Where the World Is Not

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Introduction

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.
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:

10. Robert D. Richardson, Prologue, William James: In the Maelstrom of American

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
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 litera-
ture 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
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 intellec-
tual 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 pic-
ture 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 exegetical possibilities than to advance a com-
prehensive 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.


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).


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).


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).


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. Mybe 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:


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 ethno-racial 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.


43. Ibid., p. 46, n101.


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


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.”


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).


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).


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

Chapter 1


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 “Ressentiment 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.


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


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.).


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).


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.

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.


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.


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.

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]).
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).


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.


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.


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).


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).

Chapter 2

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.
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).
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).


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).


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).

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).
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.”
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.


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.


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).


46. Ibid., p. 155.

Chapter 3


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 technic. 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 experimentor [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 Williams 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. “Hegelism 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 Philos-
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.


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.)


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.


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 (ēs-thē’tiks), 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, Cassierer, Santayana, and, of course, John Dewey (most thoroughly in *Art as Experience* [1934]).


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.


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 “primi-
tivism” 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 mar-
rried, 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 Intel-
lects, 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
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

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 crit-
cial 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


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

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 (benzolsulfamide) 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 descrip-
tion of the new compound in February 1880, calling special attention to its sweet-
ness. 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.


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.


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.


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).


49. Later Works, 11:51.


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.


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


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


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


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
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.


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.


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.


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.


19. This is particularly interesting in the case of Coolidge because he ran his plat-
form 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 accomplish-
ments of my administration has been minding my own business,” Coolidge remarked
to newspaper reporters (Washington, DC, March 1, 1929), quoted in Robin Santor


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

22. For an interesting and persuasive account of the context for such a crisis,
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 Educa-
tion 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 noto-
rious 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 senti-
mental. 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

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:
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
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.


33. Ibid., p. 174.

34. Ibid.


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.


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.


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.


48. Ibid., p. 294.


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.


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 Michaelis’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.”

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

57. In “The Novel Démeublé” 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).


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


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).


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).


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.
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.”
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.)
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).
30. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 349.
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.


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).


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*.


51. The phrase “bracing rejoinder” comes from Sundquist.

52. Ibid.


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
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).


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.


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).


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 indeterminate 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,

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 posi-
tion 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 com-
munity’s blacks are forgetting is the past that relegates them to the role of passive,
unconfrontational, 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.


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

75. Although I have not emphasized the historical moment of this novel’s publi-
cation—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 Cul-
tural Authority” (2003) that “In paralleling music, dancing, and diversity, the nar-
rator 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 explic-
Itly 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 revolu-
tion, 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

77. From the Introduction to Conversations with Ralph Ellison. He apparently said this to Hollie West in August 1973 (p. vii).

Coda