, "I sat down at the kitchen table and wrote up an account of the day's work" (189).

The "patience and deliberation" of the tribe is reflected in this work of writing, as well as in the actual work of excavating the site, a job that demands a comparably intensive labor of the hands, which Cather takes pains to highlight: the "patient" Henry, assisting Tom and Roddy in their explorations, "would dig with his fingers half a day to get a pot out of a rubbish pile without breaking it" (190). With Tom writing more of the time and his assistant digging more, there comes into view the very split that I pointed to earlier between the mental and the manual. Certainly the kind of labor of the hands that Tom engages in on the mesa emerges

as a profound experience for him: rather than encountering the City's artifacts in the more sterile environment of a museum, for instance, Tom finds them or digs them out himself, in a sense reenacting the handwork of the tribe. But it is his writing that finally survives this whole episode in his life and legitimates his efforts; if it were not for this cultural work, which like any historical narrative embodies the voice of cultural authority, the meaning of Tom's experience would be lost. And, in an important respect, the meaning of it *is* lost—on the powerful men in Washington from whom Tom tries to derive support. Tom's failure to arouse the interest of these men only reinforces the distinction between cultural and commercial pursuits, or between culture and politics, for these officials fail to see the cultural value of what Tom is doing and can only look for the potential to profit from or use his research as a vehicle for political advancement.⁵⁹

What this section of the novel conveys, finally, is Cather's will to privatize meaning, or the meaning in—or of—culture. This ultimately amounts to the privatization of history itself. The past must be sealed off from interpretation (the past is where classical aesthetics reside), Cather insists, even while she indicates how impossible this is. In these terms, the Cliff City represents the ideas of art and meaning, which are the concepts constituting culture, *behind* culture (in the form of the past, and in a generally figurative sense). These concepts are thus the ones behind the idea of cultural authority, and serve to point up this authority as private and largely inaccessible. The upshot, then, of Cather's persistent thematic focus in this novel on the "common" (or "vulgar") as a destructive force is to point to a cultural distinction that posits the masses as a threat to the order and meaning of culture; because public access and/or public exposure are constantly determined as threats to the survival of cultural meaning, we know that Cather's idea of culture is exclusive and undemocratic—it seems that for her, once something becomes a mass phenomenon it ceases to be culture. The sentiment expressed in *The Professor's House* and in many of Cather's letters and essays thus points us toward an understanding of a more general crisis in cultural authority taking place in the 1920s, as "culture" became increasingly exposed and disseminated, utilized, and, in Cather's mind, brought toward an end.

Art and Propaganda

Cather scholars might recognize the contradiction invoked here in the suggestion that this novel harbored some sort of political or social

agenda, for Cather was an opponent of literature or fiction that wanted to make a statement of this kind. But there is a consistent undercurrent of animosity in Cather's essays toward the idea that an artist has some kind of responsibility or even ability to express a stance concerning social, political, or economic affairs. Art, Cather insisted, was outside of politics and economics; nothing that was "art" could have anything to do with these realms. In particular, she resented "literature" or novels that she thought were "propaganda," and refused to grant such work the status of "art." In concluding this chapter, it is worth going back, for a moment, to her essay "Escapism" (1936), in which, for example, she specifically criticizes writers who think that novels should "cry out against social injustice," and asks, "Why does the man who wants to reform industrial conditions so seldom follow the method of the pamphleteers? Only by that method can these subjects be seriously and fairly discussed. And the people who are able to do anything toward improving such conditions will read only such a discussion: they will take little account of facts presented in a coating of stock cinema situations."⁶⁰ Apart from suggesting a division between the world of socioeconomics and the world of fiction, partly by insisting that "the people" who help to resolve socioeconomic tensions characteristically refuse to see beyond the parameters of a particular reformist methodology—they are uninterested in or immune to or too busy for fiction (or perhaps don't even read)—essentially what Cather is barring here from the category of "literature" is a reformist agenda that advocates in the interests of the class other (the socially, politically, and economically marginalized and exploited). According to her, literature is not the place to argue about the inequities of society, nor is it the place to initiate a critique that would call for the redistribution of wealth. It is certainly not a place to promote a more democratic worldview.

With this point in mind, it is worthwhile to note that in the same essay, Cather criticizes the approach of new writers who debunk the past, and who want to change literature *and* society by "eschewing" or "renouncing" "the old themes"—she finds such a project to be "disagreeable" and not "very worthy." If we look at what Cather argues here alongside the discourse of *The Professor's House*, we can conclude that, for her, it is the place of literature to criticize contemporary society, yet not for something such as failing to improve things for the class others, but rather for engaging in an assault on the past, and abandoning the "old themes" that define classical culture (and identify classical literature or—or as—"art"). What I am arguing then is that *The Professor's House* cries out against the cultural injustice of "destroying the past," and calls for the resurrection of a glorified past ("destroying the past" is cited by Cather in "Escapism"

as the only accomplishment of the “new social restlessness”). Of course Cather does not acknowledge that her novel is propaganda for the cause of enshrining the past, but this is probably because she considers it art, and art cannot be propaganda. Furthermore, the irony of Cather’s position, noted earlier, is that she must devote her novel to the very problems (money, commercial processes, etc.) that she excludes from literature’s subject matter in order to make her case and illustrate the depravity of contemporary society and the de-emphasis or disappearance of “art.”

“Missionaries of Culture”

DuBois’ “Higher Aims” in Ellison’s Invisible Man

Reading Du Bois pragmatically, then, is doubly illuminating. It reveals aspects both of Du Bois and of pragmatism that we would otherwise miss.

—Paul C. Taylor, “What’s the Use of Calling Du Bois a Pragmatist?”
(Shusterman, 97)

That somehow, somewhere eternal and perfect beauty sits above . . . the facts of the world and the right actions of men I can conceive . . . [but] here and now and in the world in which I work they are for me unseparated and inseparable.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926)

I. The Higher Aims and the Democratic Ideal

In the pages of the October 1926 edition of *The Crisis*, W. E. B. Du Bois declared that “all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of purists.” “I stand in utter shamelessness,” he continued, “and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy.” This, he asserts, is the role of art in a world in which art and politics—art and political struggle—are, as he puts it, “unseparated and inseparable.” And to those who believe that art is something outside of or above the world—to those who think, by definition, it should or must be—Du Bois directs an impatient hostility: “I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.”¹ Repudiating the plank of “purists,” who insist that art *cannot* be propaganda (for if it is, the argument goes, it is degraded, or in fact is not art at all), Du Bois exhibits in this 1926 article a particular consciousness concerning the classic or classicist distinction between art and utility; this consciousness, indicative of the struggles

undertaken by pragmatism, evolves over the course of his career, and can be traced back to his earliest and perhaps most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in which he grapples with the very same distinction.

Recent scholars have acknowledged the powerful influence that pragmatism had on Du Bois; James T. Kloppenberg has noted in his essay “Pragmatism and the Practice of History” that Du Bois’ early work “reflected . . . the impact of pragmatism,” and that Du Bois described himself as “a devoted follower of James at the time that he was developing his pragmatic philosophy.”² Ross Posnock has also written about the impact early pragmatism had on Du Bois, in addition to other black writers, in the context of an argument about the public intellectual.³ Imagining Du Bois as a student and ally of pragmatism, this chapter will ask how Du Bois exhibits this impact, especially in his thinking about art and political struggle.⁴ By looking at the differing standpoints Du Bois takes over the years, I aim to show that his return, again and again, to the practical/aesthetic dichotomy indicates the degree to which this dichotomy functions as an obstacle to his goal of eliminating racial injustice and, on the more positive side, securing racial equality. Suggesting the centrality of this dichotomy to the construction of race overall (and to the maintenance of racial hierarchy in his particular historical moment), Du Bois’ work thus sets the stage for other black writers to examine the damaging role of this division in the evolution of their identities *as* writers, as artists—as individuals. Hence, I will first illustrate the complex, particular ways in which Du Bois’ work regards this dichotomy, and then establish the impact of his work on the concerns of Ralph Ellison, who draws on Du Bois’ powerful intellectual legacy in his acclaimed piece of fiction, *Invisible Man* (1952). If Du Bois continued to wrestle with this dichotomy—despite knowing how reductive and fundamentally incoherent it was—this is because it continued to manifest its tenacity and efficacy in every domain associated with the kind of status, recognition, and empowerment that he sought for black individuals.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, as in the *Crisis* article I cite above (as well as in many other writings), Du Bois sheds light on the implications of the art/utility distinction for understanding and describing both class and racial distinction; he consistently reilluminates the question of how best to accomplish the enfranchisement of black America as, inevitably, the question of how to negotiate the dilemma posed by the purist notion of an apolitical aesthetic realm (which is the same thing as an aracial or raceless aesthetic realm: such purist ideals are clearly linked, as will become evident in this chapter, to raciopolitics, not just politics *per se*).⁵ As generations of philosophers have insisted, in this realm there is no

place for the practical, which is to say no place for an agenda, so it follows that such a realm would seem to present an inhospitable face to someone like Du Bois; yet as profoundly goal oriented as he is, there are moments when Du Bois seems to suggest the validity of such a realm—when, for example, he talks about “universal understanding,” or “true art,” or alludes to truth and beauty as abstract, fixed ideals.⁶ These instances point to a paradox, for they seem to indicate that Du Bois believes in the possibility for disinterest, but this, I will show, is not the case. What he is suggesting, rather, is that while the concepts of “truth” and “beauty” are disinterested, they are not *racially* disinterested—and therefore race interferes with the attainment of such things (“the apostle of beauty” is only “dog[ged]” by slavery, Du Bois writes, because slavery denies him the “right to tell the truth or recognize an ideal of justice”). Thus, when black artists and intellectuals are shut down, Du Bois argues, everyone suffers from the “narrowing of the field.”⁷

If we can understand Du Bois to be saying that race is a thoroughly *interested* (invested) category and, as such, actually prevents the possibility for apprehending ideals such as truth or justice (which, by nature, must be disinterested), in one sense, he was not so far off from arguing what some of his white contemporaries were arguing—as the intellectual Walter Lippmann wrote in his 1929 book, *A Preface to Morals*, “pure knowledge” (what Du Bois calls “truth”) can be attained only in a state of “disinterestedness.”⁸ But unlike Lippmann, who broke with the pragmatism of William James to explore the life of the mind apart from practical, utilitarian considerations,⁹ Du Bois could not, and would not, part ways with utilitarian considerations: he always had the impact of race at the forefront of his mind; indeed it was impossible to escape the adversity it imposed. Never losing sight of the insidious interests of race, Du Bois remained clearly conscious of and actively *pushing* an agenda of reform, even at the moments when he is most articulate about the importance of attaining a “pure” knowledge of “civilization,”¹⁰ or what Willa Cather calls a “purely cultural” education.¹¹ He is perhaps at his most political, or most practical, it might be argued, precisely at those moments when he is championing a knowledge of the “high” arts or the great books, for it is at these moments that he is revealing the political aspects of (that thing called) “culture,” laying bare the complicity of culture in the vast and complex social network that decides, finally, questions of power, wealth, prestige, and opportunity.

If, as Willa Cather argued, art, or culture, is abstract and disinterested, and has nothing to do with economic, political, or practical concerns, then Du Bois confronts a twofold problem: on one hand, he must demys-

tify and criticize what he sees to be the false distinction reiterated by those like Cather. On the other hand, he must appeal to and even embrace the system of this distinction, for to the extent that its “higher” side—the side associated with culture, or the arts, or the idea of aesthetics—retains the key to political advancement, Du Bois realizes black individuals in the United States cannot afford to live without such “higher” knowledge, cannot afford to merely live in the practical sense, whether this means gaining economic independence, learning a trade, or finding a role in industry. This he makes quite clear in “Negro Education,” an essay from 1918:

Anyone who suggests by sneering at books and “literary courses” that the great heritage of human thought ought to be displaced simply for the reason of teaching the technique of modern industry is pitifully wrong and, if the comparison must be made, more wrong than the man who would sacrifice modern technique to the heritage of ancient thought.¹²

It might sound here as though Du Bois is aligning himself with a humanistic perspective that, in many ways, because it tends to be dislocated from the particulars—the particular violences—of social experience, maintains a willful blindness to its own political or practical function. This, I think, is partially accurate, and on this point, it is worthwhile to note that he seems to be greatly influenced by the humanism of Matthew Arnold, who makes an almost identical statement in his 1869 essay “Literature and Science.” “If then there is to be separation or option between humane letters on the one hand and the natural sciences on the other,” Arnold writes, “the great majority of mankind, all who have not exceptional and overpowering aptitudes for the study of nature, would do well, I cannot but think, to choose to be educated in humane letters rather than in the natural sciences. Letters will call out their being at more points, will make them live more.”¹³ If students must make the choice, Arnold argues, between the arts or the humanities, on one hand, and the more technical, practical agenda of scientific pursuits, on the other, a knowledge of and exposure to the humanities should be chosen because it encompasses the history of civilization, which is *precisely* why Du Bois also privileges the humanities, or, as he puts it, the “great heritage of human thought”: above all, he is intent on disseminating culture, though, importantly, not just as an end in itself, and here is the point where he diverges from classic Arnoldian humanism, which advances the notion of culture for its own sake. Du Bois rather conceptualizes culture as a means to an end—political power and enfranchisement for blacks.

Yet, it must be acknowledged, the story is more complicated than this. This is the case for Du Bois only so long as there is racial discrimination, which is to say that he would arguably find culture disinterested, and approach it that way, if there were such a thing as racial neutrality. But part of the premise here is that Du Bois *must* see culture as a means (even while he does think of it as an end in itself), and embrace this activist stance, because this is the only way to remedy the injustice of race and arrive at the point where culture *can* be responsibly thought of in its own terms (as its own end). In this sense, culture is indeed both means and ends for Du Bois. Thus, while Arnold and Du Bois agree in one respect, they are also at opposing ends of this conceptual spectrum.

While Du Bois does become more tolerant of the idea of a technical or vocational education for blacks in the years following the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, acknowledging that industrial skill, trade training, and basic economic independence are indeed crucial in the struggle to improve the predicament of blacks in America—such accomplishments, he admits, will certainly make blacks in the United States visible within and indispensable to the industrial scheme, and to the commercial success of the nation overall—he remains committed to the idea that none of these accomplishments will bring black individuals “culture,” or a sense of, as Du Bois puts it, “what civilization means.”¹⁴ Surely, Du Bois writes, “it is far better to send out among the masses educated persons who lack technical training in methods of teaching rather than to send persons who have techniques without education.”¹⁵ Why? Because, Du Bois proclaims, the “mass” of “untaught people” need to learn not just “how to walk,” but “whither to go, and while logically we may argue that learning to walk ought to precede preparations for a great journey, yet as a matter of fact and history, it is the inspiration of some goal to be reached that has ever led men to learn how to get there.”¹⁶

If, in effect, this is the same thing as saying that all practical considerations should be *ideally* interested, in the sense that they should be conceived as steps toward a higher ideal that is primarily intangible—the “goal,” in this case, would not be material—then it is a quest to resolve the distinction between the ideal and the practical that occupies Du Bois, especially during the 1920s and beyond, and by “resolve” I mean disrupt, deconstruct, or close the gap on this constructed binary, so that the interdependence and fluidity, the internal incoherence of each category, becomes apparent. Just as Du Bois begins his career by insisting that the abandonment of the aesthetic, ideal realm for technical, practical concerns is a mistake, his perspective evolves to the point where he realizes that *this* initial position is a mistake, for it fails to address the core of

the problem, which is, finally, the perpetuation of the legitimacy of the distinction. The twofold problem that I speak of above is then perhaps more of a dilemma, for Du Bois must somehow figure out a way to argue the benefits of a cultural knowledge *without* furthering the cause of the distinction between culture and utility. The history of Du Bois' approach to this dilemma can be apprehended in the evolution of his polemical stance concerning what black folk are to be taught, which is to say what defines (an) "education."

Focusing his attention on the highly charged issue of black education, Du Bois positions himself against the recommendations of his predecessor Booker T. Washington, whom Du Bois dismisses as representative of the "old attitude of adjustment and submission."¹⁷ What is needed, Du Bois insists, is an educational program that sends out "missionaries of culture,"¹⁸ so as to inspire interest in the "higher aims of life." Du Bois complains that Washington's program becomes "a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow" such aims.¹⁹ At this early stage in his career, Du Bois thus found himself in the position of representing these "higher aims" as somewhat separate, somewhat removed, from the domain of Work and Money. Aptly titled, *The Souls of Black Folk* criticized the leadership of Booker T. Washington for ignoring or neglecting the *souls* of black folk; for failing to provide anything but a formal training, a set of practical skills that would keep black folk from starving, literally. Certainly the "souls of black folk," as a phrase, invokes the paradoxical imagery of both individuals (souls) and the larger community (folk), but in either case, Du Bois is emphasizing the spiritual, immaterial side of "black" life, something, he insists, that Washington fails to do.²⁰

Because the program at Washington's Tuskegee Institute was almost exclusively focused on industrial education, Du Bois targeted it as an agent of the captive (practical) mentality that kept blacks in America from developing a tendency toward thinking; without such a conceptual ability, Du Bois felt, there would be little means of envisioning any situation outside of the current need to achieve economic stability. The problem, then, was that Tuskegee limited the imagination of its students—rather than providing more abstract goals that would require social and political mobility, rather than calling out those aspects of human experience that would inspire artistic impulses and aesthetic curiosity, Tuskegee taught hard economic realities, encouraged a work ethic that refused the possibility of class mobility, and, above all, accommodated racial hierarchy by providing the South with a class of workers. With this kind of leadership in place, it was almost of necessity that Du Bois turn the spotlight on the

"higher aims of life," which, he was convinced, would never be addressed except in the form of a cultural education. An education in the high arts, a liberal arts or humanities education, was in Du Bois' view the key to political and social advancement for black America, and Washington was recommending the exact opposite: that blacks postpone, indefinitely, any aspirations to higher education. I say postpone because it is clear that Washington believes that there is a historical dimension to the autonomous aesthetic ideal that Du Bois is after: Washington, in other words, does not yet feel it is *time* for this path, but he implies that the time will come—after blacks have achieved a measure of well-being. For Du Bois, however, such tolerance could not be tolerated. Even if this kind of patience could work, it would simply take too long.

In reading through Washington's speeches, one becomes aware that he represented his own commitment to the purely practical as a commitment to the working class: he pointed out, time and again, that the degradation of manual work need not be internalized by the "race." By taking this tack, Washington accomplished a number of things. Certainly, he appealed to and helped create an anti-elitist sentiment among working-class blacks. This sentiment, or this resentment, extended to accuse those blacks—however few—who had managed to acquire a cultural education. He also helped provide a model in which black workers could rationalize their own exploitation—he told them their work was as meaningful as that carried out by the cultural elite. These effects arguably helped forward the cause of racial domination. However, looking closely at the ways in which Washington phrased his argument, it is safe to say that he, like Du Bois, did place a substantial amount of pressure on the dichotomy of the practical, on the one hand, and the aesthetic (of culture), on the other, even though he did not intend to incite the same effects. For example, at the Atlantic Cotton Exposition in 1895, Washington told his large audience:

No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. . . .

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.²¹

Certainly Washington links up the activity of writing a poem with the idea of "privilege," even as he suggests that tilling a field should be con-

sidered as dignified an act as writing a poem. Thus the “privileges” denied blacks are inextricably bound up with the idea of what is cultural, with what signifies *culture*—namely art forms, such as poetry—and so access to culture, *as* a privilege, emerges as the thing that signifies not only social equality and “progress,” but political freedom, which is, especially during the tenure of Washington’s leadership, racially determined.

What is essential to notice here, as well, is that the problem, or the question posed (why should there be any less dignity in tilling a field than in writing a poem?), suggests the constructed nature of the (writing/tilling) hierarchy, merely by suggesting that the race can and indeed must “learn” to think in an alternative framework. Hence, Washington’s remarks indicate how this hierarchy is steeped in—or merely *is*—the dynamic of class: the division between these two activities is the class division that constitutes and reconstitutes racial hierarchy; it is the very real division that purposefully puts one class of people on the “bottom,” and one on the “top,” in the sense that poetry is considered a luxury of the educated, elite class, and agricultural maintenance the lot of those who cannot afford (and are not allowed) the privilege of culture. Ultimately, Washington’s point—that writing poetry is an activity that is automatically dignified—is a powerful one, for it emphasizes the extent to which (the idea of) “art” as the highest form of expression really serves the purpose of (re)establishing cultural hierarchy.

