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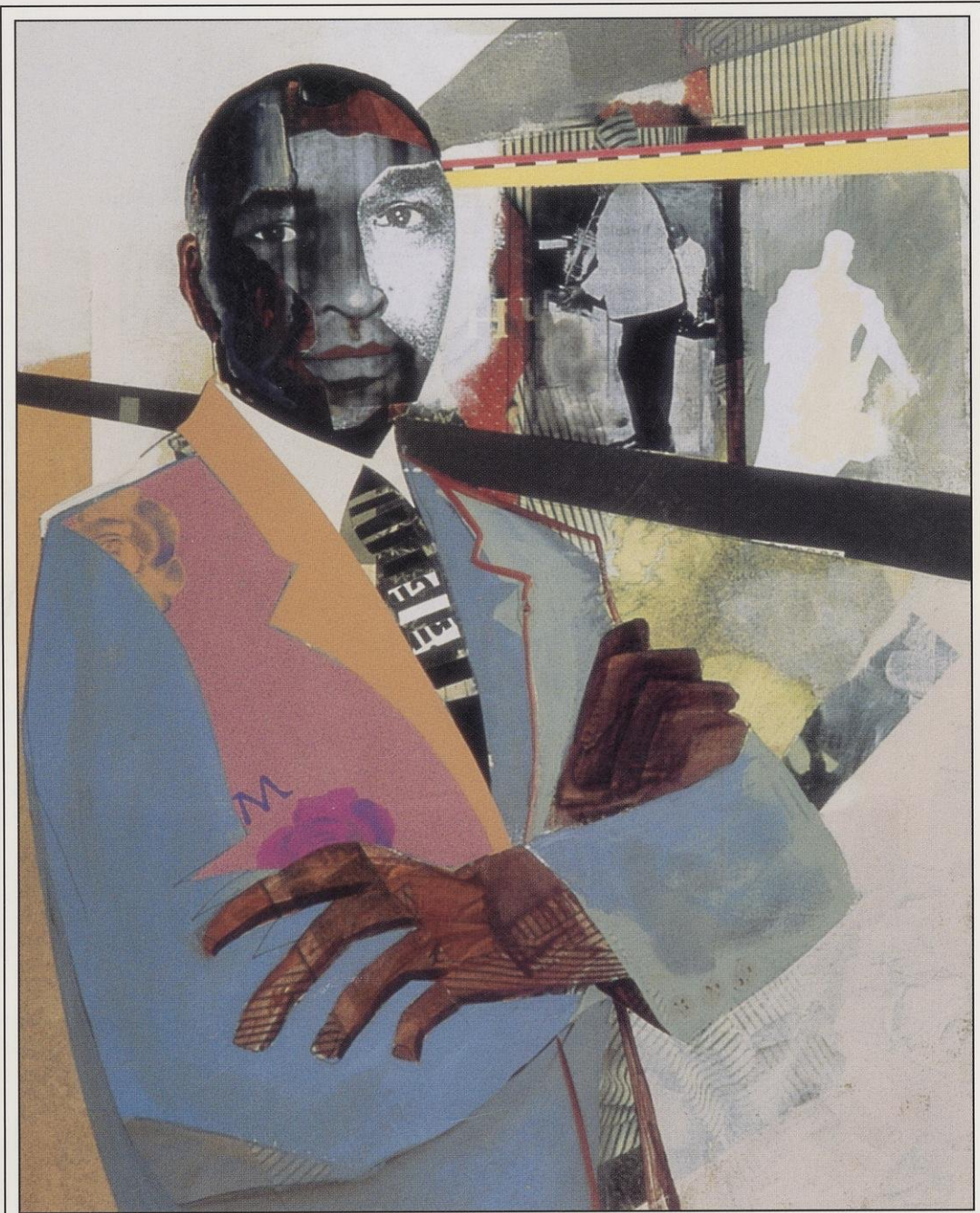
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"SECRETS" OF STRADIVARI • SYLVIA PLATH REMEMBERED
ELLA WHEELER'S *POEMS OF PASSION*

Wisconsin Academy Review

A JOURNAL OF WISCONSIN CULTURE



Wisconsin Academy Review

Spring 2000

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Public Life and the Wisconsin Academy



Earl (Richard) and Ralph Quinney, September 1941. Photograph by Alice Holloway Quinney.

FRONT COVER: Self-Portrait by Jerry Butler. Acrylic collage on ragboard, 20 x 18 inches, 1999.

BACK COVER: In My Father's Image by Jerry Butler. Acrylic collage on ragboard, 20 x 18 inches, 1998.

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The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters was chartered by the State Legislature on March 16, 1870, as a membership organization serving the people of Wisconsin. Its mission is to encourage investigation in the sciences, arts, and letters and to disseminate information and share knowledge.



What do you do when you receive your copy of the Review?

Do you flip through and look at the pictures, then toss it on the "to read" pile on top of other magazines, newspapers opened to in-depth articles you plan to read one day, months-old book reviews, newsletters, and catalogs? Does it disappear into a deeper stack of printed matter when you clear off the table or desk? Do you feel a pang of guilt when you catch a glimpse of it suffocating under all of those lesser publications?

If not, if you devour each new issue as soon as you receive it and accord it a privileged place in your home, then, exemplary reader, you may place a gold star on your forehead and skip ahead two paragraphs.

Everyone else, please read on for a little strategy that will help you appreciate the magazine you hold in your hands.

Here's what to do. When you bring in the mail and see a new copy of the *Review*, don't open it. Take it immediately into your bedroom. Tell yourself, "I can't look at it until bedtime." It will work like magic. A little inner voice will whine, "but I want to look at it now!" Ignore the voice. You may find yourself going to bed a little earlier than usual. And when you finally open the magazine, you'll smile to see what's waiting for you: artwork, fiction, and poetry to nourish your soul, and informative articles to feed your brain. In this very issue, you will find answers to questions such as these:

What's so great about old Italian violins?

Good question! A physicist right here in Wisconsin has spent three decades trying to answer it, and Professor Kameshwar Wali explains his research in crystal-clear prose. Soon you will be telling your friends about the importance of the tweeter mode.

What was Sylvia Plath like as a child?

We've all been overwhelmed with Plath hype, just renewed with the recent publication of Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters*. But now Max Gaebler, a Madison resident, who knew the Plath family when Sylvia was a child, has written a memoir—just for the *Review*—that shows an unfamiliar side of this great poet.

Could there be any interesting Wisconsin artists whom I don't know about?

Could there! Some of you may know the work of Jerry Butler, who teaches at Madison Area Technical College; for others, his colorful and moving collages will be a revelation. But don't just

look: be sure to read Katie Mengwasser's account of his work and life, as well as related poems by local writers Stephen Braunginn and Fabu.

Who wrote "Laugh, and the world laughs with you; Weep, and you weep alone"?

Not a Wisconsinite? Well, think again. For the answer, see Richard Boudreau's revealing article on three forgotten Wisconsin authors.

How can I endure the death of a parent?

This might seem beyond our scope; but Richard Quinney's memoir will resonate with feelings almost all of us have faced or will face some day.

What books about Wisconsin or by Wisconsinites have been published recently?

See the five book reviews published here.

How about fiction and poetry?
As always, we bring you previously unpublished works by Wisconsin authors: this quarter, Sherry Elmer, Judy Kolosso, DyAnne Korda, Andrea O'Brien, Richard Radtke, and Peter Sherrill.

What new programs has the Academy launched?

See Inside the Academy for the latest on the Intelligent Consumption Project.

What has Bob Lange (our executive director, of course) been thinking about lately?

Turn to the Back Page.

How did other readers react to the articles and opinions in the last issue?

Silently! Send **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** by regular mail or by e-mail to: review@wisconsinacademy.org. Remember to include your name, address, and telephone number.

Louise E. Robbins

Corrections

The negative number for the photograph on page 18 of the Winter 1999–2000 issue (vol. 46, no. 1) was missing its final digit; it should be WHi(X3)33738.

In the same issue, we failed to print the dedication to Karin B. Gordon's poem "Somewhere New" (p. 27): *For Julian*.



The Flock by Jerry Butler. Acrylic on ragboard, 20 x 30 inches, 1998.

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- Kameshwar C. Wali is a professor of physics at Syracuse University whose research area is theoretical high-energy physics. He is the author of *Chandra: A Biography of S. Chandrasekhar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Eighteen Eighty-three: A Landmark Year for Badger Writers

by Richard Boudreau

The year was 1883, the thirty-fifth year of statehood for Wisconsin. Jeremiah "Uncle Jerry" Rusk was in his second year as governor. The west and south wings of the state capitol were being rebuilt. The new Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics began collecting and analyzing data on the state's workforce and industrial practices. The Knights of Labor were agitating, particularly in the Milwaukee area, for an eight-hour workday. The Appleton Edison Light Company—the first hydroelectric-powered central lighting system in the world—went into operation. William Horlick of Racine developed a dried milk product he named Malted Milk. And there was a devastating fire at the Newhall House Hotel in Milwaukee that killed over seventy people.

These developments were interesting, even in one case shocking, but they were not of tremendous lasting importance to Wisconsinites. In spite of that, 1883 turned out to be a remarkable year in our state's history, though not recognized at the time nor made much of since. During those twelve months Wisconsin letters came of age. Not just one, but three Wisconsin writers—Ella Wheeler (later known by her married name Wilcox), Charles King, and George W. Peck—found themselves, each for the first time, projected onto the national scene. Their books became best-sellers, attracting large numbers of readers across the United States and demanding attention. Wisconsin writers and writing had entered the mainstream of American popular literature suddenly—and for the first time—with a bang.

Ella Wheeler (1850–1919) had already gained a modest following as a writer of temperance and occasional verse, and her long narrative love poem, *Maurine*, published during the nation's



Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

centennial year, had enjoyed some success. Her individual poems, referred to as "waifs" in the parlance of the time, had been printed singly in various periodicals—like those of most versifiers of the era—and she wanted them "legitimized" in a collection. Early in 1883 she presented a sheaf of such poems, all previously published, to the Chicago firm Jansen & McClurg, which had printed a second edition of *Maurine* the previous year. Imagine her astonishment when they not only turned down her new manuscript but suggested that some of its poems were immoral. She revealed the publisher's reaction in a letter to friends in Milwaukee; a local newspaper somehow

From *Poems of Passion* by Ella Wheeler

Attraction

The meadow and the mountain with desire
Gazed on each other, till a fierce unrest
Surged 'neath the meadow's seemingly calm breast,
And all the mountain's fissures ran with fire.

A mighty river rolled between them there.
What could the mountain do but gaze and burn?
What could the meadow do but look and yearn,
And gem its bosom to conceal despair?

Their seething passion agitated space,
Till lo! the lands a sudden earthquake shook,
The river fled: the meadow leaped, and took
The leaning mountain in a close embrace.



"Sweet whispered words of passion." Reprinted from *Maurine* by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, with life studies by Jans Matzene and views by Eugene J. Hall (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Co., 1901), p. 141.

Solitude

Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone.
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air,
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.

Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go.
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all,—
There are none to decline your nectar'd wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall.

Feast, and your halls are crowded
Fast, and the world goes by.
Succeed and give, it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a large and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.

Ella Wheeler roughed out a draft of "Solitude," her most remembered poem, while she was on the way to Governor Rusk's inaugural ball in early 1883. She finished it while staying at Judge Braley's house, 422 N. Henry St., in Madison.

Ella Wheeler, Poems of Passion
(Chicago: Belford, Clarke, & Co., 1883).



Captain Charles King in his uniform for the "Carnival of Authors," 1883.
Courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

learned of it, and, according to Wheeler (*Worlds and I*, p. 80), immediately blazoned out the news:

Too Loud for Chicago
The Scarlet City by the Lake Shocked
By a Badger Girl, Whose Verses
Out-Swinburne Swinburne and
Out-Whitman Whitman

Such notoriety was too good to pass up, and a rival Chicago publisher seized the advantage, promptly soliciting her manuscript and publishing it as fast as possible. It bore the title *Poems of Passion* that Ella Wheeler had wanted. The words, splattered in gold across its scarlet cover, seemed a bit racy for Victorian America—and readers couldn't wait to get their

hands on it. Charles A. Dana of the *New York Sun* (perhaps unaware that his paper had printed her poem "Solitude" only a few weeks before) severely criticized the book, citing lines in which she had used the risqué word "kiss." "This brought me scores of letters, asking where the book could be purchased," Wheeler remembered (*Worlds and I*, p. 82). So she wrote a letter of thanks to editor Dana. He was *not* pleased. Sixty thousand copies of the book were sold during the first two years.

To add to the titillation, the public soon learned of her engagement to a Connecticut man who was in the silver business, Robert Wilcox—they had met by chance in a Chicago jewelry store. Following their marriage a year later, the "Badger Girl" left her home state for the East Coast. Over the years that followed, from her "too prolific pen" (preface to *Poems of Passion*, p. 1) came several books with similar titles: *Poems of Pleasure*, . . . *Power*, . . . *Love*, . . . *Reflection*, . . . *Sentiment*, . . . *Progress*, and . . . *Problems*, besides other collections, essays, and articles concerning new age thought and spiritualism, and, finally, an autobiography, *The Worlds and I*. But nothing she ever did equaled the success of that first *Poems of Passion*. During the American involvement in World War I, she went to France to entertain the troops, reading patriotic poems and doling out advice to the love-lorn young doughboys. She returned in 1919 in ill health and died soon after. The great passion had run its course—at least in this world.



Charles King (1844–1933) never intended to make writing his career; he was bent on becoming a professional soldier. After an initial taste of the military at the beginning of the Civil War when he served his father, General Rufus King, along the Potomac near Washington, D.C., he entered West Point. By the time he graduated, the Civil War was over, and he

was attached to the army of occupation in Louisiana, headquartered in New Orleans. Eventually he transferred to the U.S. Cavalry and was posted west to pursue Indians. In 1874, during a skirmish with Apaches at Sunset Pass, Arizona Territory, his right arm was shattered by a bullet. Though the wound healed slowly, he participated in the 1876 campaign against the Sioux, before and after the Battle of Little Bighorn, and the following year against Chief Joseph's Nez Perce.

But by then the effects of his wound forced him to consider retirement. He returned to his hometown of Milwaukee in 1879. At a men's luncheon he overheard some disparaging remarks about the easy life of the cavalryman on the Indian frontier. Fired up, he put together an account of a rearguard action against the Sioux at Slim Buttes, Dakota Territory, in which he

Excerpt from *Campaigning with Crook* by Captain Charles King, U.S.A.

Chapter Nine: The Fight of the Rear Guard

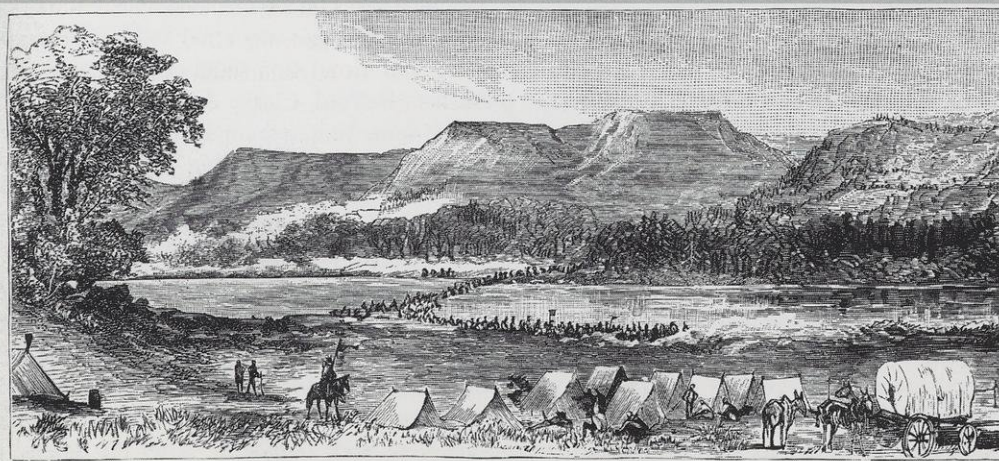
Ragged and almost starving, out of rations, out at elbows and every other exposed angle, out of everything but pluck and ammunition, General Crook gave up the pursuit of Sitting Bull at the head of Heart River. The Indians had scattered in every direction. We had chased them a month, and were no nearer than when we started. Their trail led in as many different directions as there are degrees in the circle; they had burned off the grass from the Yellowstone to the mountains, and our horses were dropping by scores, starved and exhausted, every day we marched. There was no help for it, and only one thing left to do. At daybreak the next morning the orders came, "Make for the Black Hills—due south by compass—seven days' march at least," and we headed our dejected steeds accordingly and shambled off in search of supplies.

Through eleven days of pouring, pitiless rain we plodded on that never-to-be-forgotten trip, and when at last we sighted Bare Butte and halted, exhausted, at the swift-flowing current of the Belle Fourche, three-fourths of our cavalry, of the Second, Third, and Fifth regiments, had made the last day's march afoot. One-half our horses were broken down for good, one-fourth had fallen never to rise again, and dozens had been eaten to keep us, their riders, alive.

Enlivening incidents were few enough, and—except one—of little interest to Milwaukeeans. That one is at your service. On the night of September 7th we were halted near the headwaters of Grand River. Here a force of one hundred and fifty men of the Third Cavalry, with the

serviceable horses of that regiment, were pushed ahead under Major Anson Mills, with orders to find the Black Hills, buy up all the supplies he could in Deadwood, and then hurry back to meet us. Two days after, just as we were breaking up our cheerless bivouac of the night, a courier rode in with news that Mills was surrounded by the Indians twenty miles south, and every officer and man of the Fifth Cavalry whose horse had strength enough to trot pushed ahead to the rescue. Through mud, mist, and rain we plunged along, and by half-past ten were exchanging congratulations with Mills and shots with the redskins in as wealthy an Indian village, for its size, as ever we had seen. Custer's guidons and uniforms were the first things that met our eyes—trophies and evidence at once of the part our foe had taken in the bloody battle of the Little Big Horn. Mills had stumbled upon the village before day, made a magnificent dash, and scattered the Indians to the neighboring heights, Slim Buttes by name, and then hung on to his prize like a bulldog, and in the face of appalling odds, till we rode in to his assistance. That afternoon, reinforced by swarms of warriors, they made a grand rally and spirited attack, but 'twas no use. By that time we had some two thousand to meet them, and the whole Sioux nation couldn't have whipped us. Some four hundred ponies had been captured with the village, and many a fire was lighted and many a suffering stomach gladdened with a welcome change from horse meat, tough and stringy, to rib roasts of pony, grass-fed, sweet, and succulent. There is no such sauce as starvation. . . .

Charles King,
*Campaigning with
Crook (Milwaukee:
Milwaukee Sentinel
Press, 1880).*



*Crook's column on the
Tongue River.
Reprinted from
Campaigning with
Crook and Stories of
Army Life by Captain
Charles King, U.S.A.,
illustrated (New York:
Harper & Brothers,
1890), facing p. 68.*



George W. Peck

had fought, and presented it as a talk to the same lunch group. Someone from the *Sentinel*, his father's old newspaper, heard him, asked for a written version, and printed it in the new Sunday supplement. His narrative was well written, graphic, and thrilling. It was an immediate success, and more articles followed. A year later, the *Sentinel Press* published the popular series, which comprised King's eyewitness accounts of the war against the Sioux, as a book, *Campaigning with Crook*.

From that point on King used his frontier and military experiences as background for a number of novels and short stories. Unexpectedly, he found writing congenial, and it was something he could do even with his maimed right arm, though with some discomfort. His first published novel, *The Colonel's Daughter* by "Captain Charles King, U.S.A.," appeared early in 1883, became a best-seller, and subsequently remained the most popular of all his novels. A review at the time noted that "the author's style entitles him to rank among the best of modern novelists." After completing several more books himself, he hired an amanuensis and went on to publish well over sixty books in his active career. More than fifty of these were novels, produced at a rate of nearly two a year; the last, *Lanier of the*

Cavalry, appeared in 1909. In addition, he published some 250 short stories during the same time period. His national reputation persisted throughout, founded as it was on the realism and authenticity of his accounts of army life in peace and war.

Through all of this he maintained his involvement in the military. He served in the old state guard, in the National Guard, and in the University of Wisconsin Military Science Department during the administrations of Governors Rusk and Hoard and into the beginning years of that of Governor Peck, at which time he retired from such duties. In 1895 the newly elected Governor Upham, an old army comrade, named him adjutant general of Wisconsin and promoted him to brigadier general. General King was activated during the Spanish-American War and saw action in the Philippines, then retired again. In 1904 he was recalled by the La Follette administration to head the Wisconsin National Guard. It was largely through his work that the guard earned its outstanding reputation—so outstanding that it was sent to Texas in the summer of 1916 to protect against border incursions by Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary. The guard was called up again within days of America's entry into World War I, when it was combined with the Michigan National Guard to form the famous 32nd "Red Arrow" Division. General King remained active in state military matters almost up to his death at the age of 88.



The writings of George Wilbur Peck (1840–1916) were in quite a different vein. A journalist with a knack for satire and ridicule, he was unable to indulge himself fully until he owned his own newspaper, *The Sun*, which he began publishing in La Crosse in 1874. "The funniest newspaper in America. What vaccination is to the smallpox, Peck's *Sun* is to the Blues," the banner proclaimed. And though he was on the right track to success, he was in the wrong city. In 1878 he moved to the more populous Milwaukee, where his satire and humor began to attract notice and his readership grew. In 1882 he began sketches about a character named Hennerly, his "Bad Boy," who perpetrated practical jokes on anyone available, but particularly on his Pa. Some of the humor was cruel and unfeeling, but the series caught on and circulation numbers increased. In 1883 Chicago publishers Belford, Clarke & Co. brought out both a first and, later the same year, a second collection of *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa*. Before the year was out, the books had become best-sellers, and Peck's name was a household word.

Peck, who was born in New York State, had come to Wisconsin with his family in 1843. He began his newspaper career with the *Whitewater Register* and worked for several other papers before enlisting in the Fourth Wisconsin Volunteer Cavalry in 1863, where he served until 1866. Following his mustering out he returned to Wisconsin, started the *Ripon Representative*, soon sold out, then hired on to Brick Pomeroy's staff to run the *New York Democrat*. After the demise of the New York paper, he returned to La Crosse to work on

Excerpt from *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa* by George W. Peck

Chapter 33: His Pa Jokes with Him

"What on earth is that you have got on your upper lip?" said the grocery man to the bad boy, as he came in and began to peel a rutabaga, and his upper lip hung down over his teeth, and was covered with something that looked like shoemaker's wax, "You look as though you had been digging potatoes with your nose."

"O, that is some of Pa's darn smartness. I asked him if he knew anything that would make a boy's mustache grow and he told me the best thing he ever tried was tar, and for me to rub it on thick when I went to bed, and wash it off in the morning. I put it on last night, and by gosh I can't wash it off. Pa told me all I had to do was to use a scouring brick, and it would come off, and I used the brick, and it took the skin off, and the tar is there yet, and, say, does my lip look very bad?"

The grocery man told him it was the worst looking lip he ever saw, but he could cure it by rubbing a little cayenne pepper in the tar. He said the tar would neutralize the pepper, and the pepper would loosen the tar, and act as a cooling lotion to the lacerated lip. The boy went to a can of pepper behind the counter, and stuck his finger in and rubbed a lot of it on his lip, and then his hair began to raise, and he began to cry, and rushed to the water-pail and ran his face into the water to wash off the pepper. The grocery man laughed, and when the boy had got the pepper washed off, and had resumed his rutabaga, he said:

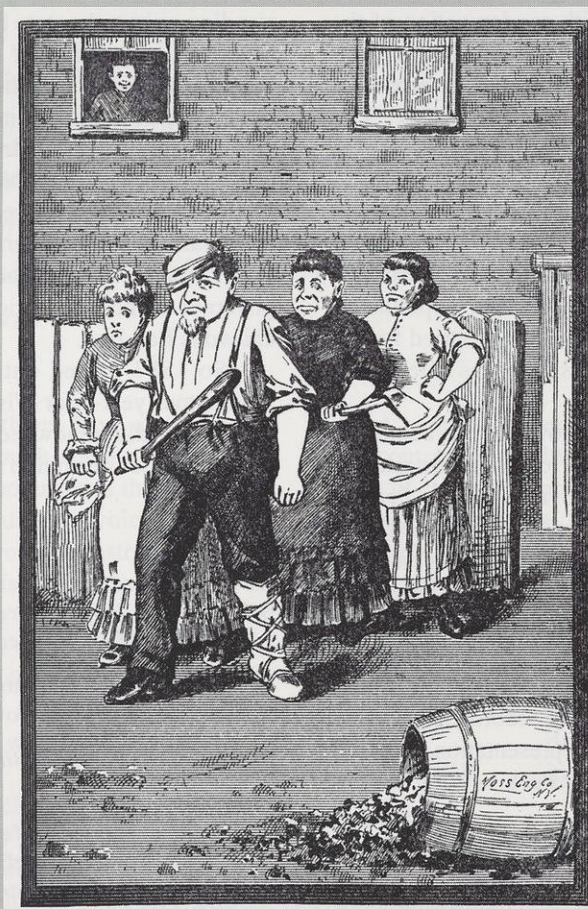
"That seals your fate. No man ever trifles with the feelings of the bold buccaneer of the Spanish main, without living to rue it. I will lay for you old man, and don't you forget it. Pa thought he was smart when he got me to

put tar on my lip, to bring my mustache out, and to-day he lays on a bed of pain, and to-morrow your turn will come. You will regret that you did not get down on your knees and beg my pardon. You will be sorry that you did not prescribe cold cream for my bruised lip, instead of cayenne pepper. Beware, you base twelve ounces to the pound huckster, you gimlet-eyed seller of dog-sausage, you sanded sugar idiot, you small potato three card monte sleight of hand rotten egg fiend, you villain that sells smoked sturgeon and dogfish for smoked halibut. The avenger is on your track."

"Look here, young man, don't you threaten me, or I will take you by the ear and walk you through green fields, and beside still waters, to the front door, and kick your pistol pocket clear around so you can wear it for a watch pocket in your vest.

No boy can frighten me, by crimus! But tell me, how did you get even with your Pa?" . . .

George W. Peck, Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1883).



Hunting for the Bad Boy. Reprinted from Peck's Compendium of Fun (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1883), p. 45.