Yet while Washington is, in effect, asking that black folk think independently of and indeed against one discursive strain of the value system set up by dominant white culture—you must believe that there is value in your work, he contends, despite the cultural discourse that would devalue this labor—he is still asking black folk to meet the demand of elite white society, which is, namely, to accept the caste system. His campaign to persuade black workers of the inherent value in their work is thus quite different from, say, other movements which sought to challenge the same classical depreciation of practical activity: consider that John Dewey’s pragmatism also criticized the classical assumption that there was more dignity in writing a poem than in tilling a field. Dewey pointed out that this attitude was the very same attitude that legitimated master-slave relationships, making obedience the duty of the laborer and authority the privilege of the thinker (poet/philosopher). Dewey argued this as early as 1899, in *School and Society*, and continued to elaborate and polish this argument in later works, such as *Democracy and Education* (1915), *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915), *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), and various essays, including “Education vs. Trade-Training,” and “Culture and Industry in Education” (1906).²² Like Washington, Dewey

spoke out against the denigration of manual labor or practical activity, arguing that such disparagement had no meaning outside of its own discourse, which is to say its meaning was based solely on the fact that its discourse was dominant; both Dewey and Washington were thus intent on exposing this attitude as merely an inheritance of an ancient system of thought. Unlike Washington, however, Dewey aligned himself with the political nature of such a critique, and explained that the denigration of practical activity and manual work was a *problem* because it was endemic to a class society. Posing a fundamental challenge to the social relations of capitalist production, Dewey protested that practical activity in the form of manual work—the kind workers were being trained for at Washington's school—was "not free because not freely participated in," so such workers "do what they do, not freely and intelligently, but for the sake of the wage earned."²³

Going further than this, Dewey proposed an alternative system: he suggested, inversely, that practical activity itself could serve as an ideal by which people could order their lives. The comparison being drawn between Dewey and Washington is thus designed to underscore the *difference* between their respective celebrations of the practical—one has an explicit agenda to challenge the social order by refiguring the distinction between culture and utility, and the other tries to de-emphasize the very possibility of an agenda: Washington refuses to politicize his position, his consciousness, and instead calls for a halt to any efforts that would translate such independent thinking, or such consciousness, into political action. Seeking to persuade white Southerners that it is possible to isolate the realms of the economic and the industrial from the tensions of social and political struggle, and thus from the risks of racial clash, in an oft-quoted remark Washington tells his audience, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."²⁴ This suggestion incensed Du Bois, of course, who was determined to agitate "questions of social equality" and who, like Dewey, was fundamentally opposed to such a segregationist sentiment—it is impossible, Du Bois asserted, to keep the social separate from the industrial; nor is it in any way desirable or useful.²⁵

What Washington tries to suggest, then, is a paradigm of disinterest, for he is claiming that economic betterment can be politically and socially *disinterested*: he stresses that there is no hidden agenda in his program, no interest in acquiring social equality or a more visible political status. Offering to help pull "the load upward," Washington is explicit in encouraging a black-white partnership based on the acceptance of political inequality and the economic tracking of blacks into agricultural and

industrial roles subordinate to white business interests. Seeking pay is, of course, an agenda, and trying to provide and implement vocational training for blacks is certainly an effort at reform, but Washington's attempts to present this agenda for reform as a politically disinterested project neutralizes the effect such a program might have. For Du Bois, then, who approves of a focus on economics only to the extent that it is represented as a politically interested approach, it might be said that Washington's program is too focused on practical issues, but at its core, not practical enough. Arguing that it is entirely *impractical* not to insist on voting rights and engage in other kinds of political activism, Du Bois asks whether it is "possible, and probable"

[t]hat nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic *No*.²⁶

Instead of money, or economic progress, then, it is the abstract ideal of "rights" that Du Bois puts above all else. A "firm adherence," Du Bois concludes, to "higher ideals and aspirations will ever keep those ideals within the realm of possibility."²⁷ As he writes the following year, after the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, nothing is more important than the "great principle of free self-respecting manhood for black folk."²⁸

Railing against what he calls the "gospel of money," the "wave of materialism" that he sees as "temporary" but no less damaging in its ephemerality, Du Bois argues that the "great question" of what something is worth in monetary terms is obscuring the "ideals of human rights." He sounds much like other critics of commercialism here—in her essays and novels, the famed author Willa Cather also rails against the "wave of materialism" and the "gospel of money." But her complaint is grounded in the insistence that these rampant commercial values are threatening the existence of "culture" as a disinterested phenomenon; she has no agenda concerning "the ideals of human rights." Her whole stance, rather, is based on an effort to dislocate ideals from practical questions, so what is being obscured, in her eyes, is the absolute distinction between material conditions and ideal considerations; between art, or culture, and purpose; between political, social reform, and the realm of aesthetics. In other words, Willa Cather and Du Bois are both opposed to commercial values, but while Du Bois opposes them because they obscure the greater (political) project of securing rights and defeating race preju-

dice, Cather opposes them for bringing result-oriented thinking to bear on all the things that should be immune to it (culture, art, education).

It is impossible to deny, however, that in privileging the mind, or the place of the intellect, in the battle against racial discrimination, Du Bois' early position, though visionary, could also be interpreted as quite elitist. After all, he was able to spend his time fighting for a "principle" only because his own economic or material concerns were relatively minimal. He had been raised in the North, he had had the rare privilege of a higher education—at Harvard, no less—and he had traveled the world. His personal experiences made it possible for him to assume, for a time, the legitimacy of hierarchies and distinctions that, at their heart, worked to maintain class structure and the idea of a cultural elite. Adopting a platform which echoed that of white genteel liberals such as Charles Eliot Norton, who argued that the cultivated, "trained" set needed to lead the masses in moral and aesthetic training, and who believed in the necessity of the guidance of an educated minority,²⁹ Du Bois formulated his widely known idea of a "Talented Tenth," which he first identified in a 1900 essay as the professionally, culturally educated segment of the black population that would lead the way toward equality. This group—which quickly became known as the mostly Northern, well-educated, black intellectual elite—having had the opportunities denied the majority of the black population, were justified, Du Bois argued, in claiming a knowledge of how best to serve the interests of black communities within the United States: this group would lead the way, lead the less fortunate, the ignorant.

This claim to authority is, in fact, remarkably similar to the party line of genteel liberalism. In Charles Eliot Norton's words, "the success of democratic institutions" required the "intellectual and moral training of the people" by an elite imbued with a sense of "patriotic duty."³⁰ This sense of duty was also crucial to Du Bois' idea of an educated minority. The "Talented Tenth" would, Du Bois admitted, consist of a select few, but only these select few, having acquired a higher education, could possibly advance the race, and knowing this, he thought, they would dutifully take up this calling. Thus, the interest of the Talented Tenth was in reproducing or multiplying its own values, so its "members" were less inclined to acknowledge the unrealistic aspects—the idealism—of their position. At the turn of the century, when the Talented Tenth idea began to circulate, it directly conflicted with the sentiment expressed by Washington five years earlier in his Exposition Address. Calling for a realistic approximation of the future of most African Americans, Washington articulates a form of what might be called "racial realism" in this address. Like other advocates of realism(s) during this period, Washington calls for a look

at hard facts, and urges his listeners to be wary of idealistic thinking: “Our greatest danger,” Washington warns, “is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands.”³¹

While the theory of the “Talented Tenth” did indeed overlook this fact (intentionally, in some respects), in that this elite sector called for higher education as the first goal to be attained, a crucial moment in this story occurs almost fifty years later, in 1948, when Du Bois revises his theory in “The Talented Tenth: Memorial Address”:

Some years ago I used the phrase “The Talented Tenth” meaning leadership of the Negro race in America by a trained few. Since then this idea has been criticized. It has been said that I had in mind the building of an aristocracy with neglect of the masses. . . . I want then to reexamine and restate the thesis of the Talented Tenth which I laid down many years ago.³²

Admitting the validity of the criticism his idea received, Du Bois goes on to acknowledge his own idealism in assuming that elite (educated) black individuals would automatically be committed to the cause of racial uplift, and not just to their own personal advancement:

When I came out of college into the world of work, I realized it was quite possible that my plan of training a talented Tenth might put in control and power, a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men, whose basic interest in solving the Negro problem was personal; personal freedom and unhampered enjoyment and use of the world, without any real care, or certainly no arousing care, as to what became of the mass of American Negroes, or of the mass of any people. My Talented Tenth, I could see, might result in a sort of interracial free-for-all, with the devil taking the hindmost and the foremost taking anything they could lay hands on.³³

“This, historically, has always been the danger of aristocracy,” Du Bois concludes, finally taking to heart the many risks of his Talented Tenth plan, the most prominent being its likelihood of fostering a “selfish” individualism—an individualism dislocated from all sense of civic duty. What Du Bois underestimated, then, is the function of the idea of private gain, finally realizing that such a pursuit could isolate individuals from one another, despite the factor of race.

If Du Bois’ program could produce the possessive individualism fostered by capitalism, and thus inevitably inhibit the formation of the participatory communities of democratic action that are (and were) essential

to self-development and social welfare, then this is another example of the dilemma he faced: how could he provide the opportunity for black students to develop as individuals, which is to say develop independent of racist dogma, yet still ensure the development of an obligatory consciousness concerning the race, or concerning racial solidarity? Early in the century, he wanted to believe that training a small group of "talented" individuals would result in this group's effort to further the cause of democracy, yet he found that such a program could, on the contrary, produce an environment in which individualism would flourish at the expense of this social consciousness. If this means that Du Bois could not at once ask blacks to think beyond race—beyond the entrapments of race—and remember these entrapments enough to be committed to the cause of racial liberation, then this is another manifestation of the dichotomy of the practical and the aesthetic, in the form of a tension between the individual and the community. The community, as such, stays together in a context of identification—its definitive aspect is its dependence on its identity *as* a community. The idea of separate individuals, or independent persons, is antithetical to the idea of a community. For one thing, such independence requires an inward focus or commitment, which is not conducive to community: community is *externally* focused and defined. Hence, its very existence can thwart the development of "psychic individuation."³⁴

The immense task of refiguring the oppositional relationship between the individual and the community is something Du Bois sought to do, in that he sought to create what might be called a community of individuals—a group of individuated citizens who retained a sense of racial solidarity.³⁵ To accept one's role as *either* a member of a group *or* an (insulated) individual was thus reductive for Du Bois. Following this, part of what he found to be problematic in Washington's program seems to be that Washington's platform legitimated the traditional aspects of the individual/community dichotomy, allowing it to remain descriptive and prescriptive of racial difference; when Washington pleaded with his black listeners to accept their station—"cast down your bucket where you are," he urged, "in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service"—he was essentially asking black Americans to accept and perpetuate a group identity, or a community, that was imposed and defined through the very (practical) activities that made individuation all but impossible; as Dewey noted, the "great majority of workers" in these fields had no "direct personal interest" in the ends of their actions.³⁶ In fact, it was the total lack of any claim to individuality in Washington's representations of U.S. blacks that made these representations so palatable to white society—"we shall

stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach," Washington assured, and even went so far as to declare that black workers had little personal interest in their own *lives*—so little that they would relinquish life: we are "ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours," Washington announced to his audience. A complete sacrifice of individuality, an utter lack of personal interest and independence, Washington insisted, made these workers entirely dependable.

The struggle within each dichotomy—practical/aesthetic and community/individual—is thus similar because both dichotomies set up a tension between location, dependence, external responsibility, and context, on the one hand, and dislocation, independence, integral definition, and abstraction, on the other. What this indicates in terms of the sociopolitical sphere, or more particularly, in terms of the dynamics of race and identity, is that the aesthetic of individuality collides with the practical realities and practical concerns engendered by racial discrimination. For one thing, this means that the goal of eliminating racial discrimination is complicated by the fact that an idea of race sits at the heart of such a project, even while the desire to escape the violent boundaries of race is the motivating force. What we learn from the debate between Washington and Du Bois, then, is that individuality is the aesthetic (abstracted, disinterested, independent) version of identity, and as such an ideal, individuality (in this case) has the potential to be quite remote from the practical function of community, and from other practical issues, such as social reform or political activism, which are rarely about anything but the collision of two groups.³⁷

To understand the aesthetic of individuality, in other words, is to understand the interchangeability of individuality and aesthetics: both claim a disengaged position, an independence, a noncontingency—a freedom, essentially, from the social, and from all that the social realm imposes.³⁸ The myth of individuality and the myth of aesthetics therefore function similarly to provide the idea, or ideal, of an autonomous realm—of autonomy itself. When Willa Cather claims that "the artist is of all men the most individual,"³⁹ she is giving voice to this intertwined history of aesthetics and individuality; indeed she is reiterating the classical conception of art as something that cannot be anything but an expression of autonomy, which, of course, means the artist cannot be anything but autonomous (and must be "where the world is not"). Cather's claim that the artist is the "most individual" suggests, in other words, that the agenda of individuality—to individuate—and the agenda of the artist are one and the same: to detach oneself from the community, which means,

especially, from the trappings of the social and the political. Like art, Cather's individuality is (or should) remain apolitical, and not at all interested in reform or location. Thus, the title of her essay—"Escapism"—adequately expresses the kind of idealist individualism she supports. Even Du Bois acknowledges the power, or the allure, of this idealism. "That somehow, somewhere eternal and perfect beauty sits above . . . the facts of the world and the right actions of men," Du Bois writes, "I can conceive," but, he qualifies, "here and now and in the world in which I work they are for me unseparated and inseparable" (511).⁴⁰ What Du Bois calls "eternal and perfect beauty"—the thing that sits above the world of politics, social dynamics, even morals—is what I have been unveiling as "art," or the idea of aesthetics, and now, finally, the myth of individuality. As Du Bois concludes, this "beauty" is only an ideal, and the ideal is that of autonomy. In this article, Du Bois has evolved his theories to the point that he finds such autonomy temporally impossible, which would mean that ideals such as art, aesthetics, and individuality are also temporally impossible. The struggle Du Bois manifests over whether to give up on such idealism—which is closely related to the liberal humanistic notion of universalism, as well as classic democratic individualism—is taken up later by Ralph Ellison, whom I will now turn to, in order to investigate how these questions surface in the work of a writer who, in considering aesthetic theory from his own perspective, argues that fiction is "a thrust toward a human ideal" and that "it approaches that ideal by a subtle process of negating the world of things as given in favor of a complex of *manmade* positives."⁴¹

II. *A Raft of Hope: Fiction and the Democratic Ideal*

Too often we've been in such haste to express our anger and our pain as to allow the single tree of race to obscure our view of the magic forest of art.

—Ralph Ellison, Interview, 1967⁴²

Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a "thinker tinker."

—Ralph Ellison, from the Prologue to *Invisible Man*

"I am a novelist, not an activist," Ralph Ellison says in an interview from 1966, suggesting the division between (his) art and political or social reform. Ellison quickly goes on to qualify this statement, however:

But I think that no one who reads what I write or who listens to my lectures can doubt that I am enlisted in the freedom movement. As an individual, I am primarily responsible for the health of American literature and culture. When I write, I am trying to make sense out of chaos. To think that the writer must think about his Negro-ness is to fall into a trap.⁴³

The “trap” that Ellison is speaking of here is a sense of identity that is in the first place racially based, which is to say community-based. The racial community is a trap, then, if it obligates the individual to such an extent that there is no possibility for individuation. And as Ellison points out, the link between individuality and art is not just profound, but necessary, in an interactive, dynamic sense—he suggests both that the former must precede the latter, *and* that individual identity is a product of artistic exploration. “It is through the problems of art,” Ellison writes elsewhere, “that we seek our individual identities.”⁴⁴ The nature of the “trap,” then, is that it is an interference, a calling that will only mire the individual, keeping the individual from attaining the state of mind *of* an individual; so the trap of thinking of one’s blackness—of feeling obligated to constantly remember this—is finally an impediment to artistic expression, in the sense that the function of such a mindset is to impose limitations. This suggests, once again, that art cannot be apprehended or even produced within the confines of such categories: it is not black, it is not white, it is not gendered—it is rather a universal (human) expression, transcendent of political categories that would in their effects eliminate the climate necessary for the kind of (universal) individuality advocated by what is, essentially, Ellison’s liberal humanism.

A key aspect of Ellison’s remarks is that while he explicitly reiterates the classic distinction between art and politics—he is a “novelist, not an activist,” he is an artist, not a reformer—he also strives to show his consciousness concerning the fact that his work is indeed political, and capable of having great political impact. Furthermore, he exhibits a determined sense of responsibility, emphasizing that individuality does *not* mean unaccountability, and cannot be equated with a lack of duty or lack of concern. In fact, he maintains, it is just the opposite: as such, the literary individual is in his view “responsible” for the “health” of “American literature and culture.” Yet if the individual is responsible, Ellison argues, it is as just that: an individual, not a racial representative.⁴⁵ The difference is that every writer/subject is an individual and is thus responsible for the same “culture,” which although racially inflected, and even racially divergent within its fabric, is nonetheless constitutive of a greater, universal “American” culture that cannot finally be subsumed under the heading of

either (or any) race. His comments thus strike a careful balance between social responsibility—which, in this case, means racial and national consciousness—and individual expression. He claims individuality, but insists that this does not make him a traitor to his race, which is precisely what he was accused of after the publication of *Invisible Man* in 1952.⁴⁶

Declaring that one need not give up individual identity for racial (or black) identity, Ellison points to his own art—which, he says, is the fruit of his individuality—to prove that these two can coexist: he expresses a sense of his identity as both a man and a black man, an individual and a member of a specific, subaltern community. In this respect, he sheds an optimistic light on the problem of “double consciousness” that Du Bois depicted half a century earlier when he wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* of the “twoness” that marked the lives of African Americans. The competition that Du Bois highlighted between the two identities of “American” and “black” can be understood as the competition between a wider human identity and a particular social identity. It is the competition, in other words, between an identity that has the privilege of humanistic neutrality (a deraced identity) and an identity that is defined through a process of highly visible social practices (black—racialized—identity). Ellison addresses the dilemma of these competing identities for the black artist/writer, which, in the paradigm sketched here, is already a contradiction: how can one sense or represent or capture the universality of art if one is so obviously caught in the particular and limited consciousness of the racialized, subaltern subject? The issues encompassed by this question—by the transparent function of this question, which is asked over and over again in order to block particular artists’ attempts to gain critical recognition and access to the marketplace—resonate at the heart of Ellison’s literary philosophy, as he struggles to reconcile an Emersonian liberal individualism with a historical, political consciousness concerning slavery and racial prejudice.⁴⁷

The push for such a reconciliation is a process, detailed in Ellison’s criticism and essays, as well as in the text of *Invisible Man*, and the tension that animates it is a close-enough variant of the tension between art and business or aesthetics and practicality (or vocational and cultural education) to make Ellison’s work a comprehensive stage for the second act of the drama that began with the Washington–Du Bois debates. As Ellison undertakes to unravel and interrogate the coherence of the historically erected split between the realms of aesthetics and politics, he aligns himself with pragmatist principles in a number of important ways, working toward an understanding of philosophical pragmatism as a dialogue between the real and ideal (he asserts, after all, that he is a “thinker-

tinker"). A powerful example of Ellison's preoccupation with these questions can be gleaned "from a long and splendid exchange" with Irving Howe in the pages of *The New Leader*, in which Ellison captures the dilemma imposed on, and internalized by, black writers (and artists),⁴⁸ and reveals the extent to which black writers are pointedly forced, or at least aggressively expected, to write only as an act of political protest, or only in support of the political cause of racial justice. The exchange with Irving Howe began with Howe's famous 1962 essay "Black Boys and Native Sons," in which he chastised Ellison for not replicating "the hard-edged, polemical style of Richard Wright, and for indulging too readily in illusory freedom"⁴⁹ from "the ideological and emotional penalties suffered by Negroes in this country."⁵⁰ Howe was primarily criticizing Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and the essay expresses his disturbance at what he imagined was Ellison's violation of the constraints placed on African American imagined life by the political and racial oppression of the early 1950s. Ellison's reply, an essay entitled "The World and the Jug," was a "bracing rejoinder" to Howe and to anyone (whether white liberal or black nationalist) who would attempt to circumscribe the expression of the black writer.⁵¹ Howe, Ellison persuasively argued, was trying to

[d]esignate the role which Negro writers are to play more rigidly than any Southern politician—and for the best of reasons. We must express "black" anger and "clenched militancy"; most of all we should not become too interested in the problems of the art of literature, even though it is through these that we seek our individual identities. And between writing well and being ideologically militant, we must choose militancy. Well it all sounds quite familiar and I fear the social order which it forecasts more than I do that of Mississippi.⁵²

In this response, Ellison balks at Howe's implication that black writers must stick to a form of literary expression that can be positively traced to a pragmatic purpose or, more specifically, to a political goal. In comparing such a position to the one taken by Southern segregationists, Ellison reveals the separatist sentiment at the heart of Howe's critique, for what Howe demands is a racial differentiation that, far from neutral or liberating, only reproduces the racial hierarchy that is reflected in and perpetuated by the split between "art" and practicality/politics. In Howe's view, black writers are not free, or should not feel free, to engage in aesthetic experimentation, or any artistic expression that does not have an explicit political agenda and declare its cause of origin to be political. This, of course, relegates the black writer to a domain of expression that gives pri-

ority to a group or community mentality, which discourages an individual relationship to art work, making it impossible for the artist/writer to ever be just that—an artist/writer—because she will always be, in the first place, a “black” writer, which is to say, at best, a writer who takes up the activity of writing only as a political act and not for the sake of itself, and at worst, a writer who is not capable of literary “greatness,” because such greatness is a status conferred on those who succeed in aesthetic terms, and aesthetics are disinterested, while black writers, of course, are not.

As Ellison’s remarks indicate, the problem is that the black writer must suffer under the weight of the aesthetics/politics dichotomy, for she “must choose militancy,” which in fact means there is no choice, but rather only the stability of a dichotomy that translates into racial terms and requires the pretext of ideological “militancy” as the singular explanation for a black writer. The claim of disinterest, then, on Ellison’s part, is a political gesture in itself, for it is a direct affront to the racial determination provided by this dichotomy. Like Du Bois, Ellison challenges the racial exclusivity of idealism, and declares that while art might indeed serve a political purpose, the black artist can be just as concerned with—and just as drawn to—“art-for-art’s-sake” as the white artist.

In aspiring to the ideal of disinterestedness, then, in the old-fashioned Arnoldian sense, Ellison is resisting the coercion intended by the dichotomy, for while he conscientiously discusses how black writers are denied the opportunity, or the freedom, to write as an act of what he calls “art,” he also shows, in *Invisible Man* especially, that an aesthetically conscious approach can be integrated with a polemical one, demonstrating this integration both internally and externally: the story of the text makes this point, for *Invisible Man* struggles to reconcile his personal identity with his racial identity, and *Invisible Man* makes this point, for it maintains a double commitment to a discourse of political protest—even militancy—and to one of individualism, despite its remoteness from such an agenda. For Ellison, the ideal reader of *Invisible Man* would be, as he put it, “the person who has the imagination, regardless of what color he is.” Such a reader, Ellison noted in *Shadow and Act*, must remember that “while objectively a social reality, the work of art is, in its genesis, a projection of a deeply personal process” and involves the “deepest psychological motives of the writer.”⁵³

The possibility for art to be deeply personal is then the possibility for the artist to be, on some level, autonomous, which is exactly what the character of Ellison’s *Invisible Man* suggests, for as Ellison points out, this character is an example of an “attempt to reveal personality living within certain conditions,” by which he means specifically African Amer-

ican conditions, or the conditions of racial oppression. The “attempt to reveal personality,” as a hopefully independent gesture, is what Invisible Man strives toward, even though he is continually de-individualized through the process of racialization. Yet while this character is committed to the ideal of individuality—to the idea of cultivating himself as an individual—while his own personal agenda is what drives him, this is only in the beginning of his journey; the underlying and lasting implication of the story has to do with the collective, universal nature of (human) experience, and with the reconciliation of political and aesthetic agendas, for Invisible Man suggests the possibility that his narrative might capture the experience of any reader, regardless of race: “Who knows,” the final line of the novel haunts, “but that on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”⁵⁴

The suggestion of this statement—that Invisible Man can “speak” for anyone besides himself—is an idea that he initially resists out of a strong commitment to his own individuation, which is simultaneously a strong fear of his own disappearance in the event of his becoming (merely) a representative of the “race.” He finally comes to accept such an idea as he learns, throughout the course of the novel, that his sense of individuality need not be extinct in order for him to function as a political ally of the black community.⁵⁵ Yet the novel carefully charts his “dread of absorption by the body politic” of the black community before it eventually takes such a stance, highlighting the complicated issues that come into play when the aesthetic of individuality is challenged by the emergence of racial politics, or racial discrimination.⁵⁶ A powerful example of this point is the scene of the eviction, where Invisible Man makes his first “speech,” the result of which is his introduction to the Brotherhood and the business of political activism. When Invisible Man is approached by an impressed Brother Jack afterwards, and Brother Jack offers him a job, telling him “We need a good speaker for this district,” Invisible Man replies, “I’m sorry. . . . I’m not interested in anyone’s grievances but my own” (286). Denying that he has any political agenda outside of his own personal advancement, Invisible Man’s response here indicates his need to establish an individual identity by extricating himself from the “mob” that signifies the black community. He simply will not “speak” for anyone but himself: he is “not interested.” It is worth noting that “not interested” and “disinterested” are close enough to be representative of the other, both lexically and conceptually.