Pomeroy's original and still successful *Democrat*. Eventually he was able to buy out Pomeroy and set up his own newspaper, *The Sun*.

Though he had been chief of police in La Crosse, he had not entered politics to any extent. But in Milwaukee, in 1890, he became a vocal critic of the Bennett Law, a piece of legislation that had been passed the previous year and was taking up everyone's attention. The law, requiring all Wisconsin schools to instruct in English, seemed to threaten the independence of parochial schools, many of which conducted classes in German. The reaction was ferocious, especially from Lutherans and Catholics. Peck, a popular editor and a good Democrat, was endorsed as a candidate for mayor. With condemnation of the Bennett Law his primary issue, he won the April election handily. That same stand plus his great popularity then propelled him into the office of the governor in November. The Democrat-controlled legislature repealed the hated law early in 1891, and Peck served two terms—the only Democrat to do so between 1876 and 1933. In those years the governorship was not proactive, and his administration was benign throughout. But the depression of 1893 severely damaged the parochial coalition that had carried him into office, and the Republicans led by William Upham defeated Peck in 1894. He tried for the governorship once more, in 1904, but this time was defeated by Robert La Follette.

Even while serving as mayor and governor he continued his Bad Boy adventures (amounting in all to about fourteen volumes), published the comic Civil War novel *How Private George W. Peck Put Down the Rebellion*, and remained publisher of *The Sun*. At one point after leaving office his path and General King's crossed publicly. During a night of entertainment at the Academy of Music in Milwaukee, Peck introduced his fellow Wisconsin author, Charles King; the two men shared the stage with, among others, Hoosier poet Eugene Field. Peck's words, humorous or not, were not recorded, but King read his short story "Van." Although his presentation was well received, there is no evidence that either Peck or King continued on the lecture circuit.



Times and tastes change. Ella Wheeler Wilcox's voluminous effusions were jumbled together in retrospect and categorized by many critics as "sentimental trash." In the new century her faithful use of traditional poetics of rhythm and rhyme soon went the way of the horse and buggy (though even today she

remains popular: there are thirty-two selections from her poems in the 1996 collection *Quotations by Women*, edited by Rosalie Maggio). General King's novels were criticized as formulaic and melodramatic, but in any case tales of the Civil War and Indian conflicts lost their appeal in a country that was moving toward world involvement in trade and war. Peck's Bad Boy's antics and jokes began to be regarded as lowbrow and vulgar, and his popularity waned, too. All three writers retain short entries in the *Oxford Companion to American Literature*, but they and their works have been relegated to literary footnotes.

Such is fame and fortune. But during their heyday—or hey-year—of 1883, Wheeler, King, and Peck were the most outstanding writers the state had yet produced. And Wisconsin was proud and supportive of them. Ella Wheeler was honored in Milwaukee some months after the appearance of *Poems of Passion* with a testimonial dinner, an evening of appreciation, and a purse of five hundred dollars. Charles King retained his great popularity in Milwaukee and Madison, and in a final gesture of appreciation Governor Walter J. Kohler promoted King to the rank of major general in 1929. Bennett Law or no Bennett Law, George W. Peck would not have been elected as mayor or governor without the prior popularity of his *Sun* and its mischievous Bad Boy.

So 1883 turned out to be not only a good year, but a momentous year—for Wisconsin letters, for its three newly, and now nationally, renowned writers, and for the encouragement their successes offered to fledgling writers of their state. ■

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William F. Fry: A Physicist's Quest for the "Secrets" of Stradivari

by Kameshwar C. Wali

The origin and early history of the violin remain shrouded in mystery despite much research and speculation. The instrument appeared in its present form in the early sixteenth century, predominantly in Italy. Two schools of luthiers flourished: that of Gasparo Bertolotti, or Gasparo da Salò (1542–1609) in Brescia, and that of Andrea Amati (c. 1511–1581) in Cremona. The Cremona school dominated the scene for the next two centuries. Amati and his descendants ushered in an extraordinary period of violin making, which peaked between 1650 and 1750. All the violin makers lived and worked side by side around a courtyard in front of the St. Domenico church, where they produced instruments of great beauty and exquisite sound. The most celebrated of all, Antonio Stradivari (1644?–1737), brought unsurpassed perfection to the instruments he built.

Since that time, well-known luthiers have attempted to replicate the Cremona violins. Although some of them have made excellent copies, the general consensus is that they have not come close to reproducing the distinct voices, carrying power, and responsiveness of the Cremona instruments. This apparent lack of success has given rise to myths of unknown and unknowable secrets concerning the source of the wood and its treatment and the particulars of varnish; there exists a vast amount of pseudo-historical and pseudo-scientific literature filled with incredible claims.

Many legitimate scientific researchers have also attempted to demystify the Cremona instruments. Although studies of the separate components, or “mechanical subsystems,” of the violin—the bridge, soundpost, frequency modes, top and bottom plate resonances, action of the bow, radiation patterns, wood, varnish, and strings—have provided valuable knowledge regarding how a violin works, they have failed to give any clues about what makes a particular violin stand out among others, let alone revealing the secrets of a Stradivari violin. “Violin research is not directed to the question of what makes a violin a great or good violin,” said Gabriel Weinreich, professor emeritus of physics at the University of Michigan. “It is directed toward understanding how a violin works by definition, although that is not orthogonal to the question of what makes a violin good.”

.....
*With new insights,
Fry has come closer than
anyone before him to
reproducing the sound
of the great Italian violins.*
.....

A violin is essentially a set of strings mounted on a wooden box containing an almost entirely enclosed volume of air (the parts of the violin are shown in figure 1). When a violinist draws the bow across the strings, the vibrations are communicated to the box; corresponding vibrations are set up in the air space, and they in turn generate the amplified sound waves that reach the listener. This simple description, however, hardly conveys the complexity of the instrument. Indeed, for a violin maker, no formula, however detailed, could describe the multitude of variables involved in the design and construction of a violin. Making a violin is considered to be a matter of experience and intuition, artistry and craftsmanship. There could be no such thing as an exact copy of a famous model, if for no other reason than that no two pieces of wood are identical.

William F. “Jack” Fry, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, is well known for his pioneering research in high-energy physics and his work in astrophysics, but during the past three decades he has also pursued research on violins. Fry has been immensely successful in understanding the delicate interconnectedness of the different parts of the violin. His holistic approach to its acoustics, although rooted in solid physics principles, contrasts markedly with the conventional, reductionist approach. Fry is committed to a scientific probe and an analysis in terms of physical principles because he



William F. "Jack" Fry. Courtesy University of Wisconsin–Madison Archives.

believes that the Cremona masters must have known, consciously or unconsciously, what they were doing when they were making their violins. With new insights, he has come closer than anyone before him to reproducing the sound of the great Italian violins.

Fry was born in a small town near Des Moines, Iowa, and raised on a farm. As a young boy he had two strong interests: music and building radios. "The isolation of a farm heightened my interest in music," said Fry. "Listening to the radio not only connected me to the outside world, but it also brought music into my life. My ears developed in two ways both at the same time, forming the roots of my scientific and aesthetic interests." At the age of seven, he decided that he would like to play the violin. His father bought him a fiddle, and Fry took lessons from a local farmer, an enthusiastic amateur fiddler. When the farmer realized that the young boy had talent, he advised him to

receive formal training. Soon Fry was playing simple melodies at community events. In high school, Fry continued to pursue his dual interests in music and electronics, taking violin lessons and toying with chemistry and electronics in his basement laboratory.

In his freshman year at Iowa State University, Fry had the opportunity to take violin lessons from a professional, Ilse Niemach, who had been trained in Europe and had studied with Jascha Heifetz. He learned superior techniques and developed a deeper appreciation for classical music, but observing Niemach's standard of playing convinced him that he lacked the combination of will and talent required to be a professional musician. He decided to concentrate on his scientific interests and to pursue an engineering career.

After college, Fry spent four years (1943–47) at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C., where he built radio-jamming devices and a huge transmitter designed to misguide radio-guided German missiles. Fry soon realized, however, that his real interests lay not in building things but in understanding the principles behind them.

He began taking night courses in physics at George Washington University, where, as luck would have it, he had as a teacher George Gamow, one of the most charismatic figures of twentieth-century physics. Under his spell, Fry discovered physics as his true vocation. He went on to graduate school at Iowa State University, where he did research on high-energy cosmic ray physics. In 1952, Fry joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he established himself as one of the pioneering researchers in high-energy physics.

Fry had long ago given up playing the violin except occasionally in amateur groups. Then, one evening in Berkeley in 1961, a colleague, Wilson Powell, suggested they play some music. Since Fry had no violin with him, Powell borrowed two from the music school, a Stradivari and a Gagliano. "For the first time in my life," said Fry, "I realized how a good violin can

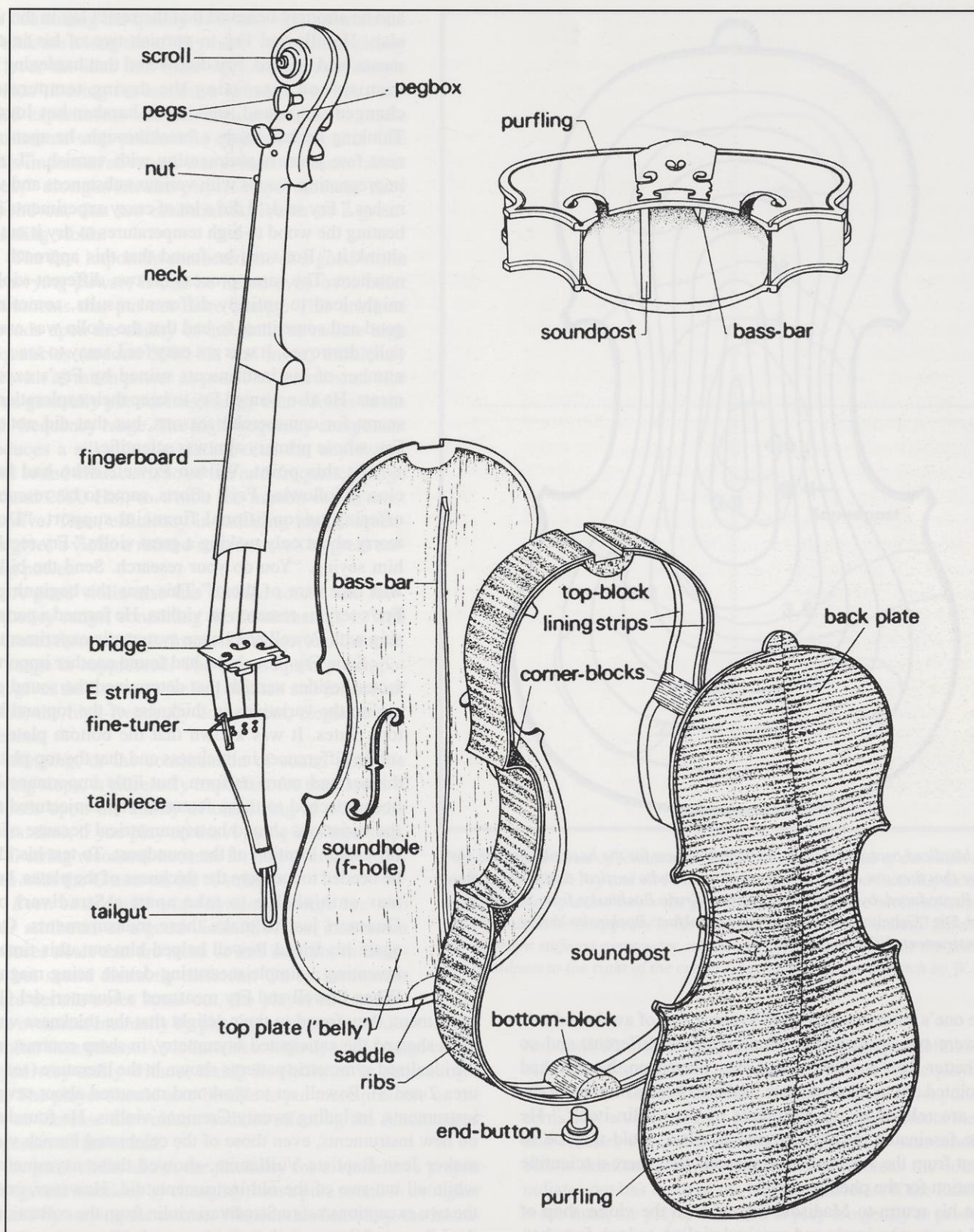


Fig. 1. Diagram showing the parts of the modern violin. Reprinted, by permission of Macmillan Publishers Ltd., from David D. Boyden et al., *The Violin Family*, *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd.; repr. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 4. (N.B. Labels have been enlarged for clarity.)

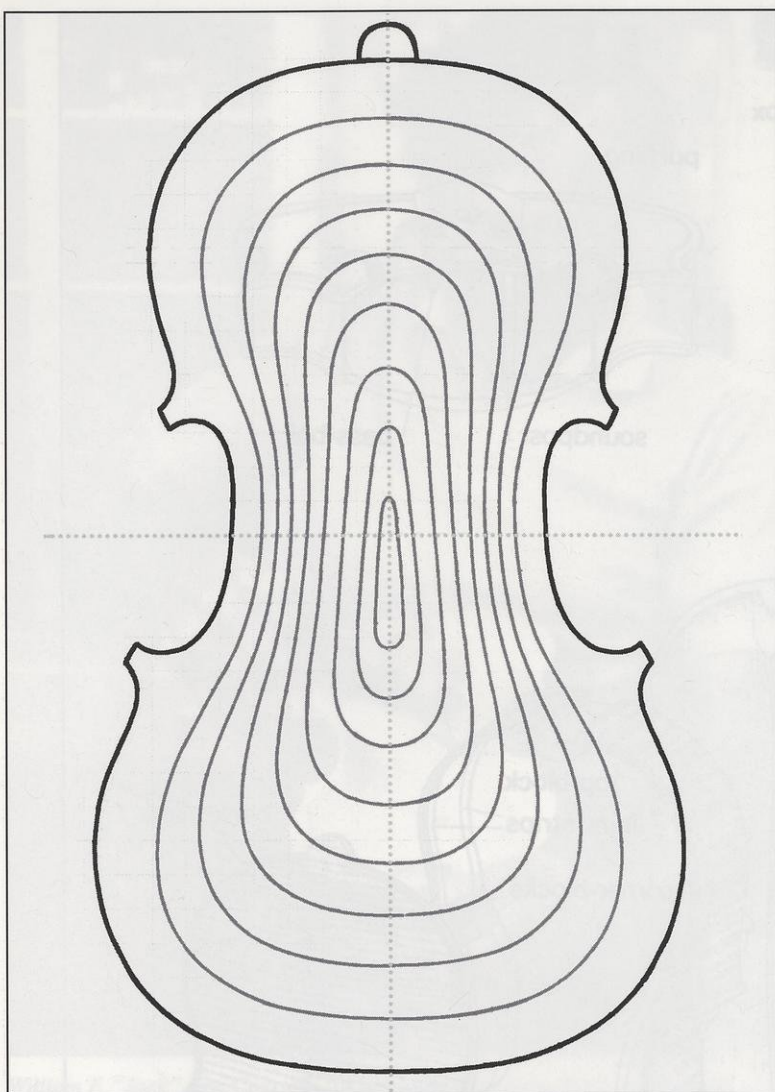


Fig. 2. Idealized contour lines of constant thickness for the back plate of the violin. Note that they are completely symmetric around a vertical axis through the center. Reproduced, by permission of Verlag Erwin Bochinsky, from Simone F. Sacconi, *Die "Geheimnisse" Stradivaris* (Frankfurt: Bochinsky-Verlag das Musikinstrument, 1976), p. 66.

change one's ability to play. That evening sort of awakened me. Here were two instruments which were so different, and so much better than anything I had ever played on. No one had ever pointed out to me that some of the problems of playing the violin are related to the problems of the violin itself." He became fascinated by old instruments. How could they be so different from the violins he had played? Was there a scientific explanation for the phenomenon?

On his return to Madison, Fry went to the violin shop of Larry Lamay, who made and repaired violins, to look for a better violin for himself. There, he found a kindred soul. Lamay was also interested in solving the mysteries of the great violins,

and he strongly believed that the secret lay in the varnish. He allowed Fry to varnish two of his instruments, and, indeed, Fry discovered that hardening the varnish and increasing the drying temperature changed the sound, making it harsher but louder. Thinking he had made a breakthrough, he spent the next few years experimenting with varnish. "I tried impregnating woods with various substances and varnishes," Fry said. "I did a lot of crazy experiments like heating the wood to high temperatures to dry it out, or shrink it." But soon he found that this approach led nowhere. The same process on two different violins might lead to entirely different results, sometimes good and sometimes so bad that the violin was essentially destroyed. It was not easy for Lamay to see a fair number of his instruments ruined by Fry's experiments. He also wanted Fry to keep their explorations a secret for commercial reasons, but that did not suit Fry, whose primary aim was scientific.

At this point, Wilson Powell, who had been closely following Fry's efforts, came to his rescue by offering unconditional financial support. "Don't worry about only making a great violin," Fry recalled him saying. "You do your research. Send the bills. I will take care of them." This was the beginning of Fry's serious research on violins. He formed a partnership with Powell and began systematic experiments.

Soon Fry thought he had found another important factor besides varnish that determined the sound of a violin: the variations in thickness of the top and bottom plates. It was known that the bottom plate has subtle differences in thickness and that the top plate is thinner and more uniform, but little importance had been attached to these features. Fry conjectured that the variations should be asymmetrical because of the off-center location of the soundpost. To test his ideas he needed to measure the thickness of the plates, but it was unthinkable to take apart a Stradivari or a Guarneri just to make these measurements. Once again his friend Powell helped him out, this time by inventing a simple measuring device using magnets.

When Powell and Fry measured a Guarneri del Gesù instrument, they found to their delight that the thickness variations showed the anticipated asymmetry, in sharp contrast with the idealized symmetric patterns shown in the literature (see figures 2 and 3). Powell set to work and measured about seventy instruments, including twenty Cremona violins. He found that no new instruments, even those of the celebrated French violin maker Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, showed these asymmetries, while all but two of the old instruments did. However, one of the two exceptions was a Stradivari violin from the collection of the Library of Congress that was famous for its great sound.

It became clear to Fry after additional experiments that asymmetry, although important, was only one of many param-

ters controlling the quality of sound of an instrument. "It took me a long time," Fry said, "to psychologically get over the idea that there were one or two simple secrets." During the last three decades, Fry has combined experiments with theoretical insights to create instruments with predictable qualities of sound. One of his important advances was to isolate certain "absolutes," along with the physical parameters they depend on, that are essential attributes of a great-sounding violin.

The first important characteristic of a good violin is *carrying power*: it can be heard even over other instruments that put out more energy. This attribute depends upon the ability of the violin to radiate high frequencies (around 5000 Hz and more) efficiently and with as much power as possible. Instruments like horns generally put out less energy than violins in the high-frequency range. The high-frequency component produces a silky quality rather than the unpleasant shrill sound characteristic of the mid-frequency range (around 2500 Hz), to which the human ear is most sensitive. Thus, efficiency in radiating high frequencies gives a violin a refined sound as well as great carrying power.

A good violin also has *divided sound*: the low-frequency range, containing the fundamental, is well separated from the high-frequency range, and the middle range is suppressed. The low-frequency component gives the listener a feeling of pitch and fullness of sound; the high-frequency component, elegance and fineness.

*Ring*ing, or the continuation of sound after the bowing stops, is extremely important for the player. It depends upon the ability of one string to excite the others: thus, if you play on the A string and then stop, the G string resonates because its first overtone coincides with the G note on the A string.

Even sound and *wide dynamic range* are two other attributes of a good violin. Such an instrument produces notes that are more or less uniform in intensity but sound distinctly different. On an instrument where certain notes stand out, the player has to produce evenness manually by playing some notes harder or softer than others. A violin with a wide dynamic range can be played very softly without losing its character or generating a hiss. The player should also be able to put more pressure on the bow to increase the volume without affecting the fundamental properties of the sound.

A good violin allows the *flexibility* for a violinist to project feelings and emotions by changing from a pure sound to a rougher one and by varying the texture. Without this flexibility, the instrument feels "frozen"—always producing the same type of sound.

The final important characteristic is *response*, which concerns how quickly a note can be excited. A good violin

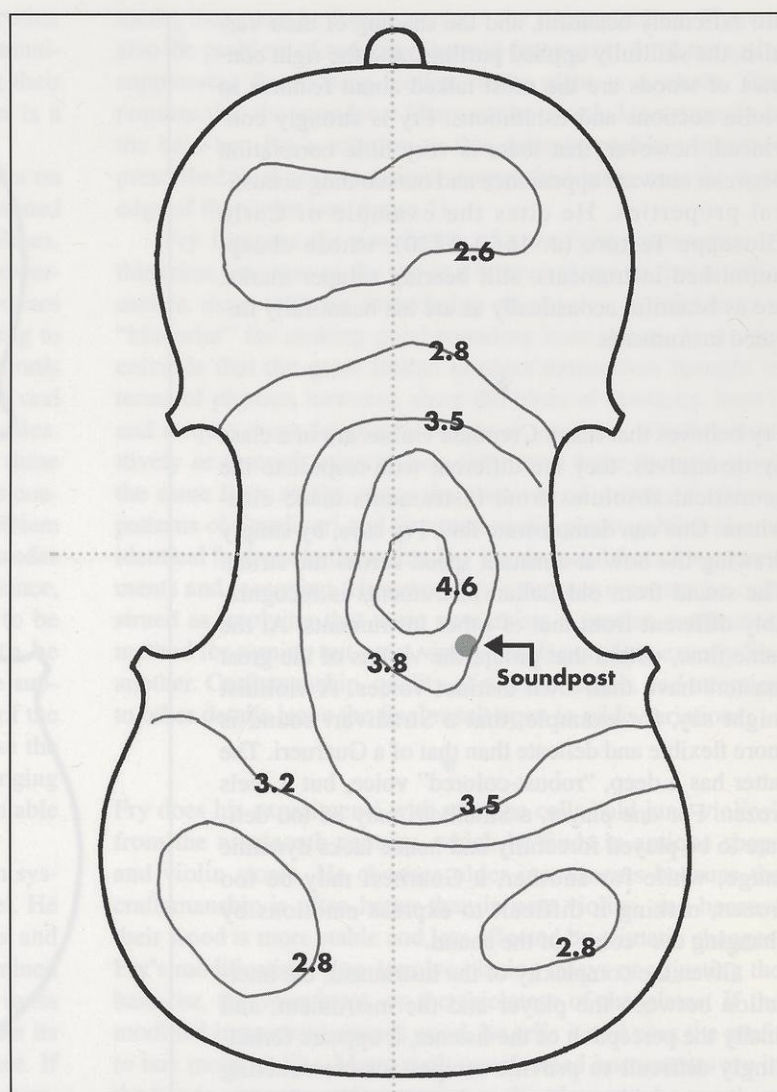


Fig. 3. Contour lines of constant thickness for the back plate of the violin as measured by W. F. Fry and W. Powell. Note that the contours are displaced slightly to the right and below the geometrical center of the back. Although this left-right asymmetry appears to be small, it represents a substantial difference in the left-right stiffness asymmetry, which partially compensates for the position of the soundpost to the right of the center line. Redrawn from a sketch by W. F. Fry.

responds almost instantaneously, as though, a violinist might say, "the note seems to start before I play it." The player does not have to "attack" the note. Another aspect of response concerns how a violin sounds to the player, which affects the sound that reaches the audience. The "local sound" surrounding the box is dominated by low frequencies, whereas the sound that radiates out has more of the high frequencies. If the local sound is too loud, the player will tend to play too gently to produce the high frequencies that carry out to the audience.

These acoustical absolutes have little to do with the physical appearance of the instrument. Most of the Cremona violins

are extremely beautiful, and the shading of their varnish, the skillfully applied purfling, and the right contrast of woods are the most talked about features in violin auctions and exhibitions. Fry is strongly convinced, however, that there is very little correlation between outward appearance and outstanding acoustical properties. He cites the example of Carlo Giuseppe Testore (c. 1660–1720), whose cheap, unfinished instruments, still bearing scraper marks, are as beautiful acoustically as are his beautifully finished instruments.



Fry believes that many Cremona violins are in a class by themselves; they are different with respect to the acoustical absolutes from instruments made elsewhere. One can demonstrate this, Fry says, by simply drawing the bow at constant speed across the string. The sound from old Italian instruments is recognizably different from that of other instruments. At the same time, within that group, the violins of the great masters have their own distinct voices. A violinist might say, for example, that a Stradivari sound is more flexible and delicate than that of a Guarneri. The latter has a deep, “robust-colored” voice, but it feels frozen. For one player, a Stradivari may be too delicate to be played forcefully and hence lacks dynamic range, while for another, a Guarneri may be too frozen, making it difficult to express emotions by changing the “color” of the sound.

Given the complexity of the instrument, the interaction between the player and the instrument, and finally the perception of the listener, it appears forbiddingly difficult to provide recipes for constructing instruments with any degree of predictability. Yet Fry has been able to come close to this goal by departing from certain standard approaches. One approach to understanding sound quality has been frequency analysis using oscilloscopes and other techniques. However, such analyses reveal an extremely complex pattern of sound containing enormous numbers of frequencies. In addition, the pattern varies drastically from one violin to another, but has little or no correlation with the quality of the sound. After numerous experiments, Fry became convinced that frequency analysis was not the right approach and looked for a deeper understanding based on acoustics.