The fact that Invisible Man did indeed stop at the site of the eviction because, as he tells Brother Jack, he and the couple being evicted are “both black” is the paradox that continually resurfaces for Invisible Man,

as he struggles to navigate his way between his impulse to extricate himself from the black community and his almost instinctive loyalty to it. The centrality of this problem surfaces as early as the scene of the battle royal, which is the first chapter of the novel. In recalling this episode, the protagonist expresses his contempt for the other young men who participated in the melee; he distinguishes himself from the black community, convincing himself that because of his role as "the featured speaker" after the battle, he is different:⁵⁷

I suspected that fighting a battle royal might detract from the dignity of my speech. In those pre-invisible days I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington. But the other fellows didn't care too much for me either, and there were nine of them. I felt superior to them in my way, and I didn't like the manner in which we were all crowded together into the servants' elevator. (17–18)

Imagining himself as "a potential Booker T. Washington" is for Invisible Man to imagine himself as utterly distinct from the rest of black America; as much as Booker T. Washington talked about the "masses," and depicted himself as a representative of the masses, he was still a black man who had power, who had managed to rise above the masses to become a singular figure in the imagination of both white and black communities throughout the United States.

Moreover, although Ellison's protagonist makes explicit reference to Booker T. Washington here, I would argue that this is one of the most apparent allusions in the novel to W. E. B. Du Bois: Invisible Man is singling himself out as Du Bois' Talented Tenth—he is the superior one, and the other nine are representative of the black masses who need to be guided by such an educated, acculturated, elite leader.⁵⁸ Invisible Man is, according to his own assessment as well as the broader standards of education, part of Du Bois' "trained few."⁵⁹ Among the ten black men present, he is the one with an acknowledged talent. His future use of this talent, however, is projected onto the image of Booker T. Washington. He sees himself in Washington's image, and the white Southern men who give him a scholarship to a black college modeled on Washington's Tuskegee Institute associate him with Washington's platform, so that he will continue in "the right direction." This direction is very specifically *not* one toward "social equality" (which is what Du Bois called for): Invisible Man in fact makes a "mistake" in his speech at the smoker, and says "social equality," only to be told that this is unacceptable and that he has "got to know [his] place at all times" (30–31).⁶⁰

At this young age—*Invisible Man* is graduating from high school at the time the battle royal takes place—he is a wide-eyed fan of Booker T. Washington, revering him enough to quote him in his speech; but as *Invisible Man*'s recollection indicates (“in those days”), he attributes this veneration to his youth. Soon after he arrives at college—a model, as I pointed out, of Washington's Tuskegee Institute, which Ellison attended in the early 1930s—*Invisible Man* becomes critical of the environment of such a school and, in turn, presents a critique of Washington. At the heart of the critique is Ellison's consideration of Washington's leadership as a self-serving activity; perhaps, Ellison's narrative suggests, Washington's role as a black leader served his own personal interests before—or above and beyond—the interests of the black community. That the “Founder” in *Invisible Man* is distinguished, somewhat, from Washington thus hardly prevents one from recognizing that Ellison is “anatomizing the assimilative pressures, the disdain for folk culture, and the personal aggrandizement” that Washington's school might have encouraged.⁶¹ This critical perspective on Washington's accommodations to racism is summed up in the famous statue of Washington (which actually exists at Tuskegee) in which the protagonist cannot tell “whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether [he is] witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding” (36). The point here, then, is that *Invisible Man*'s perspective on the Founder evolves along with, or according to, his perspective on the dilemma of black individualism, which can be traced—and is traced in the text—back to the idea of the aesthetic realm being socially dislocated and politically disinterested. In other words, black individualism is a dilemma *because* of the historical, racially invested division between the political and aesthetic realms.

Thus, in the beginning of his journey, *Invisible Man* is concerned that his participation in the group activity of the battle royal will detract from the “dignity” of his speech, which is to say the dignity of his individuality. The aesthetic of the speech is what *Invisible Man* is worried about, which indicates, in turn, that the “dignity” of his speech is dependent on its aesthetic coherence, a coherence that will be disrupted to the extent that he is associated with the group. It is not just the particularly ignominious nature of the activity, then, that offends *Invisible Man*, but the overall fact of his being grouped—lumped—together with the other nine fellows, simply because they are all black. There is an offense to *his* dignity here because he has no status as an individual, only the status of a racialized subject, and there can be no aesthetic success in this status. The status he misses or seeks, however, is not merely that of an individual, then, which implies a deraced subject: rather, because there is no such

thing as a deraced subject, Invisible Man is seeking the status reserved for whites. Individuality, in other words, is reserved for white subjects, or for those who can assimilate into or at least approximate white identity. Like the idea of (disinterested) aesthetics, the aesthetic of individuality is maintained through a process of segregation from anything practical or political; it is attained or embodied only in a circumstance of dislocation from a collective agenda. Even though the white community is a collective or group as well, it is still only the black community that must contend with the inaccessibility of individual identity, simply because it is the white community that defines the terms of the dichotomy.

The association of white subjectivity with individuality is explicitly drawn early on in the novel in another key scene, in which Invisible Man is driving Emerson around, and thinking about some relics from his school's early days:

—photographs of men and women in wagons drawn by mule teams and oxen, dressed in black, dusty clothing, *people who seemed almost without individuality*, a black mob that seemed to be waiting, looking with blank faces, and among them the inevitable collection of white men and women in smiles, clear of features, striking, elegant and confident. . . . I could recognize the Founder and Dr. Bledsoe among them. (39, emphasis mine)

Against the backdrop of a "black mob," Invisible Man remembers whites as the ones who have individual identities in the photograph; this is contested only by Invisible Man's declaration that he could "recognize" the Founder and Dr. Bledsoe (perhaps a character portraying Washington's real-life successor, Robert Russa Moton), which explains why in his younger days, Invisible Man dreamed of being the next Booker T. Washington—this was his dream of being recognized, of being singled out from the black "mob." Ultimately, the aesthetic of individuality is shown in this passage to be interchangeable with the aesthetic of whiteness.

While the adjectives used to describe the whites—"clear," "striking," "elegant," "confident"—suggest Invisible Man's aesthetically conscious relationship to white subjectivity and its own definitive relationship to individuality, he nonetheless recognizes as individuals two black men in the photograph. In the novel, both the Founder and Dr. Bledsoe are men, arguably, who signify assimilation; having successfully distinguished themselves from the rest of black America, these men are now recognizable, and it is not because they have expressed activist commitments to the cause of racial or social equality, but precisely because they have not. Like Booker T. Washington, they have both, on the contrary, accommo-

dated race hierarchy (if only on the outside), and derive their success from this accommodationist platform.⁶² Dr. Bledsoe's advice to Invisible Man is to "let the white folk worry about pride and dignity . . . learn where you are and get yourself power . . . then stay in the dark and use it" (143). Bledsoe's strategy thus appears to be entirely practical, and although it has little to do with the aesthetic that Invisible Man wants to embody, it does reflect or perhaps inspire Invisible Man's impulse to singularize himself through the process of extrication from the black community. "[G]et *yourself* power" is what Bledsoe advises, which is prophetic, in some sense, of Invisible Man's initial response to Brother Jack's request that he "speak" for the Harlem district: "I am not interested in anyone's grievances but my own" (286). Bledsoe and, in this moment, Invisible Man both embody the possibility that Du Bois finally came to terms with regarding his Talented Tenth theory: that it could, as Du Bois noted at mid-century, "put in control and power, a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men, whose basic interest in solving the Negro problem was personal."⁶³

Invisible Man is indeed aware of only a personal interest in this scene with Brother Jack, and goes on to articulate the purely aesthetic—conceptual, abstract, ideal—relationship he has to oration. "I wanted to make a speech," he tells Brother Jack, refusing the job offer, "I *like* to make speeches" (286). Invisible Man's insistence on this "art-for-art's-sake" attitude—an irreducible fancy for speechmaking in and of itself—and his failure to admit or understand the power of his oratory to produce action by others manifest his inclination to relate to public oratory as a realm in which he can discover and protect his own individuality: he has no interest in using these skills as a means to a political end for the community, nor does he have any practical goal in the sense of wanting to produce action.⁶⁴ The action he incites is, as he implies, out of his control, and certainly not intended: "What happened after [the speech]," Invisible Man tells Brother Jack, "is a mystery to me" (286). Brother Jack's response to this insistence on dislocation and disinterest is to openly challenge Invisible Man's commitment to his own individuality. "I can't believe that you're such an individualist as you pretend" (286), he says to Invisible Man, and then goes on to suggest that Invisible Man's responsibility to the black community is not only natural, but inescapable: "You appeared to be a man who knew his duty toward the people and performed it well. Whatever you think about it personally, you were a spokesman for your people and you have a duty to work in their interest" (286).

With this argument, however, Brother Jack only elicits a stubborn response on the part of Invisible Man, who is convinced that this kind of

"duty" is the very thing that stands in the way of his individuality. In his view, he cannot succeed in his attempts at individuation if he is invested in the politics of racial liberation, for these politics are part of an external force that is readily located in a social, practical agenda of reform. "I only wanted to make a speech" (287), Invisible Man repeats after hearing Brother Jack's appeal to his sense of "duty," thus reiterating his lack of interest in the plight of the black community and his commitment to the ideal of aesthetic production, to a disinterested mode of relating to oration as "art," an art, moreover—like all art—that if properly nurtured and segregated (from the practical realms of politics and social reform) will provide the route to individual identity: recall Ellison's argument that it is through the "problems of art" that "we seek our individual identities." Speechmaking, as Invisible Man's art, is thus analogous to writing, which is Ellison's art, and like Ellison, Invisible Man is dedicated to his art as such—*sans* an explicit agenda. Invisible Man tells Brother Jack exactly what Ellison tells his interviewer: He is an artist (or "novelist"), "not an activist."

Thus, when Brother Jack challenges Invisible Man's disinterested relationship to speechmaking by proclaiming his own disbelief—"I can't believe you're such an individualist as you pretend"—he is raising the question of how free Invisible Man really is to remain uninterested in, uncommitted to, or simply dislocated from the active fight for racial justice and equality for all blacks. Brother Jack is indeed implying that such individualism is not a possibility, especially because Invisible Man has a talent, and a talent cannot rightfully be pursued except in the interests of the black community (the notion Du Bois had hoped to advance with his Talented Tenth theory). Brother Jack is, in fact, suggesting something very similar to what Irving Howe wrote when discussing Ralph Ellison in "Black Boys and Native Sons": that black writers/artists have no business engaging in artistic production except as an act of political protest. Recall how Ellison's response to Howe, cited earlier, does indeed present a protest—a protest against Howe's ghettoization of the Negro artist.⁶⁵ Like Howe, Brother Jack is suggesting that Invisible Man's "art" should be or already is linked up with a political agenda, a purpose that is traceable to an alliance with the black community—the possibility of Invisible Man's individualism is practically unthinkable to him, so unthinkable that he does not believe ("cannot believe") it is even real (Invisible Man is only "pretend[ing]" to be an "individualist").

It is worth noting, however, that both Irving Howe and the fictional Brother Jack are presenting a welcome challenge to the classic dichotomy of art and politics, in that they both acknowledge that aesthetic produc-

tion is or should be political, which suggests that ideas are indivisible from action, or activism. In this view, both figures have an affinity with pragmatic principles, and are advancing an anti-aestheticist platform.⁶⁶ Yet the mержence of the two terms of the dichotomy (the realm of aesthetics, art, ideals, ideas, or individuality with the realm of practical politics, action, society, reform) is not exactly revolutionary in the circumstance of black artists. This is because, as Ellison himself observes, the union between art and politics is in this case coercively established, and functions to marginalize black artists as such. Because art is only its definition historically, and because it has been historically—classically—defined as a practice and a product that is utterly removed from political, social, practical interests (despite the Marxist argument to the contrary), the classical culture of art is off-limits to any work that is entrenched in or associated with these interests.

For Ellison to proclaim his allegiance to the classical, aestheticist theory of art—"I think style is more important than political ideologies," he specifically declared in one interview, sounding like his protagonist—is, therefore, a very particular kind of challenge to the practical/aesthetic dichotomy.⁶⁷ It is the same kind of challenge that Du Bois presented merely by insisting that a liberal arts education, a "knowledge of culture," was necessary to the healthy advancement of blacks in the United States, although such an education had no immediate practical location or ramifications, and even threatened to bolster an aristocratic idealism. The challenge they are presenting is largely conceptual, which is precisely the point: that the conceptual is and should be an accessible realm or facet of black education, black art, and black society in general. The point is thus not to suggest that Ellison is promoting an aristocratic concept of art and culture that, rooted in "style," ignores the role of art as propaganda, but rather that Ellison, like Du Bois, engaged in a radical reconceptualization of the role of art in—or for—the black community, in the sense that he insisted that art and writing produced by black individuals could and should be stylistic and aesthetically conscious, and not necessarily politically interested or reform-oriented.⁶⁸ This is, of course, a protest, and is profoundly political; it is an insertion of the black subject into the category of individuality, an insertion of black-identified art into the category of disinterested aesthetic achievement. While on the surface this insertion proclaims a decontextualization—a removing of the black artist from the context of racipolitics and practical concerns, placing her finally "where the world is not"—it is actually a position that provides a more definitive contextualizing, for it illuminates the extent to which racial factors dictate the standards of aesthetics. More generally, to allow

for the ramifications of this position would be to allow for the claim that marginalized, subaltern artists or subjects who insist on the primacy of style can be progressive—merely because they are going against the tradition (if they are black) that is imposed by both the white and black communities—while white, or culturally dominant, artists who espouse this kind of aestheticism are just reiterating a tradition of exclusion, a tradition that is rooted in class and/or caste. It all depends, in other words, on the source—which is the same thing as saying that the political meaning or effects of aesthetic theory depend on that theory's contextual origins.

It follows then that when Brother Jack insists that Invisible Man has a duty to the black community, he is asking him to never forget his racial identity, which is interpreted as a form of oppression by both Ellison and his protagonist—Invisible Man's response is compatible with Ellison's remarks concerning the constant internal reminder of one's "Negroness": to think like this is, for the black artist, "to fall into a trap."⁶⁹ Yet Invisible Man ignores the potential trap of racio-political activism, and agrees to join the ranks of the Brotherhood so that he may be paid to pursue his "art." "It was, after all, a job that promised to exercise my talent for public speaking" (291), Invisible Man explains, specifying his lack of investment in the cause. The public performance of speechmaking interests Invisible Man solely because it enables him to hope that he will achieve the goal articulated by his college literature professor, who, in discussing James Joyce's hero Stephen, tells Invisible Man that "our task is that of making ourselves individuals" (345–46). Although there is no mandate that individuality be private, it seems that Invisible Man's desire to stand alone has required, up until this point, a degree of privacy, which is why it is ironic that Invisible Man turns to the most public of activities to develop and ensure the most private of entities: his individual self. Thus while the Brotherhood publicly rebukes individualism ("individuals . . . don't count," Brother Jack tells Invisible Man), the organization wins Invisible Man over precisely by taking advantage of his need for individualism—Brother Jack makes a point of emphasizing that Invisible Man's job is "not to *ask* [the public] what they think, but to *tell* them" (462). If Invisible Man is not, in other words, interacting with the community in a give-and-take, cooperative *relationship*, where there is a mutual participation, but is rather isolating himself and determining the interaction between himself and the audience in a self-sufficient and indeed independent manner, this is what makes for individualism—of one kind.

But the minute the Brotherhood withdraws its support for Invisible Man, it becomes clear that he is largely dependent on the black community for his achievement of individuation. Charging Invisible Man with

“petty individualism,” the Brotherhood demonstrates its ultimate power over him, “removing” him from Harlem. Invisible Man is left with the realization that he is profoundly, undeniably connected to the community he has been “speaking” to, which is to say he realizes he has indeed been speaking *for* the community, as he would speak *for himself*: “I had learned that the clue to what Harlem wanted was what *I* wanted; and my value to the Brotherhood . . . depended upon my complete frankness and honesty in stating the community’s hopes and hates, fears and desires” (398). This identification with Harlem indicates the extremity of Invisible Man’s ties with the black community. He is so identified, in fact, that he understands his experience—his desires, his hopes—as indistinguishable from those of Harlem. Finally, he begins to see the impossibility of a disengaged, dislocated, disinterested pursuit of his own “art,” and finds his individual subjectivity in relation to the community. A persuasive example of this point is apparent in Invisible Man’s relationship to Tod Clifton, a black ex-Brother who is murdered by the police, for this part of Invisible Man’s story confirms that Invisible Man has experienced a revelation: he is finally capable of understanding the black community to be a group of individuals,⁷⁰ at the same time that he becomes capable of understanding and willing to understand his role as a member of this community. I am reading Invisible Man’s examination of Clifton’s murder as exemplary of these claims based on two scenes; the first is Invisible Man’s speech—or eulogy—to the Harlem community after Clifton’s murder. The second is the disciplinary meeting that takes place between Invisible Man and the leaders of the Brotherhood after this speech.

In his speech to Harlem after Clifton has been murdered, Invisible Man focuses intently on the issue of Clifton’s “name,” repeating “his name was Clifton” over and over again, before each thing he says. With this tactic Invisible Man accomplishes the task of individuating this man, while ultimately realizing his own role as a “speaker” for this community. “They were listening intently,” he says of the crowd, “and as though looking not at me, but at the pattern of my voice upon the air” (444). Invisible Man is thus accepting the fact that to these people, he is not an individual at this moment, but a “voice” who will speak to individuate Clifton so that the community might fully comprehend this loss of life, both as a personal and as a political event. “Have you got it? Can you see him?” Invisible Man asks the crowd, personalizing the tragedy: “Think of your brother or your cousin John” (444). When he finishes his speech, he has transformed his view of both himself and the black community. Unlike the earlier impression Invisible Man had when he encountered a black group—recall he saw only a “black mob”—now he sees the com-

munity in a drastically new light: "And as I took one last look I saw not a crowd but the set faces of individual men and women" (447).

Thus Invisible Man can now accept himself as a member of the community, and as a speaker for the community; he is no longer a singularly aspiring individualist who needs to differentiate himself from the "black mob."⁷¹ Unlike his agenda upon arriving in New York, which led to his taking the job as speaker for Harlem, Invisible Man does not continue to be an example of Du Bois' Talented Tenth gone awry—black men who acquired an education only, as Du Bois noticed, to pursue "the distinct and single-minded idea, of seeing how much they could make out of it for themselves, and nobody else."⁷² Invisible Man is not interested any longer in turning his education and talent into advantages merely for himself.

The new posturing of Invisible Man as both an individual *and* a conscientious community member is captured in the phrase Invisible Man uses to explain why he took unauthorized action in organizing Clifton's funeral. He went ahead, he tells the committee, on his "personal responsibility," only to be castigated by Brother Jack and the others for taking the initiative as an organizer. The evolution of Invisible Man's thought concerning the concept of "responsibility" is indicated in the fact that initially this word is preceded by "social," and is accepted by the white men in the room when Invisible Man uses this phrase after his graduation speech: the particular phrase "social responsibility" is associated with the accommodationist politics of Booker T. Washington. It implies a responsibility to the white community, and to the idea of racial harmony *without* social equality. In the later meeting with the Brotherhood Committee, Invisible Man's use of the phrase "personal responsibility" is a clear indication that he is now personally invested in the cause of social/racial equality for the benefit of the black community at large. But it is not so simple as saying that this means he is reconciled to the idea of self-sacrifice, which is what Brother Jack keeps repeating to Invisible Man in the disciplinary meeting as the foremost value of the organization. Invisible Man is interested now out of an impulse toward self-preservation. Once the Brotherhood tells him he is *not* an individual—"you were not hired to think. Had you forgotten that? . . . [Y]ou were hired to talk" (458)—Invisible Man realizes his role as speechmaker has not been what he thought. He was hired only as a practical hand, an instrument, and what he had conceived as his disinterested art form has turned out to be his participation in a structure that resembles the hierarchy of capital and labor.

Before this meeting, however, Invisible Man has already desegregated the realms of thought and action: he has embraced the political-activist

component of his job, abandoning the disinterestedness he began with. He is interested in thinking both for himself and for the community, talking for himself and for the community. His art has become his political form. This resolution of aesthetics and politics, art and reform, individuality and community, is sustained up until and reiterated at the very end of the novel when Invisible Man announces that he is “coming out” and “it’s damn well time. Even hibernations can be overdone, come to think of it.” He then continues on, noting that his hibernation underground—which can symbolize, arguably, the most profound, radical individualism possible in that it is utter dislocation and isolation—is not the answer, and may indeed be his “greatest social crime,” since, as he puts it, “there’s a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play” (568).⁷³ Recall that Ellison, echoing his protagonist, said that “as an individual, I am primarily responsible for the health of American literature and culture.” Part of this responsibility, then, Ellison implies with the last line of *Invisible Man*, is to illuminate the universal, collective aspects of humanity and art (the *human* family), while never losing sight of the particular experiences that do indeed construct social categories (that inspire racial self-identification) and the individuals who must live according to the realities imposed by these categories.

A Social Act

Individuality operating in and for the end of the common interest.

— John Dewey, defining a “positive conception of freedom” (Westbrook, 1991, 93)

In speaking about *Invisible Man* Ellison has said that in the end of the novel, his protagonist’s return from his isolation is “a social act; it is not a resignation from society but an attempt to come back and be useful.”⁷⁴ This choice to “come back and be useful” after such a reclusive period signals Invisible Man’s reconciling himself with his racial identity, or agreeing, as it were, to take on this identity in a personal, pragmatic sense. This, as I have argued, means he is prepared to invest himself in the cause of the racialized community. Ultimately, he advances this cause by recommitting himself to the political agenda of racial justice—by determining that he has a “socially responsible role to play.” Ellison, too, is deeply interested in advancing the cause of social justice, which he accomplishes with the circulation of this novel, because, above all else, *Invisible Man* is a reconstruction of the fight against racial discrimination:

Ellison does not present a narrative—or characters—that can be easily categorized or fit to match the pre-existing shapes of this fight (nor did his own life reflect a conventional commitment to racial solidarity, if Arnold Rampersad's 2007 biography is accurate). Instead, Ellison raises the most controversial questions—at an extremely, dangerously critical moment—and provides controversial answers.⁷⁵ In effect, this novel set a new example, for according to *Invisible Man*, there is no simple definition of race, culture, politics, protest, identity, or art.