Fry drew an analogy with the human ear, a complex analyzer of sound. The ear perceives sound based not on one or two frequency components, but on groups of frequencies. Such groups are called “formants” by those who study human speech, and they are used to distinguish one voice from another. The concept of formants became an essential ingredient in Fry’s work. He recognized and named three formants, each linked with a predominant mode of vibration of the violin:

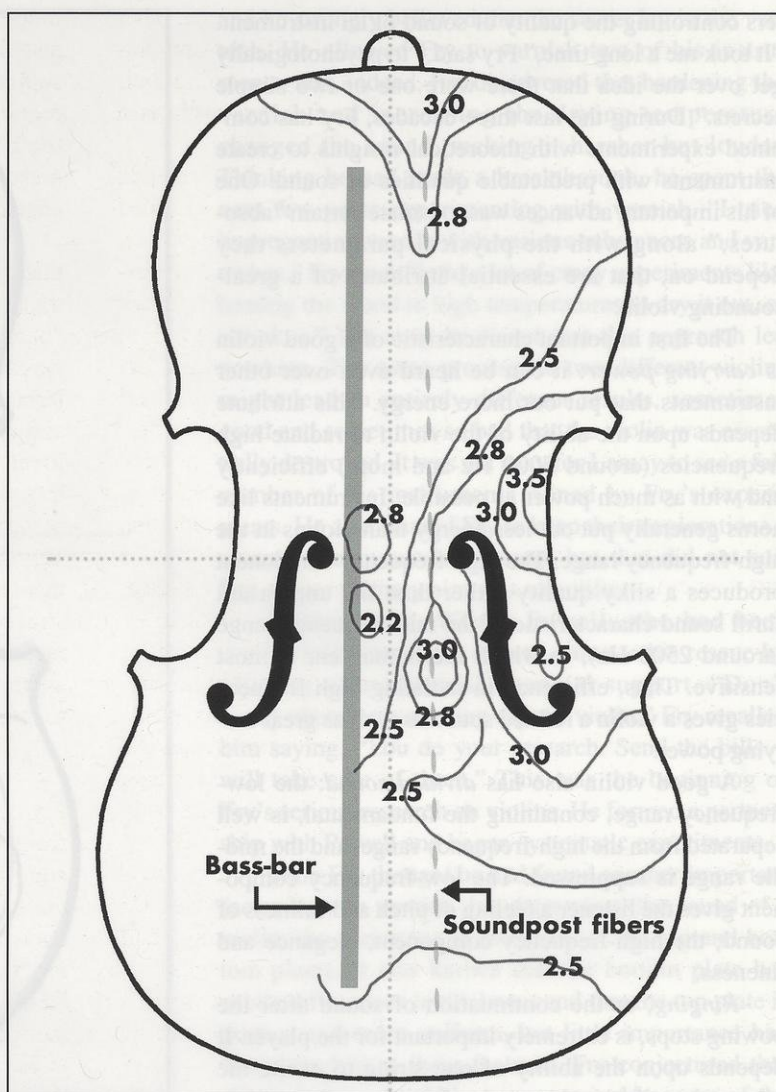


Fig. 4. The complex shapes of the constant thickness contours for the region around the bridge. The extra thickness on the inside area of the right f-hole and the increased thickness just above this f-hole are critical for the support of the soundpost fibers. Redrawn from a sketch by W. F. Fry.

- The low-frequency range (200–1000 Hz), or the *breathing mode*. In this mode, the top and bottom plates move out of phase, pushing the air in and out of the f-holes. It is responsible for the bass quality of the violin sound.
- The mid-frequency range (2000–5000 Hz), or the *rocking mode*. In this mode, the sound comes from a seesaw-like rocking motion of the top plate involving the rotation of the bass-bar around its center point. This is the shrill range.
- The high-frequency range (>5000 Hz), or the *tweeter mode*. In this mode, the action is confined entirely to a small area on the top (the tweeter) around the bridge. This range gives the sound its elegant, silky quality.

All of these modes, however, are strongly coupled to each other by the forces exerted by the strings on the bridge that communicates with the plates. Fry emphasizes that understanding their interconnections requires understanding that the violin is a *driven system*.

A violin has several resonating components. The notes on one string resonate with those on another string. The confined air in the box resonates, as do the top and bottom plates. However, these resonances are not free, but are driven by external forces generated by the player's bowing. Their responses depend on how they are coupled to these forces. According to Fry, the human voice supplies an apt analogy. The vocal cords drive the resonating system of the lungs and the nasal and oral cavities. Each of the latter has its own resonating modes. However, a person's distinctive voice is not produced by these individual resonances but depends on how the vocal cords couple to and drive the resonating cavities. For Fry, the problem was to identify the parameters that couple the three basic modes and then to find ways to change and control them. For instance, if a violin sound is too soprano and a player wants it to be deeper, the amplitude of the breathing mode has to be increased. If it sounds shrill, the rocking mode has to be suppressed. To increase the carrying power and the elegance of the sound, the tweeter mode has to be enhanced. But because the modes are so strongly coupled, changing one requires changing something else. After much experimentation, Fry has been able to produce more and more predictable sound qualities.

Starting with the realization that the violin is a driven system, Fry thinks in terms of an idealized mechanical model. He envisions the top and bottom plates as a set of springs and masses, with the spring constants and mass values determined by the thickness of the plates. As a general rule, if a mass attached to a spring is subjected to a frequency lower than its natural one, its motion is governed by the spring constant. If subjected to a higher frequency, then it is the mass that matters. Fry can vary the spring constants and masses by varying the thicknesses of different parts of the plates, thus controlling how prescribed areas of the plates move.

To get a more concrete picture, consider the motion of the top plate, which is the most critical part of the violin for radiating high frequencies. Looking down on the violin top, the left foot of the bridge rests on the bass-bar, and the right foot rests near but not on the soundpost. Since the bass-bar is long, rigid, and massive, its inertia keeps it stationary as the left foot presses on it. The right foot, however, has no such support, and the fibers that pass under it are long and provide only weak support. Consequently, the right foot and the soundpost create a torque that tends to produce a rocking, rotational motion of these fibers that makes them less effective in exerting a driving force on the back plate. This in turn affects the motion of the back plate in the breathing mode, and the violin loses its depth. Remedying this requires increasing the stiffness of these "soundpost fibers" in the top plate. However, any support system for the soundpost fibers will affect the high-frequency

mode; they must be free to perform the tweeter action. There is also the problem of reducing the mid-frequency, shrill range, by suppressing the rocking motion of the plate as a whole. This requires that the soundpost fibers not be coupled too strongly to the bass-bar. Fry's solution to this delicate problem involves prescribed thickness variations around the f-holes near the right edge of the violin (see figure 4).

Fry foresees the possibility of specifying parameters of thickness for areas of the top and bottom plates so that a violin maker, even with no knowledge of physics, would have a "blueprint" for making good-sounding instruments. It is conceivable that the great Italian masters themselves thought in terms of physics, however, since the ideas of elasticity, levers, and torques were familiar concepts at the time. Whether intuitively or through experiments, they must have thought along the same lines as Fry, since the contours of varying thickness patterns of Stradivari and Guarneri violin plates exhibit almost identical features to those that Fry has deduced from his experiments and reasoning. However, Fry's success must not be construed as implying that there now exists a precise mechanical method for turning out great violins, each sounding exactly like another. Craftsmanship, quality of wood, varnish, and attention to other details leave the final result open to wide variations.



Fry does his experiments with what he calls "old junk violins" from the nineteenth century, which he finds in antique shops and violin stores. He chooses older instruments because the craftsmanship is often better than in new violins, and because their wood is more stable and less affected by climatic changes. Fry's modifications may involve placing inlays or adjusting the bass-bar, the soundpost, or the thickness of the plates. If the modified instrument sounds good, he sells it and uses the profit to buy more violins. Many such transformed instruments are in the hands of young and upcoming violin players, who use them in concert playing. "I am not interested in making a lot of money," said Fry. "I am interested in making a contribution to the field and to making a large number of great-quality instruments available for young people at an affordable price." Fry is now able to produce superb violins, and friends have suggested that he could develop instruments with a distinct "Fry voice." Fry's personal goal, however, is to duplicate in a predictable manner the sound of an Amati, a Stradivari, a Guarneri, or a Bergonzi. This will be a true test of his scientific ideas, and if he succeeds, experts will acknowledge that Fry has finally solved the mysteries of the Cremona violins. ♪

Source

Kolneder, Walter. *The Amadeus Book of the Violin: Construction, History, and Music*. Trans. and ed. Reinhard G. Pauly. Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1998.

The author has relied primarily on extended conversations with W. F. Fry, to whom he gratefully expresses his thanks.

Ice Storm Woman

When winter isn't cold enough, you collect this natural loss in bits—like you might pocket specks of light from oak caskets. You remember frozen caves lined with dried pine needles and mauve crystals drifting . . . where water is stone and stone is your companion, the reflection of your translucent bones pulled down by the pulse of forest roots. Rest now, for soon you will search for another home like an ordinary woman who takes fond leave of her old lover. I offer you sienna ribbons of prairie cord grass alongside this ice water creek. Let the winds deliver themselves.

DyAnne Korda

In the Simple Hour

Held together with the holy fire of madness,
I sleepwalk these verdant woods
toward the ancient mud of turtle's song.
Stalks of fern soften their green fists
and stretch fingers over heart-shaped stones.
I stand here leaning on the breath of birch
to learn the swift lessons of owl wings
and I awaken calm, in the simple hour
of white trillium moonlight.

DyAnne Korda

Dad's Bibs

Long, hollow-legged
brass buckles undone
your bibs hang on a hook
upstairs in the hall
next to straw hats
and the bow saw.
You wore them
over trousers for warmth
or armor against brambles—
now they're mine.
I hitch up the straps
as far as they'll go
roll up the legs—
become you.

I save them for spring gardening
autumn seed gathering
or ambling among the trees
we planted

that day at the end of April
whipping winds throwing handfuls
of opened soil across my face
you in your brown cap
ear flaps turned down
driving the tractor
me sitting astride the planter
dropping a tree in the furrow
when the twine tied to the planter wheel
came full around again.

Judy Kolosso

The Majestic

Because the evening is warm
and one day closer to the summer
solstice, we make our way
to the roof of the theater,
climbing iron rungs that I cling to
like Buster Keaton
when I look down, then passing
over the rooms where people lose
themselves in front of shiny icons
and when we reach the top
we sit on gravel among empty
bottles of Jack Daniels and Old
Milwaukee and look beyond
the building across from us
to a sky where city lights blend
into stars so that if we were careful
to lose ourselves we would be unable
to distinguish between the two.

Andrea O'Brien



Jerry Butler and the Art of Universalizing the Particular

by Katharine Mengwasser

From his early years on a twenty-acre farm in Magnolia, Mississippi, Jerry Butler has never wavered in his dream to express himself through art. The oldest child in a large family weighed down by rural poverty, Butler began developing his natural talent by using readily available materials: pointed sticks with which to draw pictures on a canvas of sandy soil. Butler, now an award-winning author and artist, has achieved more acclaim than the young Magnolia artist dared hope for—but the dream continues to motivate him to explore new avenues of expression.

Butler's work has a gentle quality, a kindness, that radiates from the canvases and speaks more eloquently of the nature of the artist than any words could. It draws heavily on the values instilled in him as a child and young man by those who inhabited his world. He grew up with a "family" that stretched beyond parents and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to include supportive members of the small Magnolia community and, especially, members of the close-knit Pleasant Springs Church congregation. His paternal grandmother, Artice, the undisputed matriarch of the Butler clan, was particularly influential during the artist's early years.

Grand Mo Lu (as Butler called Artice) recognized his talent and gave a name to the creative instincts impelling him to illustrate both the world he knew and the world of his imagination. Butler recalled Grand Mo Lu's belief in him in an award-winning book for young people that chronicled the important events of his years in Mississippi and explained how he obtained his formal education in art. In *A Drawing in the Sand* (Madison: Zino Press, 1998), which he also illustrated and designed, he wrote: "The first time I thought of being an artist was when Grand Mo Lu started calling me one. People would ask all us kids—there were nine of us—what we wanted to be when we grew up. Whenever I said I wanted to be an FBI agent or something, Grand Mo Lu would say, 'You're already an artist. That's enough to be.' So I began to think of myself that way."

Butler's expressive collage *Black Background* celebrates the significant place Grand Mo Lu occupied in his life. A photograph of her, sitting serenely, hands together on her lap, is the

.....
*"The first time I thought
 of being an artist was
 when Grand Mo Lu
 started calling me one."*

only nonfragmented component of the work. Her eyes engage the viewer's own, and they reveal the dignity and wisdom that Butler associates with her memory.

A portion of a shopping bag, handle intact, is prominent in the upper right corner of *Black Background*. Butler explained its presence in this way: "Almost every Saturday when I was a young teenager, my grandmother would ask me to drive her to nearby McComb to shop. She didn't drive—and actually, I probably shouldn't have been driving at that time, either. I left Magnolia to go to college when I was sixteen, so I'm certain I didn't have a license then. This would have been when I was about fourteen. Anyway, we had no TV, and if the crops were in, there wasn't really that much to do. These shopping excursions into McComb were Grand Mo Lu's Saturday outings. They were all-day events.

"I enjoyed watching my grandmother visit with people she knew. I remember the warmth of those encounters. I never once heard my grandmother engage in gossip. She spoke of

ideas, of idealistic things. Immersed in poverty as she was, she believed that ideas were liberating. With her friends, with her family, she continually planted—in the mud of the poverty that surrounded her—little seeds of ideas that struggled, as seeds do, to get to the light. Her unyielding demand of me was that I focus on exciting ideas. She believed in the power and the value of ideas that go beyond yourself, beyond where you are today, and lead to a better tomorrow. Ideas can counteract hopelessness. She taught me things like this, and the shopping bag handle in *Black Background* is there because of those happy Saturday excursions.”

It was Grand Mo Lu who introduced Butler to his African American heritage through her collection of maps of Africa and who spoke to him about the creative contribution of black artists. Butler, however, rejects the label “black artist.” To him,

the word *artist* signifies a complete concept—no adjective should compartmentalize and limit the appreciation of creative expression. Artists bring their own experiences, styles, and preferences to their work, but the act of creation taps into a universal power that is the antithesis of partition and separation. Art should unite, not divide.

Butler’s profound respect for the work of the artists that his grandmother spoke of so reverently came later, along with his interest in W. E. B. Du Bois and others who wrote of the black experience. Today Butler eagerly acknowledges the immense influence on his own work that Romare Bearden, Aaron Douglas, Horace Pippin, and other African American artists have had. He also credits Du Bois’s powerful use of language with transforming his view of life. Butler proudly embraces his black heritage while still honoring the universality of the cre-



Black Background. Acrylic collage on ragboard, 12 x 16 inches, 1998.

ative experience. He often reminds the people attending his book signings or lectures that the work of the renowned men and women of African descent is great art, not just great black art. Talent dissolves barriers.

Jerry Butler is certainly aware of the problems associated with racism, but his work—like the man himself—harbors no rancor. His paintings distill the black experience into enduring, universal form. Featureless faces fill his canvases, extracting, from a profound, not-quite-explainable level, intimations of the immortality not of individual humans but of humankind. The stylized figures in his paintings move about in the simple but vibrant world Butler knows best, centering on church, work, and family life. Strong, long-fingered hands labor, worship, and reach out to loved ones and to life itself.

.....
Butler seeks to create universal connections through artworks that express his particular experiences.

The Greeks have a word—*ousia*—for the unchanging reality of things, their essence, their true nature. Butler's art evokes an understanding of the reality that resides within each of us, the universality of our experiences, and our common desires. Whatever one's skin color, economic status, or social position, there are obstacles to overcome and joys to celebrate. The inhabitants of Jerry Butler's paintings approach both facets of life with quiet dignity.

Like Horace Pippin, who seldom dealt directly with the abuses of slavery and prejudice in his work (only two major paintings by Pippin—*The Whipping* and *Mr. Prejudice*, both completed in the early 1940s—depict such scenes), Butler chooses scenes of everyday life as the major subject matter of his paintings. In *To Overcome*, however, he does take on the topic of civil rights.



Right Hand of Fellowship. Acrylic collage on ragboard, 12 x 17 inches, 1998.



To Overcome. Acrylic on ragboard, 20 x 30 inches, 1996.

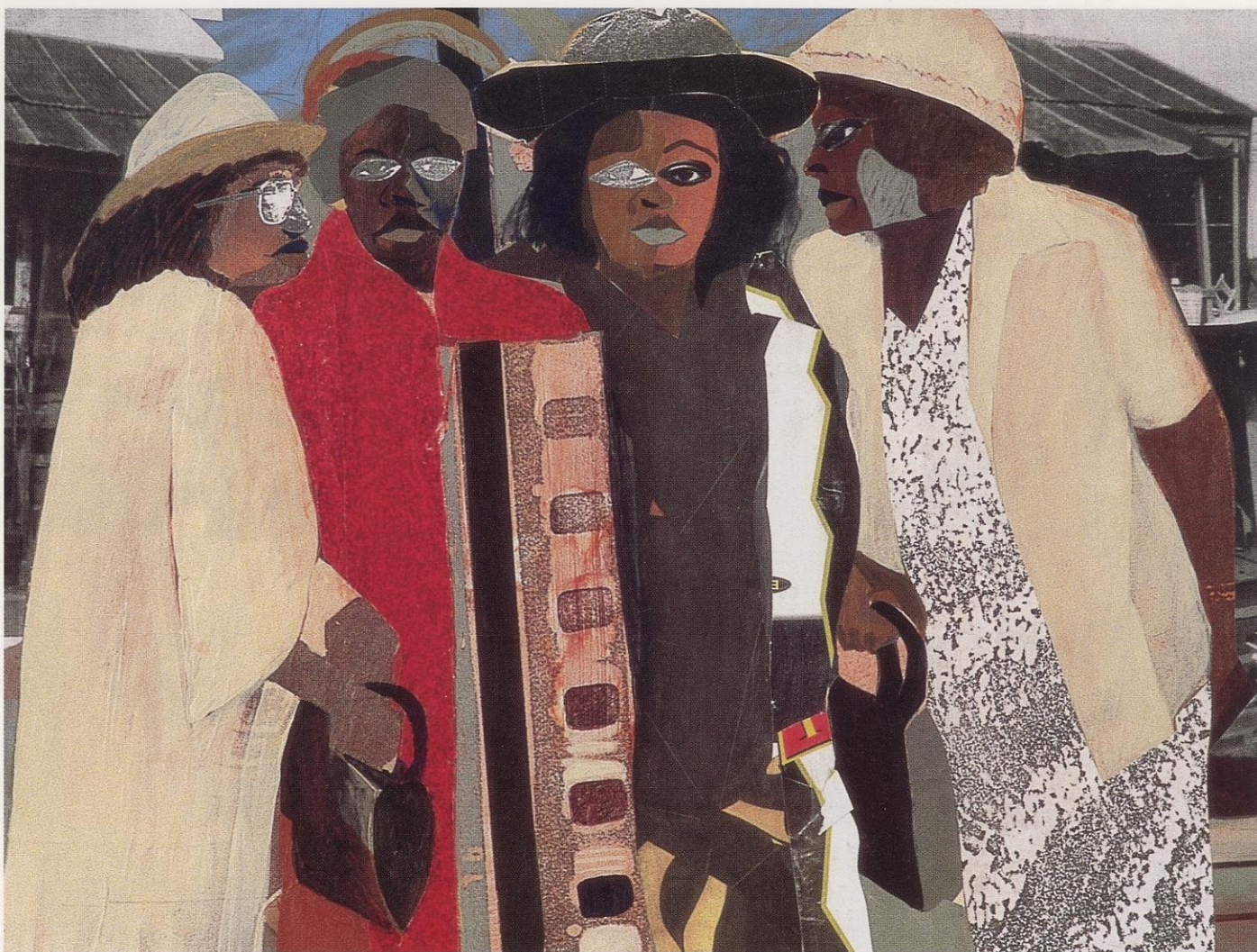
The painting depicts members of a congregation moving forward from their church, clasping hands for shared strength as they march in support of equal rights. A close look at the background reveals three hooded Klansmen observing the gathering, one of them seeming to float above the roof of the church in an eerie juxtaposition of good and evil. A menacing, though almost transparent, image of a law enforcement officer, arms folded in an attitude of barely controlled hostility, leans forward from the upper right corner. His face, like those of the other figures, is without features, but his body language shouts his disapproval of the civil rights demonstration. Butler included a small image of the Lincoln Memorial in the upper right corner of the painting to represent the idea that equal protection under the law should be the right of every citizen. A large magenta cross angles through the foreground and lends its power and majesty to the assembled marchers.



Some of the most interesting of Butler's recent pieces have been collages. He approaches collage creation from a story-telling point of view. "Most of the content of my collage work focuses on depictions of people in our society who represent, I feel, the larger population in many cases," Butler explained.

During the process of creating a collage, Butler first sketches images that he plans to use in presenting his story. "Many times I use the compositional resolutions of Mondrian," he said. "Then I work with the figures and then the spaces that relate to the figures. Often there is a substory to the composition as well. This substory is frequently more personal in content. Most of these details are worked out before any medium is applied to the surface of the canvas, so that when the actual activity of creating the collage begins, I am free of questions and I can concentrate completely on the aesthetics of the work.

"Once the first drying is complete, I evaluate the piece, looking for the feeling and content desired. If more work is required, then I begin the process all over again. Usually it is



Church Folk. Acrylic collage on ragboard, 11 x 16 inches, 1998.

some detailing that's necessary—and that is extremely important to me, because the detailing is what distinguishes my work from the works of many people I admire. Detail is becoming more and more interesting to me, although it is important to know when to stop. A realization of when to stop is vital to the creative process."

Butler uses architect's paper to copy figures he has drawn from familiar sources—church, the community, special events, and work. "People often spring to life for me," Butler said, "in the work I am creating. It's like the phenomenon of hearing a song on the radio and being instantly placed back into the heart of an event that took place more than twenty years ago, complete with the smells and feelings in detail. When this happens, I am really ready to work."

Although the figures in his paintings are most often featureless, those in the collages have expressive eyes that return

the stare of the viewer with unblinking directness. In *Church Folk*, a painted collage, four women dressed for Sunday morning services stand before a background of tin-roofed structures typical of the rural South and look out upon their world with hypnotic, oversized eyes. It was the women, Butler recalls, who were the core and the heart of the Pleasant Springs Church. His grandmother and her friends "made things go," and *Church Folk* honors these dedicated women who remain in Butler's memory.

The favored themes of his paintings—family, worship, and the dignity that can be apparent in daily experiences—frequently find their way into Butler's collages. He often incorporates photographs of family members into the collages, mixing current images of his children with timeworn pictures from the old Magnolia photo albums. The generations separated by decades, and thus denied an opportunity to intermingle in the



That's Alright. Acrylic collage on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, 1999.

warmth of family devotion, are forever fused by the artist who is their link.

In addition to creating and exhibiting his own art and devoting time to writing projects, Butler has other creative outlets. He finds deep satisfaction in his role as a college administrator, directing programs that train the next generation of artists. He has been chair of the art department at Madison Area Technical College since 1987, where he has been responsible for implementing numerous innovative programs such as Camp 53703, which offers young artists an opportunity to study with MATC instructors during week-long day camp sessions.

Saw You Making Pictures

Jazzman, paint me a picture
Sing me a song
How long
You been like that?

You always been that way
but maybe didn't know it
Until Grand Mo Lu
Told you so

Saw you takin' that stick
In your hand
Usin' the Mississippi dirt
Like your canvas
And just drew away

Saw you makin' pictures
Of Jesus so's peoples
Can touch him in the
Baptizin' pool

Jim Crow saw you makin' pictures
Didn't think colored folks
Can look that way
Or even act that way
No colored artists you knew
about
ceptin' you

Took to the highway
Way up in that northin' land
To the village called Madison
Discovered who you are

You are an artist
You are an African American
artist
You are a teacher who makes
Other artists
You are our village artist

Stephen H. Braunginn

*Reprinted with permission from
The Madison Times
October 1-9, 1999.*

Jerry Butler's life mirrors the themes he chooses to represent in his art. He has no painful, personal diaspora to endure—he suffers no isolation from his past, his heritage, as he seeks to create universal connections through artworks that express his particular experiences. He agrees with the opinion voiced by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks*: "Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor—all men know some-

thing of poverty; not that men are wicked—who is good? Not that men are ignorant—what is truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men."

Through his paintings and collages, with their universal themes, Butler gives viewers of his work the opportunity to know their fellow men and women in greater depth—and to celebrate that knowledge. ❧

Self Portrait

Jerry Butler, singer
is called "The Ice Man"
cause he so cool—he cold.
He's freezing
except when he sings
"Moody, Moody, Moody
Moody woman I love you."
The Ice Man warms folks up.

Jerry Butler, painter
I call "The Ice Man"
cause he too cool—he cold.
He's freezing
except when he paints us
with discerning eyes and unrelenting hope.
The Ice Man warms folks up.

Fabu

A slightly different version of this poem was first published in The Madison Times October 1–9, 1999, and is reprinted here with permission. © Fabu, 1999.

Mourning Sylvia's Death

Forever when your bell resounds
its clanger cracks my heart
and I am drawn
irresistibly
to you.

Once, I was you,
our lives like circles linked,
your ice-blue elbow interlocked
in mine, blush pink,
a union of purple pain.

But the moment before I breathed
your last breath
I pleaded
God help me, God
And He heard and answered me,
so loud my plaintive cry
to reach beyond the skies.

Oh, poet,
for lack of a word,
you are gone.
And I stand
delivered
lifted
up.

Our circles
break
ice-blue falling,
fading into black.
I rise,
pale bruise,
no more a gash.

Sherry Elmer

For Sylvia Plath

In the shadow
the moon
wings from
the yew

the fly
stalks
the spider.