In the wide view, the very example set by *Invisible Man* has to do with the freedom black writers can exercise to go about their craft any way they like. By refusing to follow the dogmatic formula at work in the idea of "black art," which demands that the writer make a clearly visible statement about his or her agenda, Ellison carved out a new territory of protest, and in this sense, he did not merely demand reform, or dictate reform agendas: he did reform. *Invisible Man* broadened the horizon of expression for black writers, and insisted that freedom—in art, in writing, in life—needed to be founded on the protection of an individual's right to choose.⁷⁶ No one finally convinced Invisible Man that he should rededicate himself to the cause of the black community; his decision is based on his own personal experience, and his allegiance to this community, rather than being blind, is cultivated in the process of a prolonged consideration of the many complex elements that characterize the individualist/activist dichotomy. In differentiating himself from his literary peers, Ellison exemplified the elusive and controversial idea of black individuality, and, one could argue, strongly suggested that the political meaning or effects of aesthetic theory depend on that theory's contextual origins, which is a powerfully subtle critique of what might be called protest art. "I'll be my kind of militant," Ellison proclaimed, and then reaffirmed his sense of himself as a "black" man, in effect opening up the doors to a new way of thinking about resistance, which could only serve to promote the agenda of black liberation at mid-century.⁷⁷

In conclusion, it might be said that the idea of relationship is ultimately at the heart of Ellison's aesthetic theory; as I point out above, this comes out at the end of *Invisible Man*: the "social act" of the protagonist is a fundamental endorsement of relationship, of dialogue—between the individual and the community, between races, between practicality (being "useful") and aesthetics, between hope and change. In this work by Ellison, we thus find sociality or relationship affirmed as the most glorious enhancement of individuality and the most promising commitment one could make, as a person and an artist. The social act—or social activism—is thus a threat because it promises to discredit definitions of

culture and art that have historically and purposefully relied on the ideal of disinterest to refuel their influence and maintain the status quo. In the end, political or social activism, or efforts toward reform, can only continue to unmask the aesthetic ideals that would keep the formation of a more democratic society at bay. This is to say that in the end, there is an end, a purpose, to everything, and to restore conscientious continuity between this reality and the pursuance of something like autonomy—in art or aesthetics or personhood—is more productive than to deny the fact that autonomy, in the absolute sense, is nothing but an interested ideal.

Individuals will always be the center and consummation of experience, but what the individual actually *is* in his life experience depends upon the nature and movement of associated life.

—John Dewey¹

“Independence” . . . middle-class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.

—George Bernard Shaw (*Pygmalion*, Act V)

SPEAKING BROADLY, to be “where the world is not” seems impossible, though we might like to believe—on the political Right or Left—that there is such a pure, functionless place. In this place, we would not be connected too much, we might have no duty to others or to any cause outside ourselves; we could judge art and all things objectively, thrive autonomously, upholding, ad infinitum, aesthetic disinterestedness and the romantic ideals of self-reliance and independence. Throughout this book I have delved into the many implications of believing in or arguing for the “where the world is not” view, showing that for decades, a heated battle was waged over the preservation of this autonomous realm: arguments flared about how it signals disinterest, refinement, truth, individuality, and beauty, and how it influences and interacts with democratic possibility. To be sure, the protection of the abstract realm as such is still being debated; yet, to a great extent, pragmatism helped to establish that far from there being a place where the world is not, everything and everyone are always of the world; its politics, machinery, meanings, and history cannot disappear, even for the sacred work of art. Yet where does this leave us? As writers, artists, citizens? As a world community? Within a world that we cannot escape? Yes, to some extent—but not wholly. This kind of confined understanding would be too deterministic, too discouraging, and not really accurate. Even if we cannot “lift” ourselves up into

Willa Cather's "clear firmament" because it does not exist, we are nonetheless able to engage in a reshaping of our world.

Without recuperating aesthetic disinterestedness, I would finally propose that there is a progressive role for abstraction—one that promotes democratic engagement. After all, isn't hope—as a form of utopianism—about that which is above or beyond the world, but that which is possible? Hope, as pragmatism notes, is a necessary, practical imagining, having everything to do with agency, politics, and social struggle. We do not cede the capacity or will to imagine a different, better world just because we think that detachment or disinterestedness is a fantasy. Nor do we fail to see that utopian thought can be used for practical purposes and does not necessarily deny the world. Anson Rabinach argues that at best, utopian thinking "points beyond the given [world] while remaining within it."² Our ideal world is something we can thus continue to imagine with a democratic desire that outlasts and outperforms the concrete world built around us, so that the world evolves to reflect this desire. We can, as David Harvey has urged, vigorously take up the imagined possibility in hopeful action, jumping on Ellison's raft, if you will, to challenge undemocratic realities. "There is a time and a place in the ceaseless human endeavor to change the world," Harvey writes, "when alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change. I believe we are precisely at such a moment."³ If, as Harvey advocates, we try to make the world something other than what it is, something that serves the life-interests of all individuals and the planet, we are engaging in the project of active hope, which is a pragmatist project, a democratic project, and a humanly possible one at that. I would sum up at this point by returning to William James, who pragmatically admits "the presence of resisting facts in every actual experience," but who also insists, in a formulation steeped in democratic desire, that "the world stands really malleable waiting to receive its final touches by our hands."⁴

Introduction

1. John Dewey, fifth chapter of *Reconstruction of Philosophy* (1920), enlarged ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), p. 118.

2. *Social Research* 64 (1997): 965–88.

3. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 174. All future references to the text will be cited with page numbers in parentheses.

5. Many critics have made the observation that *Gatsby* is dedicated to the future—too many to name here; most tend to seize on the famous line “*Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future.*” Among the recent critics who have paid attention to what I am calling a sort of “futurism” are Robert Seguin and John F. Callahan. Also see considerations of this theme from other decades, including Jeffrey Steinbrink’s “Boats Against the Current’: Mortality and the Myth of Renewal in *The Great Gatsby*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 26, no. 2 (1980): 157–70; Edwin S. Fussell’s “Fitzgerald’s Brave New World,” *English Literary History* 19, no. 4 (1952): 291–306; and John Fraser’s “Dust and Dreams and *The Great Gatsby*,” *English Literary History* (1965) 32, no. 4: 554–64. See also Naoki Nishi’s discussion of the future-orientation of *Gatsby* in “American Conceptualization of Time and Jonathan Edwards’ Post-Millennialism Reconsidered,” *The Japanese Journal of American Studies*, 15 (2004): 19–36.

6. John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 19.

7. William James, “What Pragmatism Means” (1907), in Hollinger and Capper, eds., *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 118.

8. This oft-quoted formulation of “reality” as “still in the making” can be found in *Pragmatism* (1907), in *William James: Writings 1902–1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Library of America, 1987), p. 599.

9. David Kadlec demonstrates that James had read Emerson’s essay in his book *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 246, n30. I am indebted to Kadlec on this point and also on the more general point of my own that *Gatsby* has an anarchic sense of time,

although this is something Kadlec never discusses. On the Emerson essay: the skeptic in this essay on Montaigne takes a position between that of “the abstractionist and the materialist,” “each of whom,” Kadlec notes, “treats the world as more solid than it is” (246). We are in fact “spinning like bubbles in a river . . . bottomed and capped and wrapped in delusions.” Montaigne, the wise skeptic, develops a philosophy of “fluxions and mobility,” a “ship in these billows we inhabit . . . tight, and fit to the form of man” (1850). *Representative Men*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

10. Robert D. Richardson, Prologue, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

11. It might be tempting here to adapt Stanley Cavell’s memorably provocative question “What’s the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?” and ask what we can achieve by understanding Gatsby’s association with pragmatism. See Stanley Cavell, “What’s the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?” in Morris Dickstein, ed., *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 79. Also see Randy L. Friedman’s discussion of Cavell and pragmatism in “Traditions of Pragmatism and the Myth of the Emersonian Democrat,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 43, no. 1 (2007): 154–84. My approach to Cavell’s question would be to highlight the place of literature in the formation and dispersion of ideas, as a primary, knowledgeable actor in the history of ideas. As Michael Wood has recently argued in *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), in a discussion about “what literature knows,” literature “reports on what happens and on what may happen,” while making “very special calls on us” (pp. 9 and 4). Among these calls, I would argue, is for us to engage in literary criticism that welcomes “investigations of texts and ideas—especially when these are located in time and space and explicated, in part, in terms of a wider historical context” (Anthony Grafton, “The History of Ideas: Precept and Practice, 1950–2000 and Beyond,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 1 [2006]: 30–31). Anthony Grafton, the new editor of *Journal of the History of Ideas*, further explains in “The History of Ideas: Precept and Practice, 1950–2000 and Beyond” the most current sense of intellectual history: “What, then, does the new Journal stand for? If it succeeds . . . [i]t will . . . be open to the investigation of books and other material objects, so long as these have a direct relation to larger questions in intellectual history” (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 1 [2006]: 30–31). In this sense, the luminous figure of Jay Gatsby can be usefully reread to provide a more complete picture of a past era, of how the theater of a philosophical movement, still loudly active today, emerged in and distinguished itself with the special voice of literature. What’s more, this novel in particular can resonate with Cavell’s answer to his own question. Calling for a revised historical perspective, Cavell wants us to “understand Emerson as essentially the forerunner of pragmatism” so that we can see how pragmatism is actually transcendentalist, so that we do not “repress Emerson’s difference” or deny that pragmatism is and has (like “America”) a “struggle with itself” (179). Gatsby’s character can arguably echo this same struggle.

12. Gatsby’s goal of inventing something in order to profit is easily situated in the context of what Walter Benn Michaels calls the “so-called American dream.” Yet, I am suggesting that the more subtle invitation is to look at his goal as a busy sign of the particular period in which Fitzgerald wrote and set his famous novel, with wide-ranging implications. Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 2. Importantly, the reader of this study should be aware that I do not intend to offer an exhaustive explication of this instance in *The Great Gatsby*: my upcoming analysis of this novel’s historical context is supposed to be brief, aimed more to characterize exegetic possibilities than to advance a comprehensive argument—a wider, more thorough critique comes in later chapters that

focus on other texts. Nonetheless, my consideration of *Gatsby*, though telegraphic, should launch the ideas that fuel this study, and provoke readers to think anew about “what may well be the most widely read work of fiction written by an American in the twentieth century” (James L. W. West III, “Almost a Masterpiece,” *Humanities* 21, no. 1 [Jan./Feb. 2000]). This article by West is adapted in part from the introduction and historical commentary for *Trimalchio: An Early Version of “The Great Gatsby”* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000]). If my suggestions about *Gatsby* are stirring enough, moreover, they will call for the work that can be done in this area, and perhaps carry implications for visionary characters in novels not explored in these pages.

13. In *The Economic History Review* 59, no. 4 (Nov. 2006), Ian Inkster notes that the “total gross global patent registrations amounted to some three million for the years 1870–1913, compared to perhaps not much more than 500,000 in the entire history of patenting to 1870” (p. 869). According to Edward W. Byrn, author of “The Progress of Invention during the Past Fifty Years,” published in the *Scientific American*, 75 (July 25, 1896), the number of patents issued annually in the United States alone more than doubled between 1866 and 1896, and the number for each person increased more than 1.75 times. This rate of expansion continued up through the early 1920s.

14. A few recent books take up the question of pragmatism as a literary genre and also the question of pragmatism and literary history generally. Significantly, none of these books makes the arguments of this book, and none deals with the same literary texts. These are Jonathan Levin (1999), a collection edited by the German scholar Winfried Fluck (1999), David Kadlec (2001), Stephen John Mack (2002), Sami Ludwig (2002), Michael C. Magee (2004), and Joan Richardson (2007).

15. Most recently, in the field of literary criticism, see Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Richardson’s focus is quite distinct from my own, and she does not treat the same literary authors. Also see Robert Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, which won the Bancroft Prize for 2007. For an account of work being done in democracy studies, in the form of a book review, see English professor Dana Nelson’s article “Democracy in Theory,” *American Literary History* 19 (Jan. 2007): 86–107. An example of the movement in literature and democracy studies not reviewed by Nelson is Patrick Deneen and Joseph Romance, eds., *Democracy’s Literature: Politics and Fiction in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

16. It’s worth noting that the only book that in some of its points treats similar subjects, albeit in different texts and a different critical context, is Claire Pettit’s study of nineteenth-century British literary history in relation to intellectual property issues, *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Pettit’s analysis is quite different from mine, although her insightful book serves to clarify many of the issues as they arise in the sphere of “British” literature and culture in her chosen period.

17. There are too many texts that could fall into this category to treat in one study and still do close readings. One could certainly go further, in either direction historically, to find literary characters and plotlines that consider invention, both in depth and in passing. Saul Bellow’s *Seize the Day* (1956), which takes after *Gatsby* thematically, includes several references to actual inventorship (Dr. Adler claims he is an inventor, and, less literally, Tommy changes his name, similar to *Gatsby*); earlier, William Dean Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) discusses a patent-rights dispute and associates inventors with the lower classes. Hemingway mentions inventors several times in *The Sun Also Rises* (1925), and in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) Max says that “the invention of machines” ended slavery. Henry James also pays attention to the sign of invention, in both *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903) and *The*

Bostonians (1886). In *Beast* John Marcher “would have liked to invent something,” and in *The Bostonians* Verena argues that “we might invent something better,” after observing that “the most brilliant thing they have been able to invent” are instruments for killing. These examples are just a few among many, illustrating why the study of literary texts I undertake is necessarily selective.

18. The term “Democratic desire” has been used in various contexts by different theorists going back to Alexis de Tocqueville. I cast a wide net in using this phrase, and intentionally refrain from giving it a narrow definition. However, by “democratic desire” I mean to signal a desire—on the part of a society, a culture, or an individual—for social, political, and economic opportunity and mobility. Robert A. Dahl’s idea of “inclusive citizenship” applies here, although he names this as just one aspect of an actual democracy. See Irving Louis Horowitz’s excellent essay “Democracy’s Visions and Divisions” for a discussion of “the three competing theories of democracy,” which are “the political, the cultural, and the distributive” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 25 [Feb. 2006]: B10). Returning to Tocqueville, in a section of *Democracy in America* called “Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restive in the Midst of Their Well-Being,” Tocqueville defined democratic desire as simply the “desire for equality” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 514. More recently, Slavoj Žižek has written of “democratic desire in all its forms, from political pluralism to flourishing market economy,” in “Eastern Europe’s Republics of Gilead” (*New Left Review* 1/183 [Sept.–Oct. 1990]: 58). And Edward Rothstein has used the phrase in a *Partisan Review* interview (2002), in which he says that “democracy still allows stirrings of aspiration or ambition, demands for attention and admiration, desires for transcendent understanding—impulses that shape many of a culture’s greatest achievements” (*Partisan Review* 69, no. 4 [2002]).

19. Deneen and Romance, Introduction to *Democracy’s Literature*, p. 5. The Arendt quote is also taken from Deneen and Romance.

20. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.

21. This book will proceed under the assumption that literature and intellectual history are intertwined already, in other words, and thus will not treat them as distinctly different things. In addition to Michael Wood’s book, cited above, there are other recent books on the subject of literature’s role in cultural debate and evolution. Derek Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004) “explores literature as event or performance and brilliantly retheorizes its place in the realm of the ethical” (this is from the book’s self-description). Other interesting treatments are Marjorie Garber’s *A Manifesto for Literary Studies* (Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities Short Studies, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003) and Frank Farrell’s *Why Does Literature Matter?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Both Farrell and Garber suggest an approach to literary criticism that agrees with my own on one level only: that literature and literary criticism have the ability to change the world.

22. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 1995), p. 224. It is important to note here, also, that I agree with the many recent calls for the transnationalization of “American” literary studies, and from this perspective, I do not see Ellison’s use of the term “American” as stable or coherent. In “A Transnational Poetics,” *American Literary History* 18, no. 2 (2006), Jahan Ramazani has noted, for example, “Although literary scholarship is not a branch of the Bureau of Immigration and Citizenship Services, as the INS has recently been renamed, critics co-construct the national and ethnic identities of writer-citizens, routinely issuing passports to T. S. Eliot, Mina Loy, W. H. Auden, Denise Levertov, and Sylvia Plath, for example, in the shape of footnotes, literary histories, and anthologies that claim them as ‘American’ or ‘British’” (331–32). Because these national labels are

made to serve disciplinary, ideological, and pedagogical functions, they often blur the distinction encapsulated by globalization theorist Étienne Balibar between “ethnos, the ‘people’ as an imagined community of membership and filiation, and demos, the ‘people’ as the collective subject of representation, decision making, and rights.” While literature, as Benedict Anderson shows in his 1983 book of the same name, helps fashion “‘imagined community,’ or ethnos, poets, novelists, playwrights, and readers also confound the boundaries of national and regional community, forging alliances of style and sensibility across vast distances of geography, history, and culture. . . . How might the field seem different if the nationalities and ethnicities of poets and poems, often reified by nation-based histories, anthologies, and syllabi, were genuinely regarded as hybrid, interstitial, and fluid imaginative constructs, not ‘natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units’ in Werner Sollors’s phrase?” (331–34).

23. George Hutchinson, from Introduction to *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

24. Barbara Will, “The Great Gatsby and the Obscene Word,” *College Literature* 32, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 125–44.

25. B. Zorina Khan and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, “Institutions and Democratic Invention in 19th-Century America: Evidence from ‘Great Inventors,’ 1790–1930,” *American Economic Review* 94 (2004): 395–401. According to Khan and Sokoloff, “As early as 1805 Congress stipulated that the Secretary of State should publish an annual list of patents granted the preceding year, and after 1832 also required the publication in newspapers of notices regarding expired patents. The Patent Office in Washington itself was a source of centralized information on the state of the arts, but it also maintained repositories throughout the country, where inventors could forward their patent models at the expense of the Patent Office. Rural inventors could apply for patents without significant obstacles, because applications could be submitted by mail free of postage” (p. 16, n35).

26. B. Zorina Khan, *The Democratization of Invention: Patents and Copyrights in American Economic Development, 1790–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 9.

27. Khan and Sokoloff, “Institutions and Democratic Invention,” pp. 395–401.

28. The term “class other” is borrowed from Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

29. Khan quotes Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, “whose brilliant decisions are enshrined in modern patent and copyright laws,” saying to an audience of ordinary mechanics in 1829: “Ask yourselves, what would be the result of one hundred thousand minds . . . urged on by the daily motives of interest, to acquire new skill, or invent new improvements.” Khan then writes that the “answer was not long in coming, for the next few decades would lay the foundation for American industrial and cultural supremacy” (3).

30. Here I am thinking of part of Khan’s definition of democracy: “a concept that is easily recognizable in its entirety but more contentious in the details, which can be as subtle as they are multifarious. . . . [It] entails the equality of opportunity, and equal access to political and economic institutions” (1).

31. Khan argues in her book that “[t]he patent system exemplified one of the most democratic institutions in early American society, offering secure property rights to true inventors, regardless of age, color, marital status, gender, or economic standing” (9). She carefully shows that the “patterns of patenting, when linked to biographical information, show that the expansion of markets and profit opportunities stimulated increases in inventive activity by attracting wider participation from relatively ordinary individuals. The technical skills and knowledge required for effective invention during this era were widely diffused among the general population. Rather than an elite that possessed rare technical skills or commanded large stocks of resources, the

rise in patenting was associated with a democratic broadening of the ranks of patentees to include individuals, occupations, and geographic districts with little previous experience in invention. . . . *Scientific American* would later proclaim that the United States advanced ‘not because we are by nature more inventive than other men—every nationality becomes inventive the moment it comes under our laws—but because the poorest man here can patent his devices’” (9).

32. See Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 1995).

33. See Michaels, *Our America*. Michaels reads this same passage and associates it with what he calls “nativist modernism,” but even his trenchant analysis misses this “science and art” piece of the dialogue. Michaels rightly suggests that *The Great Gatsby* needs to be understood in light of the historical moment in which it was written. As Barbara Will has also more recently noted, in discussing Michaels’s groundbreaking argument, “this is a moment in which American isolationist fervor is at its peak[,] . . . a moment marked by the social movement of nativism, with its support of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 and its battle cry ‘America for the Americans.’ It is also a moment in which the discourse of ‘Americanism’—the nativists’ privileged term—is linked indubitably to the discourse of whiteness. . . . For these and other nativists, keeping ‘American blood’ pure—i.e., purely white—in the face of alien expansion was a predominant concern; and one that contributed its ideological part to a host of post-War social measures, from quotas to IQ tests, that were meant to establish and affirm the whiteness or ‘Nordicism’ of the nation” (“*The Great Gatsby* and the Obscene Word,” *College Literature* 32, no. 4 [Fall 2005]: 134).

34. There are many indicators that the purpose and definition of “art” had become a cultural dispute, not the least of which is the defense of art as an ethically and politically neutral category found in the late-nineteenth-century “British Aestheticism” of Rossetti, Swinburne, Pater, and Wilde. For a recent discussion of this movement and how it might be experiencing a comeback in the twenty-first century, see Nicholas Shrimpton, “The Old Aestheticism and the New” in *Literature Compass* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 1–16. Also, for a discussion on the social purpose of art during this period, see Mark Antliff, “Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism: The ‘Aestheticism’ of the ‘Action d’art’ Group, 1906–1920,” *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (1998): 99–120. See also the argument made by theorist Clive Bell, author of *Art* (1914), particularly his essay “Significant Form” (1914) in J. Hospers, ed., *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (New York: The Free Press, 1969). For an opposing view, see Leo Tolstoy’s 1898 book, *What Is Art?* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1994), pp. 88–91. Tolstoy argues that the moral import of art in society is essential to the (aesthetic) value of that art. For a sense of how art was placed in the middle of the fray of a surge for social reform, and how Deweyan pragmatism conceived of the role of art in society, see Tracie E. Costantino, “Training Aesthetic Perception: John Dewey on the Educational Role of Art Museums,” in *Educational Theory* 54, no. 4 (2004): 399–417. See the next chapter of this book for a discussion of how “science” became a site of cultural controversy.

35. On the contributions of aesthetic ideals to the legitimization of white supremacy by modern discourse, see Cornel West, “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” in *Prophesy Deliverance! Towards an Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982). For a critique of the hierarchical racial effects of false universalism in aesthetics, see Sylvia Wynter, “Rethinking ‘Aesthetics’: Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice,” *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, ed. Mbye Cham (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), pp. 237–79. On the workings of “racialized aestheticization” (which pertains, among other things, to the whitening of aesthetic concepts, relational structures, and the forms of subjectivity and exchange they help to mediate) and “aesthetic racialization” (which includes the aestheticization of white cultural formations), see Monique Roelofs, “Racialization as an Aesthetic Production:

What Does the Aesthetic Do for Whiteness and Blackness and Vice Versa?" in *White on White/Black on Black*, ed. George Yancy, pp. 83–124 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

36. This term is taken from David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, 10th ann. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p. 93.

37. See note 18 for a description of the phrase "democratic desire." Civilization is going to pieces in more ways than one. As the historian David Hollinger has shown, it was becoming more apparent during the early 1920s that "the significance of ethnoracial groups for American society was radically unresolved," and philosophers such as Horace Kallen were emphasizing "the integrity and autonomy of each descent-defined group," a pluralistic approach that advocated against immigrants conforming to the mold "created in the self-image of the Anglo-Protestants who claimed prior possession of America" (92). See Hollinger, *Postethnic America*. In *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (1924) and other earlier works, Kallen's call for each group to preserve their differences rather than melt into the pot was indeed a call to keep the "pieces" separate.

38. From this angle, his character momentarily breaks into the realm of high society out of his desire to become a beneficiary of a system being strenuously proposed during this time by renowned pragmatists. As James Kloppenberg shows in a recent historical study of the early pragmatists, "the ideals of democracy . . . provided the norms that guided them." "An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?," in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 88.

39. William James, "What Pragmatism Means" (1907), in Hollinger and Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, p. 118.

40. See Jane Garrity, "Selling Culture to the 'Civilized': Bloomsbury, British *Vogue* and the Marketing of National Identity," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 29–58. Also see William A. Gleason's *The Leisure Ethic: Work and Play in American Literature, 1840–1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

41. From a review of Bell's book in British *Vogue*, "Turning over New Leaves" (early October 1923).

42. Garrity, "Selling Culture," pp. 29–58.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 46, n101.

44. Aldous Huxley, "The Dangers of Work," *Vogue* (late April 1924).

45. Garrity, "Selling Culture," p. 45.

46. Robert Seguin, "Resentment and the Social Poetics of *The Great Gatsby*: Fitzgerald Reads Cather," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46, no. 4 (2000): 921.

47. Although he does not discuss *Gatsby*, see David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

48. Harold Stearns, *Liberalism in America* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919), p. 184.

49. See James Livingston, "War and the Intellectuals: Bourne, Dewey and the Fate of Pragmatism," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 4 (Oct. 2003). Livingston defends Dewey against Bourne.

50. George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" (1913), in Hollinger and Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, p. 107.

51. William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

52. See Livingston, "War and the Intellectuals." Also see Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 380–90, for a discussion of Mumford's critique of pragmatism and James.

53. See *Flappers and Philosophers* (Waking Lion Press, 2006). “Head and Shoulders” is the third story in this collection, originally published in 1920. As the story opens, we are told that the protagonist, Horace Tarbox, is a student who has written a “series of essays on ‘The Pragmatic Bias of the New Realists.’” Later on in the story, “[h]e fancied he was verging more and more toward pragmatism.” And still later, we are told that Tarbox “had meant to write a series of books, to popularize the new realism as Schopenhauer had popularized pessimism and William James pragmatism.”

54. James uses this word in “Notes on the Notion of Reality as Changing,” in John Jay McDermott, ed., *The Writings of William James* (New York: 1968), p. 301.

55. Kloppenberg, “An Old Name?,” p. 89. Robert Richardson similarly argues in his 2006 biography that for James, “[i]t is not, as some cynics would have it, the mere belief that truth is whatever works for you. It must work for you and it must not contravene any known facts. James was interested more in the fruits than in the roots of ideas and feelings. He firmly believed in what he once wonderfully called ‘stubborn, irreducible facts.’” Quoted in Prologue, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton/Mifflin, 2006).

56. Quoted in Kloppenberg, “An Old Name?,” p. 89.

57. In *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court* (1889), Mark Twain wrote: “a country without a patent office and good patent laws was just a crab and couldn’t travel any way but sideways or backwards” (chapter 9).

58. See Peter B. Meyer, “Episodes of Collective Invention,” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Working Paper No. 368, August 4, 2003, available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=466880>.

59. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 41.

60. Lewis Mumford, *The Golden Day*, 3rd ed. (New York: Dover, 1968), p. 100. The chapter criticizing Dewey is called “The Pragmatic Acquiescence.”

61. Dewey, final lines to “The Pragmatic Acquiescence” (1927), originally published in *New Republic* 49 (Jan. 5, 1927): 186–89. Reprinted in John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–91), 3:151.

62. John Dewey, “Philosophy and American National Life” (1904), *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83), 3:74.

63. John Dewey, “Ethics of Democracy” (1888), *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882–1898* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–72), 1:240.

64. William James, “What Pragmatism Means” (1907), in Hollinger and Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 119.

65. James Livingston discusses “thoughts and things” in his book *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 199.

66. Peter Robinson, “The Dartmouth Fracas,” in *The Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2006. Robinson is a fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institute.

67. Robert Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 239.

68. Quoted in Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, p. vi.

Chapter 1

1. Fitzgerald’s own phrase, quoted in Barbara Will, “*The Great Gatsby* and the Obscene Word,” *College Literature* 32, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 125–44.

2. Matthew Arnold’s widely read formulation of culture in the preface to *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

3. The quoted phrase is Robert Seguin's, from "Resentment and the Social Poetics of *The Great Gatsby*: Fitzgerald Reads Cather," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46, no. 4 (2000): 935. On the point of the independent inventor in this passage, consider the views of Vannevar Bush (1890–1974), a famous U.S. electrical engineer and physicist, who had a faith in independent inventors that derived from his view of them as outsiders, as abstracted from the context of industrial science and therefore in a position to discern the deficiencies of such science, or at least be removed enough to not be constrained by the perspectives or goals of industrial research. He believed, moreover, like many of his contemporaries, in the potential of science as a noncommercial discipline. In *Science Is Not Enough* (1967), he makes these arguments in an essay entitled "The Search for Understanding."

4. The number of patents issued annually more than doubled between 1866 and 1896, and the number for each person increased more than 1.75 times. Thomas Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm 1870–1970*, p. 14.

5. Edward W. Byrnr, "The Progress of Invention during the Past Fifty Years," *Scientific American* 75 (July 25, 1896): 82–83.

6. The historian Daniel Boorstin has observed that in the last quarter of the 19th century, "all the resources which had been used to lay tracks across the continent, to develop an American System of Manufacturing in its several versions, now went into American Systems of Inventing." *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 525.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Hughes, *American Genesis*, pp. 24, 25. Subsequent references to the Hughes book will be cited by page number in parentheses in the text.

9. Before World War I, there were at least one hundred industrial laboratories in the United States; by 1929 there were more than a thousand. See George Wise, *Willis R. Whitney: General Electric and the Origins of U.S. Industrial Research* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 215.

10. In his study *Willis R. Whitney: General Electric and the Origins of U.S. Industrial Research*, George Wise chronicles Whitney's methods. Whitney, who took over as head of the new General Electric Research Laboratory in 1900, urged his scientists to have "fun" in their researches, and emphasized that the best way to run a laboratory was to allow scientists to do whatever they wanted.

11. Undoubtedly, "the displacement of independent inventors began with the rise of the industrial research laboratory around 1900[.] . . . [after this] the scientifically regulated processes of production favored by monopoly capitalism gradually wiped out independent inventors by nurturing industrial scientists who, rather than working to imagine and bring about the new—radical, breakthrough inventions which would create new systems—were employed to improve the systems of others. Constrained to problems . . . that would improve and spur the growth of existing systems in which the corporations were heavily invested, industrial scientists were paid to maintain the status quo, not to be creative" (Hughes 53–54). While such anxiety made industrial organizations reluctant to support the work of independent inventors, it did not prevent large corporations from buying most invention patents—"hoarding them," as Andrew Ross notes, "in order to suppress competition," which, for obvious reasons, phased out independents who "lacked the big capital that was increasingly required for research and development of their alternative technologies." From Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 124.

12. See previous note for an explanation of this unsupportive atmosphere.

13. Edison is a good example of an inventor who did this. As Hughes notes, however, he later became more involved in the commercial side of the industry. This

could mean he sold out, in a manner of speaking. Matthew Josephson, *Edison* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 309.

14. *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 2.

15. *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893–1896* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 407.

16. Tesla to a *New York Times* reporter, quoted in 1942 in Gordon D. Friedlander, “Tesla: Eccentric Genius,” *IEEE Spectrum* 9 (June 1972): 29.

17. From *Willa Cather on Writing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 26.

18. See Adrian Johns, “Intellectual Property and the Nature of Science,” in *Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2–3 (March–May 2006): 148.

19. Daniel J. Kevles writes in *The Physicists: The History of a Science Community in Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) that “the more the nation celebrated the advance of technology [invention], the more its cultivated citizens insisted that its inventors were, after all, merely drawing on the treasury of science” (17). This conflict between invention and science was “expressed in the sentiments of those on either side of the feud” (17). Consider that the famous physicist John Tyndall criticized America’s tendency toward utility during one of his most popular lecture tours in 1870. “I took to pieces the claims of their practical men,” Tyndall said about one of his lectures, adding, “I was as plain as could be” (17). Apparently, his audience—made up of the cultivated set of Americans—“expressed noisy approval for his attitude toward inventors” (Kevles 17).

20. Harvard astronomer Benjamin A. Gould summarized the goals of “pure science” in America in 1869 when he called for a more committed program to educate scientists who would not seek to translate their knowledge into profit. Only then could the United States impress all other nations by “leading the science of the world” (*Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1869*, p. 37.).

21. Quoted in Henry James, *Charles W. Eliot: President of Harvard University, 1869–1909* (London, 1930), 1:64.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

23. This is arguably why the private colleges, such as Harvard, taught pure science (relegating any “technical” studies to the segregated “Lawrence School”), while the public colleges “smothered science in a blanket of practical studies” (Kevles 20). Kevles writes that “Private colleges considered vocational education to be compromising to the overall ideal of higher education, which was to be valued in itself. Higher learning was not to be considered in the framework of its potential to be applied or bring economic return” (20).

24. Quoted in Walter C. Bronson, *The History of Brown University, Providence, 1764–1914* (Providence, 1914), p. 388.

25. The introduction of the elective system at universities in the 1870s corresponds to the acceptance of science as a regular part of the curriculum of higher education. Charles W. Eliot of Harvard led the movement to establish the elective system. See Burton Bledstein’s *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976) and Robert Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

26. The figure of the generalist is someone who knows a good deal about many things—a well-rounded scholar or student who is not a specialist but is a culturally learned person in a comprehensive sense.

27. Most technically, humanism is a philosophical and literary movement in which human values and capabilities are the central focus. The term originally referred

to a point of view particularly associated with the Renaissance, with its emphasis on secular studies (the humanities), a conscious return to classical ideals and forms, and a rejection of medieval religious authority. Boccaccio, Erasmus, and Petrarch were outstanding humanists. In modern usage, humanism often indicates a general emphasis on lasting human values, respect for scientific knowledge, and cultivation of the classics. Thus, the term “generalism” is practically interchangeable with the term humanism, yet I find “humanism” to be too loaded and too entrenched a term at this point to be used so freely.

28. James McCosh, *Christianity and Positivism* (New York: R. Carter, 1871), p. 14.

29. “Original Papers in Relation to a Course of Liberal Education,” *American Journal of Science*, 15 (1829): 301. This report by the Yale faculty set the coming standard for higher educational policy on the place of science in the curriculum. The report allowed science a place but warned against its potential to turn education into a result-oriented endeavor. Essentially, the report concluded, the philosophy behind a liberal arts education must not be disturbed by the introduction of science into the curriculum.

30. Francis A. Walker to Alpheus Hyatt, Aug. 29, 1889. Quoted from Kevles, *The Physicists*, p. 34.

31. Veysey, *American University*, pp. 88, 91, and passim; Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, pp. 127, 129–58, 172, 259–68, 325.

32. Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 20. Veysey, *American University*, pp. 194–95, 216.

33. If, Tesla’s logic suggests, the “creative mind” would be burdened by large sums of money, this is because originality is definitively pure and can only “thrive” in an atmosphere devoid of (money’s) impurity. While sketching invention as an activity for only the most creative of minds, Tesla’s remarks insist on the fundamentally abstract quality of inventing—it is a practice rooted in “ideas” and is best carried out (or can only occur) in a removed, secluded—abstracted—atmosphere.

34. Benoît Godin, “The Linear Model of Innovation Science,” *Science, Technology & Human Values* 31, no. 6 (2006): 641, 659.

35. *Popular Science Monthly* 22 (April 1883): 847–48.

36. Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (Vintage Books, 1990), p. 153.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 30.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

39. *Popular Science Monthly* 2 (April 1873): 736. This retort is repeated in an article by Andrew D. White entitled “Science and Public Affairs.” He was the co-founder and first president of Cornell University.

40. William A. Anthony, *Proceedings of the AAAS, 1887*, p. 70.

41. Kevles, *The Physicists*, p. 26.

42. Italics added. This is from an article published in *Century*, December 1893, pp. 223–24. Lowell continues his critique of invention, or of the particular invention of the printing press, by saying that “it has supplanted a strenuous habit of thinking with a loose indolence of reading which relaxes the muscular fiber of the mind.”

43. I take this phrase from an article written much later by Dwight MacDonald in which he discusses the legacy of these same questions (“A Theory of Popular Culture,” *Politics* 1 [Feb. 1944]).

44. Rowland, “A Plea for Pure Science” (1883), *The Physical Papers of Henry Augustus Rowland*, (Baltimore, 1902), p. 601.

45. It is no coincidence that Henry Rowland “descended from a line of Yale-trained ministers, and was sent to Andover Academy,” where, Kevles reports, “he found the science inadequate and complained of the ‘horrid’ boys who swore. In college he announced that he had no ambitions for a mere industrial career; success in business was no more important than business itself.” Rowland wrote to his mother

in 1865 that he had decided to commit his mind to science, to the kind of research that brought “not . . . filthy lucre but good substantial reputation” (Kevles 25).

46. I take the term “best-science elitism” from Kevles’s *The Physicists*, who has no citation for it. I assume he coined the term, because I have found no other reference for it (p. 43 and *passim*).

47. “A Plea for Pure Science,” 594.

48. According to Daniel Kevles, a young Rowland took his first academic position as professor of physics at the newly established Johns Hopkins University, which in 1876 opened its doors as an institution committed solely to pure research. At the time, no other college was so openly committed to the advancement of knowledge for its own sake.

49. Quoted from *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883–93), 7:88.

50. Quoted in Neil Baldwin’s biography *Edison: Inventing the Century* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1995), p. 75.

51. Letter, June 13, 1922, written in Australia (published in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. 4, ed. by James T. Boulton, E. Mansfield, and W. Roberts, 1987). It is interesting to note that other writers summed up the threat of democracy in these same terms. “The American vice,” Henry Miller wrote, “is the democratic disease which expresses its tyranny by reducing everything unique to the level of the herd.” From *The Wisdom of the Heart*, “Raimu” (1947). Likewise, James Fenimore Cooper wrote that “The tendency of democracies is, in all things, to mediocrity.” *The American Democrat*, “On the Disadvantages of Democracy” (1838).

52. “The Paradise of Mediocrities,” *Nation* (July 13, 1865): 43–44.

53. Frank Jewett, the longtime director of the Bell Telephone Laboratories, succinctly explained his dislike for the phrase “pure science”: “the word ‘pure’ implies that all other kinds of research are ‘impure.’” Jewett to Vannevar Bush, June 5, 1945. Quote taken from Kevles, *The Physicists*, p. 45.

54. *Science* 1 (Feb. 9, 1883): 1–3. For Bell’s relationship to the magazine, see Robert V. Bruce, *Bell: Alexander Graham Bell and the Conquest of Solitude* (Boston, 1973), pp. 276–78.

55. *Science* 1 (Feb. 9, 1883).

56. *Proceedings of the American Association of the Advancement of Science, 1890*, pp. 11, 14. Though Mendenhall has a point here, he fails to draw the very real connection, especially during this period, between wealth and what he calls “genius,” which is really the inspired, influential, academic intellect that is more readily acquired in an environment where time need not be devoted to wage labor.

57. Rowland, “The Highest Aim of the Physicist,” in *The Physical Papers of Henry Augustus Rowland*, p. 668.

58. Charles William Eliot, *Educational Reform* (New York, 1898), p. 44.

59. As Joan Shelley Rubin further points out in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, by the end of the nineteenth century, “The democratization of property ownership and the rise of republicanism enhanced the prospect that Americans of more modest means could attain the respectability formerly limited to the aristocracy” (2).

60. “Intelligence and Morals” (1904), *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83), 3:74.

61. Lowell does not necessarily indicate that he favors the privatization of science, but he does have a problem with the disturbance of the “ancient aristocracy of thought,” which seems to suggest that he would prefer that this aristocracy remain, at least, selective (and science has become part of this aristocracy).

62. *Individualism Old and New* (1930), *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–91), 5:98.

Chapter 2

1. *Ethnicity and Cultural Authority: From Arnold to Du Bois* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 25.

2. *Experience and Nature* (1929), in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–91), 1:99.

3. McElrath, Jr. and Crisler, *Frank Norris: A Life* (University of Illinois, 2006), p. 1.

4. I am referring to Walter Benn Michaels's now classic study *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

5. From an afterword by Kenneth Rexroth, *McTeague* (New York: Signet Classics, The New American Library, 1964).

6. See Donald Pizer, "Frank Norris's *McTeague*: Naturalism as Popular Myth," *ANQ* 13, no. 4 (2000): 21–26. Pizer does footnote the Grannis subplot: "The Old Grannis–Miss Baker subplot in *McTeague* indeed endorses a conventional idea of romantic love, though it should also be noted that the love portrayed is sexless." He further comments that "Only Old Grannis and Miss Baker—both presumably of Anglo-Saxon stock—lack significant weaknesses traceable to ethnic stereotypes." Hsuan L. Hsu also footnotes the affair, without an analysis, in "Literature and Regional Production," *American Literary History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 36–69, n.10. For a somewhat different argument concerning *McTeague* and its less-than-hopeful depiction of gender transition (which I discuss later in this chapter), see Maria F. Brandt, "'For His Own Satisfaction': Eliminating the New Woman Figure in *McTeague*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2004): 5–23.

7. See Clare Eby, "Of Golden Molars and Golden Girls: Fitzgerald's Reading of Norris," *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 141, 154.

8. Quoted in Introduction to Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris* (Bloomington, IN, 1966).

9. *Courier*, April 8, 1899, WP, p. 608. Significantly, Cather was a great fan of Norris's, and generally approved of his program for the overhaul of American literary practice. She indicates her support in several essays, and even contributes to his project, anticipating Norris himself in an essay in 1895 (*Lincoln Courier*, September 28, 1895, KA, p. 281; compare this to Norris's "The Decline of the Magazine Short Story," *Wave* 16 [January 30, 1897]: 3).

10. Hildegard Hoeller argues that the "novel's pessimism is sealed" in "*McTeague*: Naturalism, Legal Stealing, and the Anti-Gift," in *Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism*, ed. Mary E. Papke (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. xv, 416. Also, see Gina Rossetti's "Out of the Gene Pool: Primitivism and Ethnicity in Frank Norris's *McTeague*," *CLA Journal* 48, no. 1 (2004): 51–70.

11. So far, like twentieth-century criticism, twenty-first-century criticism of *McTeague* largely ignores the Grannis–Miss Baker subplot and is more interested in the pessimism of Norris's text, among other things. Granted, Barbara Hochman points out in 1988 that "in its treatment of the Annixter action, *The Octopus* complicates and extends the tenuous optimism projected through the minor figures of Old Grannis and Miss Baker in *McTeague*" in her book *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), p. 82. But most critics do not acknowledge, much less seriously analyze, these characters after this. As noted, the Norris critic Donald Pizer continues to read the novel as a pessimistic text even while noticing, finally, the subplot, and Clare Eby does not mention its potential importance as she argues in an article discussing Norris's influence on Fitzgerald that *McTeague* is a "novel about going down" (see her essay "Of Golden Molars and Golden Girls: Fitzgerald's Reading of Norris" in *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 2 [Spring 2003]: 141). Hilde-

gard Hoeller argues that the “novel’s pessimism is sealed” in “*McTeague: Naturalism, Legal Stealing, and the Anti-Gift*,” in *Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism*, ed. Mary E. Papke (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. xv, 416. In addition to high-visibility, late-twentieth-century critical treatments of *McTeague* that ignore the Grannis–Miss Baker affair, such as Walter Benn Michaels’s *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* and Cecelia Tichi’s *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modern America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), earlier criticism of the book, such as that by Vernon Louis Parrington, who wrote *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America: 1860–1920* (1930; repr., New York, 1958), and Donald Pizer, author of *The Novels of Frank Norris*, do not account for the Grannis–Miss Baker plot either. Tichi, it should be noted, does at least recognize that Norris is not all doom when she admits that he “is not . . . hostile to machine technology per se” (52).

12. *McTeague* (New York: Signet Classics, The New American Library, 1964 ed.), p. 13.

13. *McTeague*, p. 241 and passim. Further references to this novel will be made parenthetically in the text according to page numbers.

14. As noted earlier, Norris is often considered a “naturalist.” However, the term itself and the literary movement, along with realism, are still under debate. For a newer argument in the field of American literary realism, see Jane Thrailkill’s *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (Harvard University Press, 2007). For a now classic study of American literary realism, see Amy Kaplan’s *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Also see Donald Pizer for a comparison between realism and naturalism, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966). For a set of close readings in literary realism see Phillip Barrish, *American Literary Realism, Critical Theory, and Intellectual Prestige 1880–1995* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

15. “The Scholastic and the Speculator” (1891–92), in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882–1898* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–72), 3:154.

16. This passage strongly indicates the principles of literary realism, which in the work of Norris and of course William Dean Howells meant that novels such as the one described here—a romance, profoundly unrealistic—needed to account for hard realities, and not be the domain of domestic, dreamy, women (or men). Such a perspective is apparent in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, when one of Howells’s characters declares at a dinner party that “The novelists might be the greatest possible help to us if they painted life as it is, and human feelings in their true proportion and relation, but for the most part they have been and are altogether noxious.” Later Howells’s minister insists that “false ideal[s]” come from “the novels that befool and debauch almost every intelligence in some degree.” Quoted from *Silas Lapham* (reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1963) pp. 183, 223.

17. The two literally come together in the sense that they no longer stay on separate sides of the partition—yet no wall literally comes down.