Peter Sherrill

Sylvia Plath Remembered

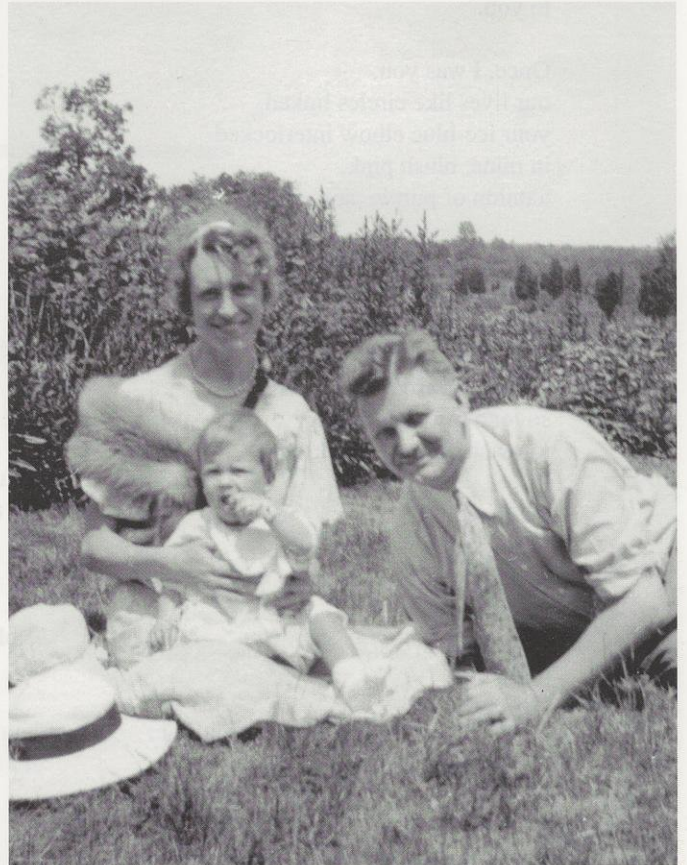
by Max Gaebler

Sylvia Plath wrote a short autobiographical piece that was commissioned by the BBC in late 1962. It is a charmingly nostalgic account of her childhood in Winthrop, Massachusetts, a town many people have seen without being aware of it, since it lies on the north side of Boston Harbor, and passengers on every plane taking off from or landing at Logan Airport toward or from the east have looked down out of the plane's north windows at Winthrop and its easternmost tip, Point Shirley. It was on Point Shirley, a narrow strip of land just wide enough for one street and a row of houses on either side, that Sylvia's maternal grandparents, the Schobers, lived. And it is their telephone number, the first telephone number she knew or used, that she chose as the title for her little piece for the BBC: "Ocean 1212-W." She ends the piece with this short paragraph:

And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood. My father died, we moved inland. Whereupon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle—beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth.

It was during these years of her early childhood that I knew Sylvia best, a childhood I remember as beautiful, surely, but not as a myth. It was very real; and one of the many tragedies of her tragic life is that it should have seemed to her, at least at times, so inaccessible and cut off from her later years.

I saw Sylvia a few times during her school years in Wellesley, a time or two while she was a student at Smith College, and only once after her marriage to Ted Hughes. It is the little girl and her brother whom I held on my lap and to whom I read stories that I remember best.



Aurelia and Otto Plath with Sylvia, 1933. Courtesy Warren J. Plath.
© Estate of Aurelia S. Plath.

Sylvia's father, Otto Emil Plath, grew up in the small town of Grabow in that part of East Prussia known in my youth as the Polish Corridor. His grandparents had earlier emigrated to America and settled on a farm near Watertown, Wisconsin. Learning that their grandson was a bright and promising student, they invited him to come to America and offered to send him to school at Northwestern College in Watertown, provided he would promise to prepare himself for the Lutheran ministry. As Sylvia's mother, Aurelia, told the story, Otto arrived in New York at the age of sixteen, lived there with an uncle for a year, then went on to his grandparents' home in Watertown and entered Northwestern College, where he and my father met.

The college was really a classic German *Gymnasium*. It was called a preparatory school and college, but the eight

classes went by the old Latin names: *sexta, quinta, quarta, tertia, unter und ober secunda, unter und ober prima*. All instruction was in the German language; indeed, I still have some of my father's textbooks from which he learned Latin and Greek *auf Deutsch*. The expectation that Otto would go on to enter the Lutheran ministry was not unusual; my father was one of only two students in his Northwestern College class of 1907 who did *not* go on to the Wisconsin Synod seminary in Thiensville. As a matter of fact, my father wasn't even a Lutheran!

At any rate, the hopes of Otto Plath's grandparents were doomed to be shattered. While still a boy he had already formed the scientific interests which were to shape his career, and after reading Darwin his mind was made up. He felt if he were to become a teacher rather than a minister, it would be acceptable to his grandparents. But they did not share his enthusiasm and felt betrayed by his change of course. They decided that "he would no longer be a part of the family; his name would be stricken from the family Bible. And so it was done. He was on his own for the rest of his life."

It was there at Northwestern College that Otto Plath and my father met. So close was their friendship that a couple of years later, when my father accepted a teaching fellowship at the University of Washington in Seattle, Otto Plath decided to head for the Pacific Northwest also. Though their paths soon separated, Otto Plath and my father maintained their friendship through the years. So when I arrived in Boston as a sixteen-year-old freshman in 1937, Otto Plath, my father's old friend, was there to meet me at South Station.

In Boston we headed straight for Rowe's Wharf, where we boarded the ferry for East Boston. There we got on the narrow-gauge train that took us to Winthrop, where the Plaths had purchased a home the preceding spring. I stayed with them for a week, my first week in New England. The Plath house was near the water, one house removed from Boston Harbor. It was brown stucco with a large sunporch on the harbor side. It was on the porch that I slept.

Sylvia was not quite five at the time; her brother, Warren, was two and one-half. They were delightful children and a revelation to me. My own brother was a good deal younger than I; he was by this time nearly twelve and seemed a generation beyond these two youngsters. They were bright and sunny and eager, a wonderful audience for any story a visitor chose to read them and spirited companions for a walk on the beach or a visit to the playground. It is easy for students to forget that children and old people also exist. For me, frequent visits to Winthrop brought me in touch with the Plath children and Aurelia's parents, happy and wholesome reminders that the world contained more than students and professors.

During that first week Otto Plath took me with him to visit the classroom at the Boston University building where he taught. It was just off Copley Square, as I remember, on the site now occupied by the New England Mutual building. He was a rather well-known entomologist whose book, *Bumble Bees and Their Ways*, is written in a style that makes it of more than scientific interest. He was interested in what he called "animal psychology" and "animal sociology," and the social insects in particular had captured his attention. His was a rather lonely voice in those days, but in recent years his work has attracted renewed attention from scholars interested in what is now called sociobiology.

That same day he took me to lunch at Pieroni's Sea Grill, another vanished landmark in Park Square. And on the way home we stopped at the markets near Faneuil Hall to buy fresh vegetables and meat. Otto did most of the family marketing, especially on Fridays and Saturdays, when the operators of the North End stands offered bargains rather than running the risk of having produce spoil over the weekend.



I visited Winthrop often, especially that first year. Aurelia and Otto had issued a standing invitation to come whenever I wished, and they provided a real home-away-from-home for this very young and inexperienced college freshman. I talked a lot with Aurelia, who reminded me in many ways of my own mother. She was much younger—really about midway between my mother and me in age. But thirty-one seemed middle-aged to me then. Aurelia shared my mother's fascination with words and used them with the same fastidiousness. And she enjoyed her two children in ways that reminded me of the joy my mother took in my brother and me.

I talked with Otto frequently and on occasion took short walks with him around the neighborhood. He complained often of his health. He attributed it to age, at least in that first year or two I was around. Later he decided he had cancer, though he steadfastly avoided going to see a doctor and getting the medical examination he so badly needed. I remember laughing at his assumption that his age was catching up with him, even though fifty-two, which is what he was in 1937, seemed pretty old to me then. I remember his asking me how my father was. Remarkably well, I replied. So he went on to ask: "But how old is he now?" "He'll be fifty-one in December," I answered. "Well," said Otto, "that explains it. He's still only fifty and I'm fifty-two. A couple of years can make a big difference."

On every visit to Winthrop I enjoyed the children. Sylvia and Warren loved stories, and they never forgot a single detail. They had a cat named Mowgli after the hero of Kipling's *Jungle Book*. And I remember, a few years later, giving them for

.....
*Many five-year-olds have
 vivid imaginations,
 but I have never encountered
 one so active and fruitful
 as Sylvia's.*

Christmas Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's wonderful story *The Yearling*. Many five-year-olds have vivid imaginations, but I have never encountered one so active and fruitful as Sylvia's. Warren held his own very well, too. When Sylvia spun out her fantastic images, Warren would respond with tales of his adventures "on the other side of the moon, when I was nine." I don't recall anything specific, but I do remember being impressed with Sylvia's precise and pictorial description of people and events she had imagined. She always described things in terms of color, a characteristic of her writing throughout her life. In those days of her childhood, perhaps understandably, I remember more of her drawing and painting than of her first literary efforts. It was her art work that first won the praise of her teachers and her parents.

Naturally, I was invited to spend my first Thanksgiving away from home with the Plaths and Aurelia's parents, the Schobers. I made my way out to Winthrop that morning by way of the ferry from Rowe's Wharf and the narrow-gauge from East Boston. Aurelia had baked the pumpkin pies that morning, and around mid-day we headed for her parents' home on Point Shirley. While we waited for dinner, I went for a walk with Aurelia's brother, Frank, youngest of the three Schober children, just two years older than I and a freshman at Northeastern University. The traditional football game between Winthrop and Revere always was scheduled for Thanksgiving morning, and he told me all about it.

For the next seven years I spent every Thanksgiving with the Schobers and Plaths, first in Winthrop and later in Wellesley. Beginning in 1943 I was joined on these Thanksgiving Day expeditions by my brother, who came to Boston as a college freshman that year. The food, of course, was thoroughly traditional—New England traditional. Squash, boiled onions, pumpkin pie—these were fixtures along with the turkey and cranberry sauce.

Quite a crowd sat down to this holiday feast. Aurelia and Otto and their two children, Mr. and Mrs. Schober, Frank, Aurelia's younger sister, Dorothy, and, later on, Dorothy's hus-

band, Joe Benotti—all these plus a Gaebler or two filled the places at the Schober table. Long years later, after we were living back in the Midwest, my brother and I regularly sent special greetings to the family in Wellesley on Thanksgiving.



When I returned to Boston in September of 1938 to begin my sophomore year, I went out a few days early in order to spend

time with the Plaths. It was during those days that a great hurricane struck New England. In "Ocean 1212-W" Sylvia places that hurricane in 1939. True, a hurricane did hit New England that next fall, but it wasn't the one she remembered. The winds were actually a bit stronger in that 1939 blast, but the tide was out when the winds came. In 1938 the tide was in, and the wind created a tidal wave that swept over Providence and Buzzard's Bay, then hit Boston Harbor with a fury natives talk about to this day. The peak of the storm came in early evening, about eight o'clock. But sleeping there on the sunporch facing the full force of the wind from the south, it didn't feel as though it had let up in the least bit by the time I finally went to bed around ten o'clock, well equipped with candle and matches in the



Warren and Sylvia Plath in front of the house in Winthrop, Massachusetts, with their cat Mitzi, Mowgli's mother. Courtesy the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. © Estate of Aurelia S. Plath.

event of a power outage.

The next morning was beautiful and sunny. Aurelia and her two children and I went walking. "The wreckage the next day," the adult Sylvia recalls, "was all one could wish—overthrown trees and telephone poles, shoddy summer cottages bobbing out by the lighthouse and a litter of ribs of little ships." The incongruity of the beautiful and benign aspect of the world that morning with the visible reminders everywhere of the awful and untamable power of the elements all about us remains with me vividly.



During my upper-class years I went out to Winthrop less often. For Thanksgiving, of course; but when I was a junior, Thanksgiving was my first visit of that year. So I was not really

witness to Otto's worsening health. It was mid-August in 1940, the following summer, when a minor accident revealed the desperate extent of his illness and got him finally to the doctor, who quickly discovered that it was not cancer but diabetes which had been ravaging his body.

I had not been out to Winthrop or seen any of the family that fall. Aurelia did call me once to let me know how serious Otto's condition was and that he faced the amputation of his leg, already gangrenous. I communicated this word to my family back in Wisconsin, but it never occurred to me to go to the hospital to see Otto. Not long afterward Aurelia called again, this time to tell me of Otto's death. She told me not to make any effort to come to the funeral; naive young man that I was, I took her word literally and didn't go. I called my parents, of course—the kind of long-distance call limited in those days to occasions of real emergency. And I sent flowers from our family. The senselessness of his illness and death had not been lost on him any more than on those close to him. Aurelia realized it needn't have happened. And the doctor simply wondered how such a brilliant man could have been “so stupid.”

Otto had died on November 5. Only two or three weeks later I went out to Winthrop for the annual Thanksgiving observance. His absence muted the event, but everything proceeded exactly as usual, except that this time we ate at Aurelia's home. It was almost two years before she and her parents sold their Winthrop houses and joined forces to acquire a home in Wellesley—the “move inland” as Sylvia called it.

That was in the fall of 1942, when Sylvia, who was a grade ahead of her age in school, would have entered the sixth grade in Winthrop. Her mother decided to have her repeat the fifth grade in her new school in Wellesley so that she might be with children her own age. The school principal in Wellesley, Aurelia records, “was very understanding and agreed with my multiple reasons for the request, adding, ‘It is the first time in my teaching experience that a mother has requested an all-A pupil be put back a grade.’” However, it worked out well, for the texts and methods differed completely from those in Winthrop.”



I met my wife, Carolyn, in 1944. When our interest in each other became serious, one of the first things I wanted to do was to have her meet the Plaths and Schobers. It must have been some time in September that I took her out to “meet the family.” Aurelia's father was home on his two-day weekly break from his work at the Brookline Country Club, and Mrs. Schober prepared one of her typically wonderful dinners.

Carolyn recalls that after dinner Sylvia, then twelve years old, played something on the piano especially for her and admired her black silk dress. Aurelia adds that after we had left, Sylvia burst out in adolescent enthusiasm with that widely current advertising slogan: “She's lovely, she's engaged!”