18. I am indebted to and agree with the historian James Livingston, who has written, “To look beyond the realm of necessity at or near the turn of the century was, then, to look into, not away from, the ongoing transformation of capitalism. For that transformation opened new social spaces and social roles.” From *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 180.

19. Interestingly, Lisa Long has written in her article “Genre Matters: Embodying American Literary Naturalism” that “the most recent critical work on naturalism highlights the gendered nature of the literary historical project, a narrative that almost always gets hung up on the indeterminacies of naturalism. Like gender itself,

naturalism disorders the literary landscape in contemporary considerations of American literary history of the turn of the twentieth century, both vexing and energizing the field" (*American Literary History* 19, no. 1 [Winter 2007]: 160). Recently, there have been several critical readings of literary naturalism that prioritize gender, including John Dudley's *A Man's Game: Masculinity and the Anti-Aesthetics of American Literary Naturalism* (University of Alabama Press, 2004); Jennifer Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Eric Carl Link's *The Vast and Terrible Drama: American Literary Naturalism in the Late Nineteenth Century* (University of Alabama Press, 2004). By "gender transition" I mean the shifts in gender roles that were taking place with such things as the suffrage movement and the advent of mass production (to name two ongoing events). See Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (1965; repr., Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971).

20. *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850–1940*, p. 69.

21. Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (New York: Kennerly, 1914), pp. 133, 131. It was Livingston's argument that brought me to Lippmann on this point, so I am indebted to his scholarship in more ways than one.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

24. I find it very interesting and telling that the term Norris uses to describe Miss Baker—"estimable"—is a term loaded with economic implications, and beyond this, full of the discourse of value, which is a question I take up more directly later on in the chapter.

25. The refiguration of class occurs too, of course, as an essential component of the structure of gender.

26. "There was nothing for him to do," Norris reiterates, "His hands lay idly in his lap" (249).

27. See Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

28. Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929), pp. 186–87. This new "social and participating self" that Mumford speaks of must find a way to bring together previously disparate worlds. Mumford is explicit about the intersection of thought and reality—it is important for the new social self to "produce formative ideas, and embody ideal forms."

29. Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (1925; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 237. Subsequent page references are cited in parentheses in the text.

30. *Walden* (New York: The New American Library, Signet Classics edition, 1960), p. 6.

31. "The miser," writes Georg Simmel in his *Philosophy of Money* (1907), is one who "finds bliss in the sheer possession of money, without proceeding to the acquisition and enjoyment of particular objects" (quoted from a collection of his work called *On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by Donald Levine [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971], p. 180).

32. Georg Simmel writes in "The Miser and the Spendthrift" (1907) that the "pleasures of the miser are almost aesthetic. For aesthetic pleasures likewise lie beyond the impermeable reality of the world" (180). See previous note for citation information.

33. This quote I take from the book jacket of the edition of *McTeague* that I am

working with. See note 3.

34. The kind of disinterest I am speaking about here is not about forsaking the ends for the means, but about means and ends constituting each other.

35. From John Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1929), in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953*, 1:280.

36. *Later Works*, 10:278. Subsequent page numbers are cited in parentheses in the text.

37. This echoes the sentiment of Willa Cather's historian in *The Professor's House*, who champions the productive process over the product (he tells his wife that if his check "could have bought back the fun I had writing my history, you'd never have got your house"). I discuss this in detail in a later section.

38. Like Cather's historian in *The Professor's House*, Dewey disapproves of activity in which the end or product is something completely other than the activity itself. In the long view, this disapproval signifies a critique of exchange: if the means "cease to act" when the end is reached, the one is exchanged for the other.

39. This argument, which can be found in Dewey's earliest writings, was one he developed in the 1920s. In "the major books of that decade he turned to an account of modern industrial labor whenever he required an example of the dissociation of means and ends characteristic of human activity that fell short of the artful" (*Livingston* 169). See, for example, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922); *Middle Works* 14:82–87, 100–103, 208, 211; and *Experience and Nature* (1929), 1:272, 275–79.

40. In a similar turn, Willa Cather would later imply in *The Professor's House* the desirability of a presexual world, a "delicious garden," as Norris puts it, in which romance can occur without the complication of (carnal) transaction. Cather's couple, of course, are Tom and Godfrey, who, perhaps uncoincidentally, share their most intimate moments in the professor's "walled-in garden," which is described as "the comfort of his life" (5): "it was there he and Tom Outland used to sit and talk half through the warm, soft nights" (7). In other passages, Cather further romanticizes the site: "Over a dish of steaming asparagus, swathed in a napkin to keep it hot, and a bottle of sparkling Asti, they talked and watched night fall in the garden" (155). Certainly "an Elysium" of Godfrey's own creating (to appropriate Norris), the garden in *The Professor's House* comes to represent the place where desire and romance are experienced as meaningful in themselves, where time stands still for the insular pleasure of romantic feeling. As far as a "romance" "of the imagination" (234) occurs here, which is to say an open-ended, immaterial romance (much like the one experienced for so long by Norris's couple), we find an example of the "disinterested love" Godfrey tells us Tom believed in. This kind of love—a private process free of intended ends—seeks to convert nothing. With St. Peter, who sometimes could "evade the unpleasant effects of change [a conversion process] by tarrying among his autumn flowers" (7), we find a kind of renewal of Norris's "delicious garden," where "it was always autumn."

41. Large corporations sought to control or purchase most invention patents—"hoarding them," as Andrew Ross notes, "in order to suppress competition," which, for obvious reasons, phased out independents who "lacked the big capital that was increasingly required for research and development of their alternative technologies." Quoted in *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 124.

42. Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 27–28.

43. See *Yankee Enterprise: The Rise of the American System of Manufactures*, ed. Otto Mayr and Robert C. Post (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982); David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univer-

sity Press, 1984).

44. The technical definition of “bottom line” is quite interesting in the context of this discussion. The first definition refers to profit or monetary losses: bottom line[:]
1. The line in a financial statement that shows net income or loss. 2. The final result or statement; upshot: “The bottom line, however, is that he has escaped” (David Wise). 3. The main or essential point: “A lot can happen between now and December, but the bottom line—for now—is that the city is still heading toward default” (New York). *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

45. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 154.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Chapter 3

1. Published in the *New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, January 1, 2006.

2. Robert B. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. xi. William James’s pathbreaking first essay on pragmatism, announcing that the only test of any idea is in its “practical consequences,” was published in 1898 (“Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” *U. Chronicle*, Sept. 1898); originally a lecture delivered before the Philosophical Union at Berkeley, California, in 1898, it was reprinted in W. James, *Collected Essays and Reviews*, ed. R. Perry (Longmans, Green, 1920), p. 406. For a discussion of the rise of pragmatism (and the parallel American critique of German idealism), see Max H. Frisch, “American Pragmatism before and after 1898,” in Robert W. Shanan and Kenneth R. Merrill, eds., *American Philosophy: From Edwards to Quine* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), pp. 78–110. See also Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 165; Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 241–49; and Kuklick’s *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860–1930* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), especially part 3; also, in general, see Morton White’s *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism*, rev. ed. (Beacon Press, 1957).

3. Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). Subsequent references are to this edition and are cited in parentheses in the text.

When St. Peter meets with Dr. Crane to discuss Crane’s intent to sue for some of the money made from the commercialization of Tom’s invention, Crane admits that “strictly speaking, of course. . . . The idea was Outland’s. He benefited by my criticism, and I often helped him with his experiments. He never acquired a nice laboratory technician. He would fail repeatedly in some perfectly sound experiment because of careless procedure” (126). When St. Peter asks if Tom “would have arrived at his results without [Crane’s] help” (127), Crane replies, “That I cannot say. He was impatient. He might have got discouraged and turned to something else. He would have been much slower in getting his results, at any rate. His conception was right, but very delicate manipulation was necessary, and he was a careless experimenter [*sic*].”

The emphasis here is on Tom’s natural ability as an idea man, not a result-oriented experimenter. His “conception” is what stands out about him to Crane and those around him, and he is careless about and uninterested in the practical work that must be done in order to materialize his research. The contradiction here, of course, is that Tom is involved in developing a gas that will have very concrete, practical consequences—it ultimately revolutionizes aviation, which means it is presumably of great use to the military. While Cather is thus intent on enshrining her hero

as a disinterested scientist, she complicates the picture by making it easy to see how science cannot possibly avoid a relationship with industry; even Tom was aware that the gas he was working on had commercial possibilities, although he “very seldom” spoke of such possibilities (126).

4. As I have noted in previous chapters, I am referring here directly and indirectly to the philosophical schools of idealism (associated with the German thinkers Kant and Hegel) and pragmatism (associated with the later American thinkers James, Dewey, and Peirce); the history of these philosophical schools underlies much of my argument in this chapter, in the sense that pragmatism, as it emerged in the late nineteenth century in the philosophies of Peirce and James, attacked the abstract idealism that dominated late-nineteenth-century academic philosophy. As James explained, the pragmatist thinker “turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to the professional philosopher. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power” (from James’s “Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism,” in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott [New York, 1968], pp. 311–17).

5. See Tom Quirk, “Fitzgerald and Cather: *The Great Gatsby*,” *American Literature* 54, no. 4 (1982): 577. Quirk is among many, including James Miller, who document the widely known influence of Cather’s work on Fitzgerald. Robert Seguin and Guy Reynolds have more recently considered this influence.

6. Tom invents a new gas that, after his death, is turned into the “Outland engine” by Louie Marsellus, the new husband of Rosamond St. Peter, who was Tom’s fiancée (“virtually his widow” [PH 30]). “Cather is vague on the details of how Tom’s invention can power an engine, but he must, presumably, have discovered a gas that would transform with exceptional rapidity into liquid and back, requiring a lighter engine and a new kind of bulkhead to contain the pressure it created.” From Hermione Lee, *Double Lives* (London: 1994), p. 389, n1.

7. To say that absolute or abstract idealism dominated American thought in general in the late nineteenth century is simply to understand how an enduring belief in and faithful search for first principles, universal truths, and foundations is consistent with philosophical idealism.

As for the history of academic thought, from about the 1870s to the 1890s there was an increasing impact of post-Kantian idealism on American philosophy. William James rejected this trend in 1882 in the British journal *Mind*, when he criticized the growing popularity of Hegelianism: “We are just now witnessing a singular phenomenon in British and American philosophy,” he wrote. “Hegelianism so defunct on its native soil . . . has found among us so zealous and able a set of propagandists that today it may really be reckoned one of the most powerful influences of the time in the higher walks of thought” (“On Some Hegelisms,” in *The Will to Believe* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979], p. 196). While German philosophers “rushed back to Kant,” British philosophers led by T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley at Oxford and Edward and John Caird in Scotland “had turned to Hegel for support as they worked out a domestic brand of absolute idealism with which to challenge the longstanding empirical tradition of Locke, Hume, Bentham, Mill, and Spencer” (Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991], p. 14). Among others, George Santayana took note of this phenomenon, calling Oxford in his *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1916) “the paradise of dead philosophies.” Regarding American philosophy, Westbrook reports: “In the United States Hegel clubs had sprouted up throughout the country, and in St. Louis an energetic band of Hegelians led by William Torrey Harris had successfully launched the nation’s first professional journal of philosophy, the *Journal of Speculative Philoso-*

ophy [beginning in 1867]. In addition, absolute idealists . . . [including Josiah Royce, George Morris, and George H. Palmer] had established a foothold in the philosophy departments of leading American universities" (14). James was against such developments, for "Hegel's philosophy mingles mountain-loads of corruption with its scanty merits." Ultimately, James wrote, he wanted to show "some chance youthful disciple that there is another point of view in philosophy" (Westbrook 14).

It should be noted that in the United States, the decline of idealism was not entirely due to the attacks of pragmatists; it was also due to the so-called new realists, who proclaimed their ideas around the same time as the pragmatists, and who also attacked idealism, fighting with the pragmatists to dominate American philosophy: pragmatists and new realists agreed only insofar as they were both anti-idealist. Pragmatism critiqued realism along with idealism, claiming that both were constrained by, as Dewey put it, "the alleged discipline of epistemology" ("The Short-Cut to Realism Examined" [1910], *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924* [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83], 6:138). What this meant is that realism, like idealism, "was caught up in the dead end search for the resolution of knowing—realists argued that individual things existed independently of the mind's perception of them; idealists claimed that Reality exists in the mind. Both, pragmatists asserted, posited truth and knowledge as universals, so both were wrong" (Westbrook 14). With careful thought, I have determined that Cather's anti-pragmatism (in this novel especially) is closer to the idealist than to the realist position. Outside of a highly specific argument to this end, this conclusion makes sense if we consider that Cather was educated at the height of idealism's reign. But whether her philosophy was more consistent with idealism or realism is somewhat of a moot point here.

8. In "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (1917), reprinted in *Middle Works*, 10:7–10, Dewey wrote that "philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."

9. The departure of idealism was due to many combined factors, of course. As John Patrick Diggins notes in *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), there developed in the philosophy of James and others a persuasive impatience with "the idealist's conceit that human thought could deal with unobservable objects independent of itself" (129).

10. On Dewey's steadfast commitment to abstract idealism until he reached Chicago, see Westbrook, *John Dewey*, pp. 60–77. On the question of why no one noticed Peirce's description of the principles of pragmatism in his 1878 paper "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," which appeared in a series of articles that Peirce contributed to *Popular Science Monthly*, see James's "lesson of reception" in his book *Pragmatism* (1907)—this is essentially James's theory that by 1898 (the year he himself first used the term "pragmatism," attributing it to Peirce), "the times seemed ripe for [pragmatism's] reception," which, James argues, explains why Peirce's paper did not have any impact—it came a bit too early. James argues that he struck the right timing with "pragmatism": "the term applies itself to a number of tendencies that hitherto have lacked a collective name" (*Writings 1902–1910*, comp. Bruce Kuklick [New York: Library of America, 1987], p. 507).

11. Cather's liberal arts curriculum in college drew primarily on literature and philosophy, and she read widely on her own. She was throughout her life an avid reader who always kept up on developments in both intellectual and popular culture. Although I am primarily describing philosophical idealism above (which was usually defined within the academy in rigorous and even technical terms), I am linking the principles of this school with a general trend in literary criticism that can be discerned on several fronts. For starters, I would point to the New Humanist movement

(associated with Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and Stuart Pratt Sherman), which emerged in the early 1900s. It championed restraint, anti-naturalism, and anti-pragmatism, and argued that literary works should be evaluated in aesthetic and ethical terms. Drawing on Matthew Arnold's dictum, these terms were objectively determined by "standards" that were derived from an idea of the "best"—a reference to Arnold's idea of culture as "the best that is known and thought in the world." Arnold, in fact, was the movement's leader (unsurprisingly, he was also one of Cather's literary heroes). Like Arnold's dictum, the New Humanism was closely related to philosophical idealism in many respects. It advanced a notion of first or universal principles, and relied on a sense of transcendental spirituality, which kept its critical agenda isolated from social reform. For a historical overview of the movement, see David J. Hoeveler, *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900–1940* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), pp. 32, 33, 40, 67, and passim. Significantly, George Santayana conflated New Humanism with the genteel tradition, calling the movement "the genteel tradition at bay" in his 1931 book of that name (*The Genteel Tradition at Bay: Nine Essays by George Santayana*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967], pp. 153–96).

In addition to the New Humanism, which formulated its platform when philosophical idealism was already under siege, there are other examples of idealist-based literary criticism. For instance, the poet and popular English professor George Edward Woodberry, who became a member of the Columbia English department in 1891, drew on idealism in his widely read *Heart of Man* (New York: 1899).

It is worth noting that Woodberry taught at the University of Nebraska in 1877–78 and 1880–82, which, acknowledging his reputation for being extremely impassioned and persuasive, indicates the lasting influence he might have had on the literature department there. Thus when Cather arrived in 1890, it is likely that Woodberry's impact on the pedagogical philosophy of the department was still noticeable. At any rate, Cather knew who he was: she admired his poetry and referred to him as an "eminent scholar and critic" (*The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews 1893–1902* [Lincoln: Nebraska Press, 1970], 2:706). She mentions him several times in her reviews, always seeming respectful of his principles.

The idealism informing Woodberry's literary theory was clear from a pragmatist point of view. In William James's words, "poor Woodberry" was "so high, so true, so good" yet ultimately "so ineffective" (James to Mrs. Henry Whitman, in *Letters of William James* [Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920], 2:89). Other literary critics of the period also exhibit idealistic tendencies—the writings of scholars such as Stuart Pratt Sherman, John Erskine, and Henry Seidel Canby (a very close, respected friend of Cather's) show the influence of the principles of idealism, or at least testify to the fact that developments in literary criticism and philosophy were remarkably similar. Ultimately, my point is that during this period philology shared the concerns of philosophical idealism and that, in studying literature, Cather was exposed to (and indoctrinated into) an idealistic approach to literary scholarship—and thought—in general.

12. See James Bissett Pratt, "Truth and Ideas," *Journal of Philosophy* 5 (1908): 125. See also James Bissett Pratt, *What Is Pragmatism?* (New York: Macmillan, 1909).

13. *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–91), 4:13–14. Here I would also cite Kuklick's observation (as I do in the text) that absolute idealists thought of a philosopher as someone who would "perform in an almost ministerial fashion," proclaiming "the basic worth of human existence and traditional institutions" (*The Rise of American Philosophy* 306). In other words, the job of philosophers, as superior human beings, was to grasp and proclaim the truth from a distant, necessarily isolated, position.

14. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, p. 137.

15. From Dewey's essay, "Does Reality Possess Character?" (1908), in *Middle Works*, 4:142.

16. In the field of law, Oliver Wendell Holmes broke new ground with his famous essay "The Path of the Law" (1897), which, coming just one year before James's first essay on pragmatism, declared legal thought to be inextricably bound up with politics, economics, and social reality. "From this moment on," writes Morton Horwitz, "the late nineteenth-century ideal of an internally self-consistent and autonomous system of legal ideals, free from the corrupting influence of politics, was brought constantly under attack" (*The Transformation of American Law, 1870–1960* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], p. 142). Holmes explicitly advances a critique of German idealism in this article, and ultimately applies this critique in *Lochner vs. New York* (1905), perhaps the most cited case in American legal history. In this opinion, he makes his famous remark "General propositions do not decide concrete cases."

Another highly influential essay that in its very title exemplifies the point I am making was Roscoe Pound's "Law in Books and Law in Action" (1910). This essay, in which Pound insists that "the history of juristic thought tells us nothing unless we know the social forces that lay behind it," and that legal thinkers must "look to economics and sociology and philosophy, and cease to assume that jurisprudence is self-sufficient," is one of the important texts in the legal realist movement, although Pound later became a critic of this movement. (It is interesting to note that Pound [who became Dean of the Harvard Law School in 1916] was working on a doctorate in botany at the University of Nebraska while Cather was an undergrad there, and was well acquainted with her. Cather was close with his sister and his whole family for a time.)

This essay and the material I've quoted of Holmes's are collected in *American Legal Realism*, ed. William W. Fisher, Morton J. Horwitz, and Thomas A. Reed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

17. For example, the genre of realism, emerging as a campaign in the 1880s and 1890s with William Dean Howells as its leader, attacks "worn-out romantic ideals" (Edwin Cady, *The Realist at War: The Mature Years, 1885–1920*, of *William Dean Howells* [Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1958], p. 38), and as Amy Kaplan puts it, "explores and bridges the perceived gap between the social world and literary representation" (*The Social Construction of American Realism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988], p. 9). Like the pragmatists, writers of realist fiction aimed to depict the social conflict that more romantic, idealistic writers ignored. "Realism's favorite whipping boy is the romance," writes Kaplan, "a protean category which encompasses subjects as diverse as classical art" (16). Frank Norris, as I point out in the last chapter, was at the forefront of literary realism.

18. The contradiction, of course, is that Cather and the many contemporaries of hers who also opposed pragmatist principles can hardly be described as people who did not execute their ideas. While expounding on the beauty of ideas as such, these thinkers are thus already caught in the bind of having to concretize their thoughts in order to write books, publish articles, and so forth. For some, this might not have seemed a contradiction: in this case, writing would be excused or excluded from the realm of action. But it is hard to get around the fact that in order to manifest thoughts outside of speaking (which also counts as action, I think), one must inevitably resort to the practical work of writing, which is to say that writing—especially in the interwar years—must be understood as the manual materialization of ideas, and cannot, finally, be exempt from the principles of application, execution, and practice that constitute the consequentialist paradigm.

Moreover, as a fiction writer who would like to imagine such writing, at its best, as "art," Cather is both highly practical and highly dedicated to the problem

of practicality *within* her narratives—she consistently turns out characters who are actively involved in practical life, and many of her stories revolve around the technical incidents of the industrial, commercial world. This is a point I will argue in the body of the paper; suffice it to say here that Cather's claim of art being utterly distinct from economics, business, politics, and social reform is not at all consistent with her choice of subject matter (but then again, how could it be?), nor does such a claim account for her own assumption of art as a vocation.

19. Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy*, p. 306 and *passim*.

20. While Godfrey and Cather indicate that if culture is turned toward an end then culture (as they conceive of it) will end, it is part of my argument that culture already functioned toward at least one end, and that this end—the interests of the aristocracy, or the ruling class—is ignored by Cather, as it must be, if she is to advance a proper defense of classical culture and the adjoining idea of an apolitical aesthetics.

21. Aesthetics (ès-thèt'iks), as it developed within the philosophical tradition, usually refers to the branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art and the criteria of artistic judgment. The conception of art as imitation of nature was formulated by Plato and developed by Aristotle, both of whom held that beauty inheres in the object itself and may be judged objectively. Kant, advancing German idealism, held that the subject may have universal validity, while other thinkers, such as Hume for example, went against this philosophy and identified beauty with that which pleases the observer. Modern philosophers especially concerned with aesthetic questions have included Croce, Cassirer, Santayana, and, of course, John Dewey (most thoroughly in *Art as Experience* [1934]).

Roger Stein's *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA, 1967) and Neil Harris's *The Artist in American Society* (Chicago, 1966) both suggest, moreover, that in nineteenth-century America aesthetic forms were increasingly presented by their proponents as means to transcend the material and physical realities of life and to reach the ideal. I would argue that this explains the rise of idealism in philosophy in the 1860s and the dominance it maintained until pragmatism (and to a lesser extent realism) came along in the 1890s.

22. From her introduction to a selection of Cather's early criticism collected under the title *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893–1896* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 50.

23. This position is closely aligned with, if not identical to, the “art-for-art’s-sake” movement that emerged in English criticism in the 1890s, most popularly in the work of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Each elaborated a platform that can arguably be traced to earlier critics such as Ruskin and William Morris, who were both proponents of the related “Arts and Crafts Movement,” which also claimed an independent aesthetics.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 407.

25. Janis P. Stout, “Writing on the Margins of Biography,” *South Central Review* 23, no. 3 (2006): 60–75.

26. As I have already pointed out, pragmatism had its counterparts in both literary and legal realism, practical science, and all the new and reinvigorated social sciences. Thus, although I do mean to refer specifically to the critique of traditional logic and philosophy when I use the term pragmatism, I also mean to invoke this broad range of historical reference.

27. Around the time that Cather published this novel, the New Criticism was just getting underway. In many respects, Cather can be associated with the principles of this school of critics. As early as 1920, T. S. Eliot published *Sacred Wood*, which offered an influential account and critique of Western culture's decadent development, noting the ongoing decay of Western societies through secularism and industrialism,

and suggesting that through rejection of modern fallen civilization, and a return to myth, religion, and Christian culture, this decay could be resisted and even reversed.

28. Although I would agree that many references to the “primitive” and to “primitivism” in 1920s American fiction can be read within the context of a specifically racialized/sexualized discourse, Cather’s meaning is quite different here, for even though she means to indicate a lack of cultivation, her point is not to call up a racially located sexual imagery, but rather just the opposite: St. Peter is stripped of all sexual reference and history. His primitivism is his sexual neutrality: “He was only interested in earth and woods and water,” Cather writes, “he had never married, never been a father” (241). Calling her professor a “primitive” in this passage is thus calling him a presexual being, though there remains an investigation to be made into the subtextual allusion to Native American culture here. For discussions on primitivism and modernism, see Marianna Torgovnik, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Hal Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Consciousness of Modern Art,” *October* 34 (Fall 1985): 47–50. Also see Ann Douglas’s book *Terrible Honesty* (New York: Noonday Press, 1995), pp. 282–83 and passim.

29. According to David Hollinger, “the American idealists used the suprasensuous ‘ultimate reality’ of classical idealism as a sponge; whatever seemed threatening in their intellectual environment could be absorbed within it.” From *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), p. 47.

30. According to Joan Shelley Rubin in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), Arnold “so fully epitomized the transatlantic genteel tradition that the term ‘Arnoldian’ can stand as a summary of its attitudes toward culture, character, discipline, training, democracy, and critical authority” (14). Henry James made a similar assessment when he declared, “I shall not go so far as to say of Mr. Arnold that he invented [culture], but he made it more definite than it had been before—he vivified and lighted it up.” Quoted in Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 223.

31. From Arnold’s essay “The Function of Criticism,” in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: Viking Press, 1949), p. 261.

32. From Arnold’s essay “Literature and Science,” *ibid.*, p. 419.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 421.

34. Joseph Conrad captured the same sentiment that Cather expresses through Godfrey when he wrote in 1912 that “Only in men’s imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life” (from *A Personal Record*), chapter 1.

35. From Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, originally published in 1869. Quoted in Trilling, *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, p. 483.

36. In 1882 electricity was introduced in parts of New York on September 4 as Thomas Edison turned a switch in the offices of J. P. Morgan to light the offices and begin commercial transmission of electric power from the Morgan-financed Edison Illuminating Co. power plant on Pearl Street. The company soon supplied electricity to all of Manhattan and developed into the Consolidated Edison Co., prototype of all central-station U.S. power companies.

As for “sweetness,” in 1879 Saccharin (benzosulfamide) was discovered by accident at Baltimore’s new Johns Hopkins University by chemist Ira Remsen, 33, and his German student Constantin Fahlberg, who were investigating the reactions of a class of coal tar derivatives (toluene sulfamides). They published a scientific description of the new compound in February 1880, calling special attention to its sweetness. Fahlberg filed a patent claim without mention of Remsen’s contribution, and after returning to Germany, obtained financial backing, and organized a company to

produce his sugar substitute “saccharine”—at least 300 times sweeter than sugar and a boon to diabetics. So much for Johns Hopkins being a “research” institute without commercial interests.

37. In 1926 the *Saturday Evening Post* noted the public’s familiarity with the works of applied science, remarking: “Pure science is the wallflower, the ugly duckling, the elder sister who lives secluded and remote, unknown and unpraised.” In addition to the point I am making in the text, I also want to call attention to the gendered nature of this remark: it is clear that “pure science” was not enjoying the aesthetic appeal of commercial or applied science, which is here being associated with the “pretty” sister—the desirable, aesthetically pleasing sister. This issue of gender and commercialism is taken up at a later point in this essay. Editorial, 198 (June 5, 1926), 38.

38. *Saturday Evening Post* 194 (Jan. 7, 1922): 28.

39. At least a quarter-century before Cather published *The Professor’s House*, the effort to distinguish between “pure science” (a phrase that began to replace “abstract science” in the late nineteenth century) and “practical” or “applied” science began to concern the nation’s cultural critics. For this history, see my first chapter. Also, see Daniel J. Kevles, *The Physicists: The History of a Scientific Community in Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Howard S. Miller, *Dollars for Research: Science and its Patrons in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Washington Press, 1970).

40. At Dartmouth in 1873, Whitelaw Reid, the editor of the *New York Tribune*, observed: “ten or fifteen years ago, the staple subject here for reading and talk . . . was English poetry and fiction. Now it is English science. Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Huxley, Darwin, Tyndall have usurped the places of Tennyson and Browning, Matthew Arnold and Dickens.” Daniel Kevles retrieved this quote from Mott, *History of American Magazine*, III, 105.

41. *Popular Science Monthly* 2 (Feb. 1873): 499.

42. *The Physicists*, p. 17.

43. This is what Arnold argues to defend the displacement of “humane letters” with science. He focuses on the lack of beauty and emotion in science, which is due to its fundamentally practical nature: “If then there is to be separation and option between humane letters on the one hand, and the natural sciences on the other, the great majority of mankind, all who have not exceptional and overpowering aptitude for the study of nature, would do well, I cannot but think, to choose to be educated in humane letters rather than in natural sciences. Letters will call out their being at more points, will make them live more.” From “Literature and Science,” p. 427.

44. Quoted in Henry James, *Charles William Eliot: President of Harvard University, 1869–1909* (London, 1930), 1:64.

45. From “The Function of Criticism,” pp. 255–56. Other quotes from Arnold will be cited by page number, and are all taken from *The Portable Matthew Arnold*.

46. Of course, Tom and the professor are engaged in an intimate, homoerotically charged relationship. As several critics have noted, including Judith Butler, Bonnie Zimmerman, and Doris Grumbach, this is a story of “private, unconfessed, sublimated” homosexual love, and I quite agree. My inquiry is, however, along other lines, although I hope to illuminate the intersection of this and other themes.

47. On the two cultures, the “scientific” and the “humanistic,” see C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

48. “Philosophy and American National Life” (1904), *Middle Works*, 3:74.

49. *Later Works*, 11:51.

50. From *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: 1962), p. 161.

51. By this I mean the great sense of loss, the tone of sadness and lament, and the nostalgic idealizing of the past that permeates many modernist works. The spirit of

nostalgia and the sense of ending I am referring to are captured at the close of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, as he yearns for "the fresh green breast of the new world, as it might once have looked to the explorer, holding his breath, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."

52. Following this, we can understand Tom's character to be consistent with the idea of an open future—a future marked not by time's domestication (in which things grow old and dull), by its use, but merely by its process. In this open future, (old) perspectives are continuously renewed and time itself is a continuity. Perhaps Cather suggests the acontextuality of time itself, for such a concept of time is not end-defined, of course, and cannot appreciate the idea of loss or that of change. Following this line, having met Tom by "chance," having subsequently loved and lost him, Godfrey is caught between this experience of time and its adversary, nostalgia (reflecting Cather's own bind, I think). In the text's multiple uses of the word "chance" we find clues to Godfrey's ambivalence toward unpredictability, as well as a map of his struggle to incorporate the past. On one hand, he laments that Tom might still be alive "had not chance, in one great catastrophe [WW I], swept away all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself" (236). On the other hand, the text indicates the face of good fortune in the repetition of unpredictability: "All the most important things in his life, St. Peter sometimes reflected, had been determined by chance" (233). Most importantly, "Tom Outland had been a stroke of chance he [Godfrey] couldn't possibly have imagined; his strange coming, his strange story, his devotion, his early death and post-humus fame—it was all fantastic" (233). The unreal dimension suggested at here points to Tom's power to recycle the old, and in doing so, threaten a linear perspective (which presupposes a beginning, middle, and end to all things). Thus, along with the open-ended perspective that arrives with Tom comes a "strange" faith in the meaning of things outside of their consummatory potential; for Godfrey, Tom's unexpected entrance signals the arrival of chance (opportunity, luck, possibility, uncertainty) itself. If Tom's persona is "strange," then, this is because "chance" is a disinterested phenomenon.

53. Cather is without doubt susceptible to and frequently expressive of anti-Semitism. This is evident if one reads all of her work, especially the early short story called "The Singer Tower," where she describes a "gaudy" building designed by a Jewish engineer in a demeaning manner, calling it a "Jewy" sort of thing. But in *The Professor's House*, I would argue that she complicates her anti-Semitic agenda by creating the chance for Louie to come off as a sympathetic character. Alongside the anti-Semitic stereotype of the profit-motivated Jew, revived in the very fact that Louis is Jewish and excessively wealthy—making his fortune, no less, off a dead hero's genius—Cather strives to demonstrate Louie's agreeability, and presents the professor as his advocate of sorts. The professor consistently shows a genuine respect for Louis; in a conversation with Kathleen he calls him an "absolutely generous chap," and adds, "I've never known him to refuse to give either time or money" (111), and in another conversation with her he comes to Louie's defense (71). In still another example of Cather's complex treatment of Louie's character, the professor admires him. "Louie," Godfrey says, "you are magnanimous and magnificent" (149).

By noting these instances, I do not mean to suggest that Cather is *not* anti-Semitic, she clearly has such leanings; rather, Cather's position regarding Louie's status as a Jew is not as simple as, for example, Walter Michaels makes it out to be in *Our America*. His claims make sense to me up to a point, but he would have been more persuasive if he had discussed the novel's ambivalent line. Michaels's critique leaves itself open to crucial questions, such as why does the professor try to protect Louie? Why do some characters like him while others don't? There is no hard evidence that the professor dislikes Louie (while there *is* evidence to the contrary), and as for Lillian, she is thrilled with Louie. The presence of anti-Semitism in the novel

is thus encased in a more complex narrative than Michaels lets on. At any rate, it is important to acknowledge the role of anti-Semitism in Cather's anti-market outlook, even though there are fissures in Michaels's account.

54. The effects and dynamics of this history are discussed and debated to different degrees in *Popular Culture and Democracy* (Olomouc, Czech Republic: 2004), edited by Matthew Sweny and Mikay Peprnik; Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: 1974); Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca, NY: 1983); Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York: 1977); Richard Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption* (New York: 1983), especially the Introduction; and Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

55. I take this term from Cather's article "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," *The Nation* 117, no. 3035 (September 5, 1923).

56. "Nebraska," pp. 236–39.

57. For a discussion of the history of independent inventing in the United States, see my first chapter. Whereas it is historically accurate to suggest that independent inventors often worked without the promise of a commercial profit, they certainly hoped to make a living, and in the case of the more famous ones, often did. It is also worth reiterating here that it is the cultural work of mythology that created the idea of the independent inventor as a figure who had "eureka" moments based on individually pursued research. The accomplishments of such research were more the result of a cooperative effort that involved many minds and many phases of development. Cather in fact alludes to the dependency of scientific discovery on a community effort when she indicates the contribution that Dr. Crane made to Tom's research.

58. In *Our America* Walter Benn Michaels suggests something similar while arguing that Native American culture played a crucial role in the developing idea of cultural identity in 1920s America. He writes that "if the Indians had not been perceived as vanishing, they could not have become the exemplary instance of what it meant to have a culture" (Duke University Press, 1995), p. 38.

Chapter 4

1. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 218.

2. Quoted in Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, p. 9.

3. "The American College," *New Republic* (October 25, 1922): 208–9.

4. *Democracy and Education* (1916) in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83), 9:328.

5. I make this point more extensively in my chapter on Norris. Quoted from Walter Lippman, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (New York: 1914), pp. 130–31. "Now in the complicated civilization upon which we are now entering," Lippman predicted, "it will be impossible for many people to enjoy the primitive sense of absolute possession." As I elaborate in my discussion of *McTeague*, Lippman argued that the new industrial society would require, instead, a socialization of identity in which a cooperative effort would take the place of individualistic ambition. "We shall need men and women who can take an interest in collective property," he wrote, and declared an optimistic welcome to feminism as a social movement that would bring cooperation to the forefront of American civilization. "One of the supreme values of feminism is that it will have to socialize the home. When women seek a career they have to specialize. When they specialize they have to cooperate. They have to abandon more and more the self-sufficient individualism

of the older family.”

6. Capturing the sentiment I am getting at, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed in a 1916 speech that “America is not anything if it consists of each of us. It is something only if it consists of all of us” (Presidential Speech, Jan. 29, 1916).

7. Cather indicates that her concern here is for the individuality of the individual when she emphasizes the professor’s interest in nurturing the kind of individual who would pioneer in a given field; this kind of student, like Tom Outland, “kindled” (19) professor St. Peter: “if there was *one* eager eye, *one* doubting, critical mind, *one* lively curiosity in a full lecture-room of commonplace boys and girls, he was its servant. That ardour could command him” (19, my emphasis). In this passage, among others, Cather is leading us to conclude that to the extent that the university becomes a trade school, the professor is worried it will fail to provide an atmosphere conducive to the development of the passionate, curious, critical *individual*. But while Cather clearly means to stress her commitment to individuality in such a passage, her desire to see the college resist a vocational curriculum emerges as her need to protect *culture* (as I argue above), which for all practical purposes is the opposite of individuality. This does not mean (as I also argue in the text) that Cather is against individuality, however; it means she is against the movement of individualism that would require equal opportunities for all individuals, which would in effect topple the structure of culture, as culture is dependent on an anti-egalitarian reality (some individuals are granted certain privileges while others are not).

8. Here I want to further emphasize the distinction I see in this novel between science and technology: Cather’s problem is with the commercialization of science, or industrial science—in a word, technology. I discuss this when I look at the professor’s lecture, in which he disparages the contributions made by “science” (54). Although he doesn’t use the term, I argue for the idea that he is really against technology.

9. Here I quote from Cather’s essay, “Escapism,” in *Willa Cather on Writing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), pp. 19–21.

10. The lower division of the seven liberal arts in medieval schools, “trivium,” consisted of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Quadrivium, the higher division of the seven liberal arts in the Middle Ages, was composed of geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, and music. Moreover, the dictionary definition of “humanities” cites the languages and literatures of ancient Greece and Rome, and suggests “the classics” as a synonym, along with the “liberal arts” (those branches of knowledge, such as philosophy, literature, and art, that are concerned with human thought and culture). The educator, critic, and editor Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908) sums up my point when he says, “A knowledge of Greek thought and life, and of the arts in which the Greeks expressed their thought and sentiment, is essential to high culture” (*Encarta Book of Quotations*, Letter to F. A. Tupper, 1885 [New York: Macmillan, 2000], p. 700).

11. From “Escapism,” in *Willa Cather on Writing*, pp. 19–21.

12. It is worth mentioning that Ralph Ellison, whom I discuss in the last chapter, was part of a writing program subsidized by the WPA during the Great Depression.

13. “Escapism,” in *Willa Cather on Writing*, p. 21.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

16. This is also from Cather’s essay “Escapism,” in which she writes, “the condition every art requires is, not so much freedom from restriction, as freedom from adulteration and from the intrusion of foreign matter” (26). In the wake of the arguments made by Walter Benn Michaels, this remark seems particularly xenophobic, and this, of course, is related to the point I am making, although I go in a direction somewhat different from Michaels in my analysis.

17. The idea that culture was not to be found in any curriculum designed for practical ends is in my view the first clue to understanding her idea of culture as neces-

sarily private, in the sense that it was not accessible to everyone, nor should it be.

18. Calvin Coolidge, *America's Need for Education* (Boston: 1925), pp. 44–47.

19. This is particularly interesting in the case of Coolidge because he ran his platform according to a laissez-faire policy, and often proclaimed the rights of individuals against the State. He was famous for saying that the American government should stay out of the affairs of its people. “Perhaps one of the most important accomplishments of my administration has been minding my own business,” Coolidge remarked to newspaper reporters (Washington, DC, March 1, 1929), quoted in Robin Santor Doak, *Black Tuesday* (2007), p. 26.

20. Coolidge, *America's Need for Education*, p. 68.

21. See Torrey, ed., *Journals* (1906), Oct./Nov. 1850 entry (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), p. 83.

22. For an interesting and persuasive account of the context for such a crisis, see Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America* (Duke University Press, 1995), especially pp. 34–40. Michaels historicizes this crisis by emphasizing the passage, in 1924, of both the Immigration Act and the Indian Citizenship Act, and argues that “nativism in the period just after World War I involved not only a reassertion of the distinction between American and un-American but a crucial redefinition of the terms in which it might be made. America would mean something different in 1925 from what it meant at, say, the turn of the century; indeed, the very idea of national identity would be altered” (2).

23. See two recent (2006) articles on Thoreau’s ideas in Walden regarding common schooling: Paul Standish, “Uncommon Schools: Stanley Cavell and the Teaching of Walden,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 25, no. 1–2 (March 2006); and Naoko Saito, “Philosophy as Education and Education as Philosophy: Democracy and Education from Dewey to Cavell,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 40, no. 3 (August 2006): 345–56.

24. In *Willa Cather on Writing*, p. 36.

25. O’Neill’s creation was the basis of a mold made in 1913 by Pratt Institute art student Joseph L. Kallus. The doll earned \$1.5 million for O’Neill. Although Cather might not have been aware that a woman invented this doll, such an invention by a woman would fit into her idea of women as artists and/or artisans: Cather is notorious for having written scathing reviews of women’s fiction, including a ferocious attack of *The Awakening* when it came out for being too emotional and/or sentimental. In one article titled “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” Cather defines herself as a writer against the standards of female writing, declaring, “I have not much faith in women in fiction. . . . [T]hey are so limited. . . . When a woman writes a story of adventure, a stout sea tale, a manly battle yarn, anything without wine, women and love, then I will begin to hope for something great from them, not before” (*The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893–1902* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970], p. 699).

26. For a discussion of the associations made between mass-market culture and a feminine ideal, see Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 44–62 and endnotes on pp. 225–27; Huyssen argues that “fear of the masses in this age of declining liberalism [the early twentieth century] is always also a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, of fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass” (52). To this I would add a fear of culture receding, or disappearing into the mass, although Huyssen seems to be talking about “culture” in the recited categories above.

See also James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 68–

83. Livingston shows that several thinkers in early-twentieth-century America saw women as the embodiment or representation of the principle of consumption, and from this basis, he makes the argument that “the New Woman represented not only the principle of consumption but the promise of subjectivity under circumstances that seemed to have cast the ‘social self’ as the new paradigm of personality” (71). The new model of subjectivity that Livingston argues was emerging was incorporating the feminine to the extent that the “age of surplus” demanded the “release of subjectivity from the grip of the male proprietor” (76).

27. For example, Ellwood P. Cubberly, one of the country’s most respected educators at the time, wrote in *Changing Conceptions of Education* (New York, 1907) of the threat that the “newer immigrants” (from eastern and southern Europe) posed to a workable idea of American culture, and insisted that these “foreign” individuals be assimilated into American culture through a classical educational curriculum that drew on Greek and Latin literature and philosophy.

28. Dewey wrote this when trying to define “a positive conception of freedom.” I return to this remark in my last chapter.

29. At the close of the Civil War there were 24 coed universities in the United States. By the end of the 1870s, there were 154.

30. One of Cather’s best friends throughout her adult life was Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who was extremely active in promoting/importing the educational theories and practices of Maria Montessori, one of the leading educational reformers of the twentieth century. Through Fisher, Cather became acutely aware of reform movements in education in general, yet she was also exposed to such activity through her position as an editor and journalist at *McClure’s* magazine, which covered all sorts of political and social controversies of the day.

It is also worthwhile to note that Dorothy Canfield Fisher shared Cather’s commitment to preserving an imagined distinction between art or culture, and practical or vulgar materialism. Fisher served on the Book-of-the-Month Club board as a judge during the 1920s, a position from which she could—and did—expound her ideas on aesthetics, standards, and high culture.

31. There were, of course, technical colleges before the twentieth century, but these schools were focused on agricultural training and mechanical skills. In fact, there was a great deal of federal support for such schools in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1862 the Morrill Land Grant Act was passed to provide funds to start U.S. land grant colleges for the scientific education of farmers and mechanics. The second Morrill Act, in 1890, supplemented the first and also established experiment stations, extension services, and agricultural research programs to aid U.S. farmers. The Hatch Act, passed in 1887, authorized the establishment of agricultural experiment stations in all states with land grant colleges. Other vocational and technical colleges existed as well to provide training for black Americans, but I address this in the last chapter.

32. Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 173–74.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

34. *Ibid.*

35. A reprint of Westbrook’s note 24, p. 174: *Report of the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technical Education* (1906), quoted in Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School, 1880–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 220; Robert L. Church and Michael Sedlak, *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: Free Press, 1976), pp. 304–5, 289. The industrial education movement has been an immensely popular topic among historians. See Sol Cohen, “The Industrial Education Movement, 1906–1917,” *American Quarterly*, 20 (1968): 95–110; Berenice M. Fisher, *Industrial Education: American Ideals and Institutions* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); James B. Gilbert, *Work Without Salvation: Amer-*

ica's Intellectuals and Industrial Alienation, 1880–1910 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), chapter 10; W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, eds., *American Education and Vocationalism: Documents in Vocational Education, 1870–1970* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1974); David J. Hogan, *Class and Reform: School and Society in Chicago, 1880–1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), chap. 4; Harvey Kantor, *Learning to Earn: School, Work, and Reform in California, 1880–1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Harvey Kantor and David Tyack, eds., *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982); Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 81–87; Selwyn K. Troen, “The Discovery of the Adolescent by American Educational Reformers, 1900–1920: An Economic Perspective,” in Lawrence Stone, ed., *Schooling and Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 239–51; David Tyack, *The One Best System* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 182–98; and Arthur G. Wirth, *Education in Technological Society: The Vocational-Liberal Studies Controversy in the Early Twentieth Century* (Scranton, PA: Intertext, 1972)” (Westbrook, 191, p. 134, n.24).

36. “Some Dangers in the Present Movement for Industrial Education” (1913), *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83), 7:99, 102.

37. *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Middle Works*, 9:341. The ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois are treated in detail in the last chapter of this study (along with those of Ralph Ellison).

38. This is one place where the narrative implies the reality of collaboration behind intellectual accomplishments (which are often attributed to one person).

39. This is perhaps because it is not remarkable itself; notwithstanding its different forms, it is universal, and therefore commonplace in its very essence.

40. Thoreau is one of the more famous writers to make the connection between exchange and dependence. Michael Gilmore draws this point out in his article “Walden and the ‘Curse of Trade’”: “The interactions of exchange, in [Thoreau’s] view, breed not independence but servility.” In *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 294.

41. Certainly the term “settle” holds its share of importance in American historical studies. For example, the pioneers were also referred to as “settlers.” Settling the West is in large part the project that identifies America. In her articulation of the myth of America, Nina Baym argues that the “essential quality of America comes to reside in its unsettled wilderness” (*Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978], pp. 132–33). Perhaps more central to an investigation of Cather is the Emily Dickenson verse:

Soto! Explore thyself!
 Therein thyself shalt find
 The ‘Undiscovered Continent’—
 No Settler had the Mind. (1864)

Don Hernando de Soto was one of the sixteenth-century Spanish pioneering explorers of what would be New Mexico; he went in search of the fabulous “Seven Cities of Gold.” He was followed by Coronado, whose expedition to the southwest inspired Cather’s imagination; Professor St. Peter, having devoted his professional life to the study of these men, to the point of tracing their travels through New Mexico, seems to finally take Dickinson’s (and Thoreau’s) advice, as he increasingly withdraws into the unknown territory of his self.

As I point out in this paragraph, the word “settle” seems to signify death. For the Native Americans, this was certainly the case. The white settlers were intent on claiming the land, and this meant the death of many Native American individuals and communities, not to mention the Native American cultures themselves. Strangely enough (as I have indicated), Cather does not seem to have had any political anxieties about the brutal tactics of white pioneerism. She seems to attribute to white pioneers the same spiritual relationship to the land that the Native Americans had; she idealizes both aspects of nineteenth-century America.

42. Although it is probable, I am not interested here in making the argument that Cather was inspired by *Walden*; rather, I am pointing out an important similarity in these writers’ sentiments. Cather’s reverence for the idea of self-sufficiency, along with her disdain for market-dependent living, make her and Thoreau allies. Little or no work has been done on this alliance, even though it exemplifies the ways in which Thoreau’s agenda emerges in twentieth-century literature.

43. Gilmore, “Walden and the ‘Curse of Trade,’” in Bercovitch and Jehlen, *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, p. 296.

44. *Walden* (New York: The New American Library, Signet Classics edition, 1960), p. 6.

45. It is worth mentioning that Cather’s Thoreauvian idealization of nineteenth-century America appears desperate next to Thoreau’s rejection of the very same historical period.

46. *Walden*, p. 51.

47. Gilmore, “Walden and the ‘Curse of Trade,’” in Bercovitch and Jehlen, *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, p. 303.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

49. *Walden*, p. 98.

50. Here I disagree with Leo Marx, who argues that “What matters most to them [“writers and artists drawn to this new pastoralism”] as it had to Thomas Jefferson, is the proper subordination of material concerns to other, less tangible aspects of life—whether aesthetic, moral, political, or spiritual” (“Pastoralism in America,” in Bercovitch and Jehlen, *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, p. 59).

51. “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle,” *Nation* 117, no. 3035 (September 5, 1923): 236, 238. Interestingly, Cather’s disdain for living “easily” is closely related to Thoreau’s disdain for “easy reading.” Both writers argue for a work ethic that requires laborious effort.

52. *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 21.

53. Money is always a symbol for something else, and never just a symbol for itself. Money, in these terms, cannot represent itself. This seems to be at least part of Cather’s problem with it. For a somewhat differently centered argument pertaining to money and representation, see chapter 5 of Michaels’s *The Gold Standard*. For a discussion of money as an epistemological metaphor, see chapter 2 of Livingston’s *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850–1940*. Also, Marc Shell’s *Money, Language, and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) analyzes the monetary corollaries of late-nineteenth-century political languages.

54. From Cather’s essay “On the Art of Fiction,” first published in 1920 in *The Borzoi*, reprinted in *Willa Cather on Writing*, p. 103. “Writing,” Cather proclaims, “ought either to be the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand . . . or it should be an art, which is always a search for something new and untried, where the values are intrinsic and have nothing to do with standardized values.”

55. From “Escapism,” an essay Cather published in *The Commonweal*, April 17, 1936. Reprinted in *Willa Cather on Writing*, p. 19.

56. This essay appears in *Willa Cather on Writing* as an “unpublished fragment,” p. 125.

57. In “The Novel Dèmeublé” Cather writes, “if the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism. Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art” (*Willa Cather on Writing* 40).

58. *Walden*, p. 157.

59. Tom also fails to grasp his role as a tourist. See Paula Kot, “Speculation, Tourism and the Professor’s House,” in *Twentieth Century Literature* 48 (2002).

60. “Escapism,” in *Willa Cather on Writing*, pp. 18–29.

Chapter 5

1. From Du Bois’ essay “Criteria of Negro Art,” quoted from *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: 1995), pp. 509–15.

2. James T. Kloppenberg, “Pragmatism and the Practice of History: From Turner and Du Bois to Today,” collected in *The Range of Pragmatism and the Limits of Philosophy* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 199.

3. Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Harvard University Press, 2000).

4. Although my arguments take a different approach, Daniel G. Williams’s book *Ethnicity and Cultural Authority: From Arnold to Du Bois* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) raises similar questions and exemplifies the varied directions of recent scholarship in this area. Williams does not deal with the impact of pragmatism; rather, his focus is to explore the “ways in which the authors’ textual constructions of ethnicity form a basis from which to speak ‘to’ or ‘for’ a specific group or constituency” (5).

5. It’s worth recalling, as I do in the second half of this chapter, that the novel *Invisible Man* has a well-known episode in which the protagonist is working for a paint company that runs on the slogan “Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints,” and the color the company is best known for is, of course, white.

6. “Just as soon as true art emerges,” Du Bois writes in “Criteria of Negro Art,” “just as soon as the black artist appears, someone touches the race on the shoulder and says, ‘he did that because he was an American, not because he was a Negro; he was born here; he was trained here; he is not a Negro—what is a Negro anyhow? He is just human; it is the kind of thing you ought to expect’” (Lewis 515).

7. “Criteria of Negro Art” (Lewis 513–14).

8. Walter Lippman, *A Preface to Morals* (1929; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1982), pp. ix–iii.

9. In Lippman’s later career, he was drawn to Santayana’s idea of “essences,” principles and ideals that may not exist in reality but rather come into existence as objects of the mind’s “prolonged and discriminating” reflection. After graduating from Harvard, where both James and Santayana had mentored him, he wrote to Bernard Berenson, “I love James more than any other great man I ever saw, but increasingly I find Santayana inescapable” (quoted in Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* [Boston: 1980], p. 21).

10. Du Bois argues this point explicitly in his essay “Atlanta University,” first published in 1905 in *From Servitude to Service: Being the Old South Lectures on the History and Work of Southern Institutions for the Education of the Negro* (collected in Lewis, pp. 237–52).

11. Such an education does not recognize or employ any kind of industrial or vocational learning. The preservation of this kind of education is one of the most powerful polemical lines of Cather’s 1925 novel *The Professor’s House*.

12. From Du Bois' essay "Negro Education," published in 1918 in *The Crisis* (Lewis 261).

13. From *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: Viking Press, 1949), p. 426.

14. In his essay "Atlanta University" (1905), Du Bois writes, "There are many ways of developing manhood and inspiring men" (238).

15. From "Atlanta University" (238).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

17. From Du Bois' essay, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," in Lewis, p. 323. This essay was originally published in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and remains one of the most famous segments of this text.

18. A phrase Du Bois repeats throughout his essay "Atlanta University."

19. "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," in Lewis, p. 323.

20. Although, as I point out, Du Bois is concerned for the "souls" of black folk, it should be noted that because he says black *folk*, he implies a "collectivity at odds with individual cultivation." This is an issue I take up in depth later in the chapter when I look at Ellison and *Invisible Man*. (The quote above is from the scholar Michael T. Gilmore, who offered this important observation in a letter.)

21. E. Davidson Washington, ed., *Selected Speeches of Booker T. Washington* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1932), pp. 31–36.

22. These essays are collected in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, 15 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83).

23. *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Middle Works*, 9:269.

24. On the first page of the first chapter of Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), his protagonist tells us that eighty-five years ago his grandparents "were told that they were free, united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and, in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand" (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1972).

25. Recall my argument in chapter 2 that in *McTeague* Norris implies the benefits of acknowledging and facilitating the relationship of the social and the industrial.

26. From "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" (Lewis 324).

27. *Ibid.*, 325.

28. From "The Parting of the Ways" (Lewis 329), originally published in *World Today*, April, 1904. I am quite aware that Du Bois' terminology excludes women from the struggle, and marginalizes their overall significance. This exclusive discourse is used without proper consideration, I believe, from Du Bois, and it continued to pervade black politics in the second half of the century as well, until black feminists gained enough visibility and power to challenge such exclusion. For Du Bois' part, however, it should be noted that he did reserve some of his most passionate writings for women's rights, dismissing patriarchal arguments and both white and black misogyny. In fact, he was an advocate of women's rights to the point that he demanded not only voting rights but, in "The Damnation of Women" (1920), equal pay for equal work (a movement—entitled the pay equity movement—that is just gaining noticeable momentum today).

29. Charles Eliot Norton, "The Paradise of Mediocrities," published in *Nation* (July 13, 1865): 43–44.

30. *Ibid.*

31. From "Atlanta Exposition Address," cited above in note 14.

32. From "The Talented Tenth: Memorial Address" (Lewis 347). Originally published in *Boulé Journal* 15 (October 1948): 3–13.

33. *Ibid.*, 349.

34. In *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Philip Brian Harper uses this term in the same fashion. Harper's

chapter on *Invisible Man* helped immensely to formulate the ideas of this section of my chapter. Although he and I have different aims and a different framework (for one thing, Harper never discusses Du Bois, or Washington, and the legacy of their debates in *Invisible Man* is what I want to illuminate and read), Harper's arguments influenced my own to a great extent.

35. After writing this, I came across in the new Introduction to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (written by him in 1984) the reference to W. H. Auden's definition of democracy as a "collectivity of individuals," which, although I cannot find the source of this remark, seems to capture my meaning.

36. From *Democracy and Education* (1916), in *Middle Works*, 9:268–69.

37. Recalling my chapter on Cather, it makes sense to point out that in order to retain classical "culture," which in some respect requires a commitment to uniformity, Cather had to accept a position that was not always supportive of individuality, and was certainly against any efforts to reform social reality by implementing more egalitarian, democratic measures that would extend equal opportunities to all individuals. But, as I argued, Cather was indeed a supporter of individuality in *theory*—a statement, perhaps, that speaks for itself.

38. The philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote that "It is the individual only who is timeless. Societies, cultures, and civilizations—past and present—are often incomprehensible to outsiders, but the individual's hungers, anxieties, dreams, and preoccupations have remained unchanged through the millenia." *Reflections on the Human Condition* (New York: 1973), p. 183.

39. From her essay "Escapism," published in 1936 (collected in *Willa Cather on Writing* [New York: 1949], p. 26). In this essay Cather claims that there is "a revolt against individualism" underway, and that this revolt "calls artists severely to account, because the artist is of all men the most individual: those who were not have been long forgotten." Harkening back to the question of Cather's conditional support of individuality, I would point out here that Cather's insistence on art as an apolitical medium is indicative of the kind of individualism she advocates, which is, ironically, captured in the title of the essay: that is, escapist. Thus, the "revolt against individualism" she laments is really the revolt against a disinterestedness that would allow many, if not most, individuals to be grouped in a class that automatically has less access to the privileges of those who control the capital.

40. From "Criteria of Negro Art" (Lewis 511).

41. From the 1981 Introduction to *Invisible Man*, p. xvii.

42. "A Very Stern Discipline: An Interview with Ralph Ellison," from *Harper's Magazine* (March 1967): 76–95.

43. From John Corry, "An American Novelist Who Sometimes Teaches," first published in the *New York Times* magazine, November 20, 1966, collected in *Conversations with Ralph Ellison* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), p. 101.

44. *Ibid.*

45. This is not to say that there is no tendency toward a representative-based outlook, because clearly Ellison is suggesting that every American individual is a representative of America, so it is national identity—and national democracy—not racial identity that sits at the heart of his idea of what the artist is responsible for upholding.

46. Ellison's novel offended many different critics. Eric J. Sundquist points out in *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1995) that its "cultural heterogeneity was criticized from the outset by socialists who were offended by Ellison's renunciation of the communist sympathies he had shown in the 1930s and his proclamation of an ironic faith in democracy" (12). Ellison declared in 1966, "I rejected Marxism because it cast the Negro as a victim and looked at him through ideology." From *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*, p. 104. Ellison also was

accused of lending credence to racist stereotypes with the characters of Bledsoe, Trueblood, and Rinehart, whose actions threatened to underscore, rather than combat, racist interpretations of black social life as inherently pathological. Moreover, he continued to be criticized for decades. According to the academic literary critic Addison Gayle Jr., who in 1971 edited a landmark anthology of black writing titled *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1971), black artists should be urged to rely on their special heritage and culture and not to fall prey to the temptations of assimilation, which, in his opinion, undermined the works of Ralph Ellison (as well as James Weldon Johnson and James Baldwin).

47. It is worth noting that Arnold Rampersad's *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2007) depicts Ellison as more concerned about his own personal status than about any political cause (such as civil rights, or helping other younger black writers to succeed). In a review of Rampersad's book in *The New Yorker*, Hilton Als writes that Rampersad, "who invested years in his biography of Langston Hughes, seems to take this rejection [of other black artists] personally." Als goes on to imply—as other reviewers have also done—that Rampersad's book might be unfair, at times, to Ellison. See "In the Territory: A Look at the Life of Ralph Ellison," *The New Yorker* (May 7, 2007).

48. I am for the most part using these terms—"writer" and "artist"—interchangeably. If for any reason they must be distinguished in this discussion, I will call attention to such a distinction in an explanatory fashion. I take the phrase "a long and splendid exchange" from Eric Sundquist (*Cultural Contexts for Invisible Man*).

49. This is a quote from Eric Sundquist's introduction to *Cultural Contexts*.

50. "Black Boys and Native Sons," *Dissent* 10 (Autumn 1963): 353–68.

51. The phrase "bracing rejoinder" comes from Sundquist.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Conversations with Ralph Ellison* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), xii.

54. *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 568. All subsequent quotes are from this edition and page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

55. In *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1987), Kimberly W. Benston draws a similar conclusion about the last line of Ellison's novel being a suggestion of human universalism, but does not make the same arguments or formulate his reading in quite the same way.

56. I quote this phrase from Harper, *Framing the Margins*, p. 127.

57. *Framing the Margins*, p. 127

58. This point is surprisingly overlooked by critics of *Invisible Man*: none of the critiques I looked at mentioned this passage as a direct allusion to Du Bois' Talented Tenth. This struck me as curious. I think one conclusion is that there is not enough attention paid to the role that Du Bois' work plays in *Invisible Man*. The influence and the imagery of Du Bois' work in *Invisible Man* is not completely unnoticed, of course, but a more thorough investigation into this intertextual—or interauthor—relationship could be done. Critics who have noted its importance (but not the passage I discuss) include Eric J. Sundquist; Mark Busby, *Ralph Ellison* (Boston: Twayne, 1991); Rudolph F. Dietze, *Ralph Ellison: The Genesis of an Artist* (Nuremberg: Verlag, 1982); and Jerry G. Watts, *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). James M. Albrecht, in "Saying Yes and Saying No: Individualist Ethics in Ellison, Burke, and Emerson" (1999), also mentions the legacy of Du Bois in Ellison—and draws some similar conclusions about Ellison's version of individualism—but does not treat this one passage. Albrecht's article was published in *PMLA* 114, no. 1, "Special Topic: Ethics and Literary Study" (Jan. 1999): 46–63.

59. Du Bois explains his Talented Tenth idea as "leadership of the Negro race in

America by a trained few."

60. In 1938 the Carnegie Corporation commissioned the Swedish social economist Gunnar Myrdal to write a study of American racism. Myrdal's study, *An American Dilemma*, which includes a selection titled "Social Equality," was a long treatise asserting that America was ruined by its racial prejudice, because such prejudice prevented it from fulfilling its proclaimed commitment to equality. When the study was published, Ellison wrote a review of it, criticizing Myrdal for representing African American life as primarily a reaction to white racism. As Ellison pointed out, "In our society it is not unusual for a Negro to experience a sensation that he does not exist in the real world at all. He seems rather to exist in the nightmarish fantasy of the white American mind as a phantom that the white mind seeks unceasingly, by means both crude and subtle, to lay" (*An American Dilemma: A Review*, in *Shadow and Act* [New York: Random House, 1964], p. 304).

61. Sundquist, *Cultural Contexts*, p. 15.

62. It is true, however, that while on the outside he appeared to be an accommodationist, Booker T. Washington was silently (even secretly) funding some of the race cases in the legal system that were designed to test and push the limits of Jim Crow legislation. Because he did this in an underhanded manner, few people knew about this side of his activities, which have been documented only in very recent biographical studies. Certainly Ralph Ellison knew nothing about it.

63. From "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address" (1948). See Lewis, p. 347.

64. For a discussion of political action in literature, and indeed as literature, see Richard Kostelanetz, *Politics in the African American Novel: James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1994).

65. Cited in this chapter, earlier, is Ellison's polemical summary of Howe's ideas on how Negro writers should conduct their art: "Most of all we should not become too interested in the problems of the art of literature, even though it is through these that we seek our individual identities. And between writing well and being ideologically militant, we must choose militancy. Well it all sounds quite familiar and I fear the social order which it forecasts more than I do that of Mississippi."

66. Howe's view of the relationship between art and politics is, of course, somewhat more complex than this. For example, in his genre study *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Horizon, 1957) he asserts, "The criteria for evaluating a political novel must finally be the same as those for any other novel: how much of our life does it illuminate? How ample a moral vision does it suggest?" (24). In a representative political narrative, ideological abstraction "is confronted with the richness and diversity of motive, the purity of ideal with the contamination of action" (23). The underlying dialectic of political fiction, according to Howe, consists of ideological abstractions, programs, and ideals interacting and conflicting with the flux of experience, the diversity of motives, and the contamination of actions. Vincent B. Leitch further points out in *American Literary Criticism from the 30s to the 80s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) that the "ideal literature propounded" by Howe (and other New York intellectuals such as Trilling and Wilson) "constituted an aesthetic, moral, and sociological formulation" in order to ensure "the ethical interaction of literature with life and society" (103).

67. I quote this from "A Very Stern Discipline: An Interview with Ralph Ellison," done by Steve Cannon, Lennox Raphael, and James Thompson (*Harper's Magazine* [March 1967]: 76-95).

68. The question "Does it remain black art?" (asked by Eugene Goodheart) is a provocative response to my argument, and is related to the more general question of whether race would still exist after racism (after racism is eliminated). One response to the above question is: the very idea of race as an indeterminable category makes

the question incoherent. While thinking about this question, I came across a story told by the novelist Charles Johnson, who recalls asking for a copy of *Invisible Man* in a university black studies library in 1969, only to be told that the library did not carry it because Ralph Ellison was *not* a black writer. I cite this story from David Remnick, "Visible Man," in *The New Yorker* (March 14, 1994): 36.

69. James Baldwin captures the nuances of this problem from an intriguing angle in his short story "Going to Meet the Man" (1945) when he speaks from the position of white Southern racists who are perplexed by the growing activism of their black neighbors: "nor had they dreamed that the past, while certainly refusing to be forgotten, could yet so stubbornly refuse to be remembered." The past that the community's blacks are forgetting is the past that relegates them to the role of passive, unfrontational, controllable, ignorant servants/slaves, and they are forgetting it by demanding their rights.

70. In assessing the impact of the Brotherhood's removal of him from Harlem, *Invisible Man* does in fact say that he is "on the way toward revelation" (397). He is explicitly referring to the process by which he has been unmasking "all the secrets of power and authority" in the organization itself, but in my view he is without doubt experiencing the revelation of his own connection to the black community as an integral part of—and route to—his individual identity.

71. Other critics also see the revelation *Invisible Man* experiences as a result of this speech, without advancing quite the same arguments. Above all, see Harper. For a discussion of *Invisible Man* as a newly cognizant member of the Harlem community, see Kerry McSweeney, *Invisible Man: Race and Identity* (Boston: Twayne, 1988). Also see Edith Schor, *Visible Ellison: A Study of Ralph Ellison's Fiction* (Greenwood Press, 1993), who implicitly agrees that *Invisible Man* finally comes to terms with his relationship with/to the black community; and James M. Albrecht, in "Saying Yes and Saying No: Individualist Ethics in Ellison, Burke, and Emerson" (1999), cited above, note 58.

72. From Du Bois' "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address" (1948), p. 349.

73. It makes sense to point out that this "profound" "radical" individualism is arguably not individualism at all any more, and would perhaps be better described as personal isolationism.

74. "An Interview with Ralph Ellison" by Allen Geller. From the *Tamarack Review* (Summer 1964): 221–27.

75. Although I have not emphasized the historical moment of this novel's publication—it seems to me an obvious point that *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954) and the awakening of the Civil Rights movement were closely in tow—I want to stress now that *Invisible Man* came out at a time of great racial crisis, a time when desegregation was on the horizon, which accounts for the overwhelming anxiety that characterizes both the black and white response to this text. See Introduction to Kostelanetz, *Politics in the African American Novel*, and Introduction to *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*.

76. Kenneth Warren notes in his article "Ralph Ellison and the Problem of Cultural Authority" (2003) that "In paralleling music, dancing, and diversity, the narrator suggests that the formula for making good art is the same as that for making a just society" (171). He draws attention to the passage in *IM* where diversity is explicitly mentioned: "'Diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states' (*IM* 577). A good society would be like a good jazz song." Warren also points out that "The title he gave to a 1967 lecture, 'The Novel as a Function of American Democracy,' exemplifies his many musings on the relationship between art and society. He 'emphasize[d]' that the American nation is based upon revolution, dedicated to change through basic concepts stated in the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. It is dedicated to an open society. . . . With such a society, it seems only natural that the novel existed to be exploited by certain personality types who found

their existence within the United States.” Warren’s article appeared in *boundary 2* 30, no. 2 (2003): 157–74.

77. From the Introduction to *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*. He apparently said this to Hollie West in August 1973 (p. vii).

Coda

1. “I Believe” (1939), *Later Works*, 14:91.
2. Anson Rabinach from “Ernst Bloch’s *Heritage of Our Times* and the Theory of Fascism,” *New German Critique* 11 (1977): 11.
3. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 195.
4. From James’s *Pragmatism* (1907) in *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 117, 123.

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