In fact we were not yet formally engaged. That came a month later, after we had returned to the Midwest and met each other's

families. We were married the following February, and soon after our return to Boston I was invited to preach one Sunday at the Unitarian church in Wellesley Hills. After moving to Wellesley, Aurelia and her children had become active in that church, where—as Sylvia's friend and biographer, Lois Ames, records, “Sylvia and Warren . . . on Sunday went to the First Unitarian Society of Wellesley Hills where their mother also taught Sunday school.” Aurelia was in church that Sunday, and we went home with her after the service for dinner with the family.



In the summer of 1948, when Sylvia had just completed the tenth grade, we moved to Davenport, Iowa, and contacts with New England friends, including the Plaths and Schobers, were pretty much limited to an exchange of holiday greetings. So we weren't around for Sylvia's graduation from high school or her first years at Smith College. But in 1953 we did go back to the Boston area for the summer. It was the summer following our first year in Madison, Wisconsin (where we have lived ever since). We were fortunate to get the use of an apartment in the home of friends who were in the orchard business.

Imagine our consternation when we drove into town one August morning to pick up groceries at Knowlton's store and noticed on the front page of the *Boston Globe* a news item about the disappearance of a Smith student. My heart leaped into my throat and I took in the whole story almost in a single look. It was Sylvia all right, and the story sounded pretty grim. Police were scouring the woods near their home, and with each passing hour the prospects became more desperate.

We rushed back to the apartment and called Aurelia. When I suggested that we come, she jumped at the idea. So we made arrangements for our children and headed in. Bill Rice, the Unitarian minister in Wellesley, was at the house when we got there, and he helped explain what had happened. He suspected foul play and feared the worst. After he left we stayed on, sitting there in the living room with Aurelia and her mother looking at family pictures, recalling incidents from the past the way one does when someone dies, trying to reinforce whatever shreds of realistic hope we could identify. Finally we left, promising to keep in touch.

We did call several times, and finally, two days later, we had a call telling us that Sylvia had been found, alive, in a crawl space underneath the downstairs bedroom floor of Aurelia's home. I don't recall whether it was Aurelia or Bill Rice who phoned, but we were enormously relieved to learn that Sylvia was now in the hospital recovering from the effects of an overdose of sleeping pills and receiving intensive psychiatric attention. How remarkable, indeed almost miraculous, we agreed, that her life had been saved simply because she took too many sleeping pills and her stomach couldn't hold them.

We returned to Madison very shortly after that and did not see Sylvia during the brief interval before leaving. We spent no more summers in the Boston area, and trips east were infrequent in those days of overnight railroad travel.

I saw Sylvia only one more time; it must have been in May of 1959. Sylvia was married by then, and Aurelia and I went down to visit her and her husband, Ted Hughes, in their apartment on the back side of Beacon Hill. It was the only time I ever met Ted. They served us tea, and we had a pleasant conversation. Aurelia had told me how hard they were working, and I recall Sylvia and Ted talking about the rigors of the writing schedule they had set for themselves.

Sylvia died in London on February 11, 1963. I don't remember just when or how we got the word. The first sketchy report was that she had died of pneumonia. Though our suspicions were aroused immediately, it was eight or ten months before the facts were generally known. And it was much longer before their full meaning became the subject of so much analysis and speculation.



During Sylvia's lifetime her poems and stories had appeared here and there, principally in periodical publications. The few things I had seen I did not find particularly pleasant or, in some cases, easy reading. So while I shared her family's pride in Sylvia's obvious talent and the gathering prospects for her success as a writer, I did not read very much of her work.

As a matter of fact, there wasn't a great deal to read: a volume of poems, *The Colossus*, and a few pieces scattered through various periodicals. That is all there was. Far more of her work has been published posthumously. Indeed, it was only with the publication of *Ariel*, the remarkable collection of poems she wrote at fever pitch during the last weeks of her life, that the true scope and quality of her genius became evident. That was in 1965, and ever since then the volume of serious critical attention to her work has continued to grow.

In recent years I have read a good deal of that critical work. More important, I have read far more of Sylvia's own writing. And my personal connections quite aside, I have been variously

deeply moved, edified, and disturbed by her words. She is best known as a poet, and rightly so. I find much of her prose remarkable, too.

But the Sylvia who remains in my memory is not the justly celebrated writer, surely one of the finest talents of her generation; neither is she the complicated, tortured, and intense personality who became one of the most famous suicides of our time; nor yet is she the aspiring, gifted, conforming, troubled heroine of *The Bell Jar*. Rather she is the imaginative, lovely child I knew in Winthrop so many years ago.

Perhaps it is I who want to seal that period off "like a ship in a bottle—beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth." Perhaps it is a reluctance on my part to face the wild forces which so deeply troubled the child I knew as she grew older. I was not really present during those later years; I did not know her well as adolescent or student or adult, surely not as professional writer, as wife and mother. It was the child I knew—a wonderful, happy child who romped the beach on the shore of Boston Harbor and reveled in the fallen trees after the great hurricane and listened intently as I read stories of long ago and far away. That little girl is the Sylvia I shall always remember. ♣



Sylvia Plath, age six or seven, on the beach. Courtesy the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. © Estate of Aurelia S. Plath.

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The Feast of St. Stanislaus

by Richard Radtke

As an adult I debate whether the taste of the sausage that long ago spring afternoon had a peculiarly feline tang on my twelve-year-old tongue, or whether memory is playing tricks on me. I see Max standing in the kitchen doorway, his chef's hat tilted at a rakish angle. I swear there is a twinkle in his eye.

That is how the story ends. It begins a year earlier, in 1951, when a massive stroke takes Grandma Grabowski's second husband, Casmir. Monsignor Kozich calls Casmir a faithless heathen and refuses to bury him in St. Basil's cemetery. Rejected by her church, Grandma follows Sophie Zalewski to the congregation of Reverend Lupo Valencia, who preaches at the Tabernacle of Eternal Light.

Max claims that Grandma's outrage with The Church has less to do with religion than it does with her failed plan to be buried between her first and second husbands at St. Basil's.

"Why did I move into this madhouse?" she wails after joining my mother, Max, and me in our second-floor flat.

"You had nowhere else to go," Max answers from his mohair chair across the living room. Max met my mother when she took a job at the Krakow Inn where Max is head chef.

We live across the street from the park, where old men play checkers under the memorial to General Thaddeus Kosciuszko. It is an elegant statue, the General bolt upright astride his horse, sword raised above a head crowned by a tricorn hat. The General gazes across the park to Lincoln Avenue as if to get a better view of what is going on in the back room of the Polonia Cafe & Tap Room.

I can see the General from my cot in the alcove of our living room. When I study him carefully, he turns his head this way and that to watch a girl pass or to kibitz a move of a checkers player. Silent but alert, he knows all that goes on in the houses across the street from his post.

Grandma Grabowski has taken my bedroom at the back of the flat, which is why I am now on the cot in the alcove. Days, she gossips from her wing chair in the living room. "He came in drunk again," she informs my mother when Max is late for breakfast. "Two o'clock in the morning."

My mother waves her hand. "He works late. I know what time he comes home. We sleep together."

"Shhh," Grandma hisses with a nod toward me. "Enough about who does what with who."

As though I don't know that my mother and Max sleep together. Even before they were married, they'd come home to

the flat after midnight, the smoke from Max's cigars drifting under my bedroom door like a threat.

When Grandma moves in, she brings Sasha with her.

"Where is that damned cat?" Max asks as he peeks out from behind the bedroom door. "He's been in here again. My sinuses are killing me."

Sunday nights we gather in the living room in front of the Philco to listen to Charlie McCarthy. During the commercials, Grandma steers the conversation to her religious conversion.

"Yes," she says, hooking a rug with needles that clack like swords in a musketeer movie, "Reverend Valencia worked a miracle this morning." She pauses to be sure that everybody is listening. "There was this woman with a terrible goiter. She came up to the altar and was filled with the Holy Ghost. When Reverend Valencia put his hand on the goiter it fell from her body. A miracle."

Max looks up from the sports page, takes aim, and says: "Mother Grabowski, if that were true, Reverend Valencia would be up to his ass in goiters."

The tempo of the clacking needles quickens as Grandma shoots back: "Faithless heathen." She fires a visual round at me, warning me not to take Max's wisecrack as license to do likewise.

Through the window I look down at General Kosciuszko. He inches forward in the saddle and cocks an ear, clearly wishing he could join us and trade stories with Max and Grandma.



Max becomes obsessed with the cat. As we drive to All-Star Wrestling at the South Side Armory he confides in me. "It's him

or me, Buddy." He blows his nose into a large gray handkerchief.

I nod, not daring to ask exactly what he has in mind.

With his great, hairy body Max could be a wrestler himself. I imagine him pulling the ropes apart and stomping into the ring. *Max of the Attacks*, they'd call him on the marquee.

The only thing Max refuses to do around the house is cook. "I cook for a living," he says. "Every night the customers asking for this and that. It is enough. At home I read the sports and sit in my chair, okay?" My mother says yes, okay.

Wednesday nights Max and I watch Verne Gagne overcome the hated Crusher, Gorgeous George, The Dutchman. After each match Gagne swaggers down the aisle to his dressing room, his cape held aloft by the cheers of an adoring crowd. Evil has met its match again this week.

"There's a lesson for you," Max says as we drive home. "Do what is right, and you win out in the end."

Across the way, in long shadows cast by the streetlight, General Kosciuszko sits atop his horse, eyes downcast. I salute him. He nods.



I snicker at Grandma's tales of healing at the Tabernacle of Eternal Light. Max offers wry commentary.

"I see where they're expecting a meteor shower in the Pacific," Max says as he reads his paper. "Reverend Valencia plan to heat up the oceans, Mother Grabowski?"

"Blasphemer," Grandma replies.

Gray snow seeps into the ground, leaving an oily residue behind. Inspired by warm weather, General Kosciuszko sits taller in the saddle. Grandma Grabowski stores her wool afghan under her bed in favor of an off-white shawl. And Max announces that he will cook dinner for us in honor of the Feast of St. Stanislaus.

My mother buys a new linen tablecloth from the mezzanine at Schuster's. She spreads it over our dining-room table like a flag of truce. Max appears in the kitchen doorway decked out in his white work clothes, a knight with a chef's top hat. He declares the kitchen off limits. A secret recipe, he says.

We sit down. Grandma Grabowski cranes her head toward the living-room window. "Where's Sasha?"

"I saw him on the railing of Felkner's porch when I went out for paprika this morning," Max says. "Looks like Felkner has been giving him heavy cream again."

Max produces a bottle of Krupnick and four stemmed glasses. Across the street, General Kosciuszko's head turns an inch as he strains to see what is going on in our flat.

First comes a zakaski buffet of cooked and smoked cold fish, assorted cold meats, pickled eggs, relishes, pickles, breads with sweet-flavored butters, crisp raw vegetables, and Polish creamed mushrooms. Next come potato pierogi to melt in the mouth. Thin, tender rounds of fine homemade noodle dough, wrapped around a filling of buttery potatoes. Then cabbage dumpling soup and beet relish, chilled and tart. Finally the main course, Polish sausage and stuffed cabbage arranged in a porcelain bowl from the old country.

The bowl bubbles as Max spoons portions onto our plates with the finesse of a dancer. Kapusta comes with the main course, and gouki, and there are cheese blintzes for dessert. In the end we roll back in our chairs and smile, one to another. A contentment settles over the table that has not graced our house since the arrival of Max and Grandma and the cat.

The cat. We never see Sasha again. That night Grandma stands at the door calling to him, through Charlie McCarthy and Fred Allen, right on into the Lux Radio Theater. Sasha is gone.

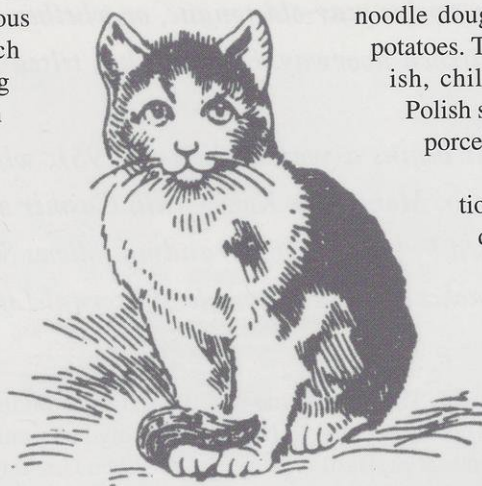
Max reassures her. "If he's not back tomorrow morning we'll call Reverend Valencia on Felkner's telephone. The Reverend can work one of his miracles to bring him back." Grandma nails him with a wicked glance.

Max and I drive the neighborhood three nights in a row, calling out Sasha's name. Each night we return empty-handed.

"Sasha was the last thing Casmir ever gave me," she says of the man whose memory is burnished in her mind like a brass door-knocker rubbed smooth by countless thumbprints. "It is a sign. I don't belong with this world anymore."

She moves to Reverend Valencia's Eternal Light nursing home and lives there another fourteen years. She is ninety-three when she joins Casmir in the plot behind the tabernacle. I am sure she is forever innocent of suspicion that she devoured her husband's gift at the Feast of St. Stanislaus.

Only General Kosciuszko knows for sure, and, as always, the General is not talking. ■



“Went to School, Went to Town, Took My Baby Bed Down”: The Solace of Words

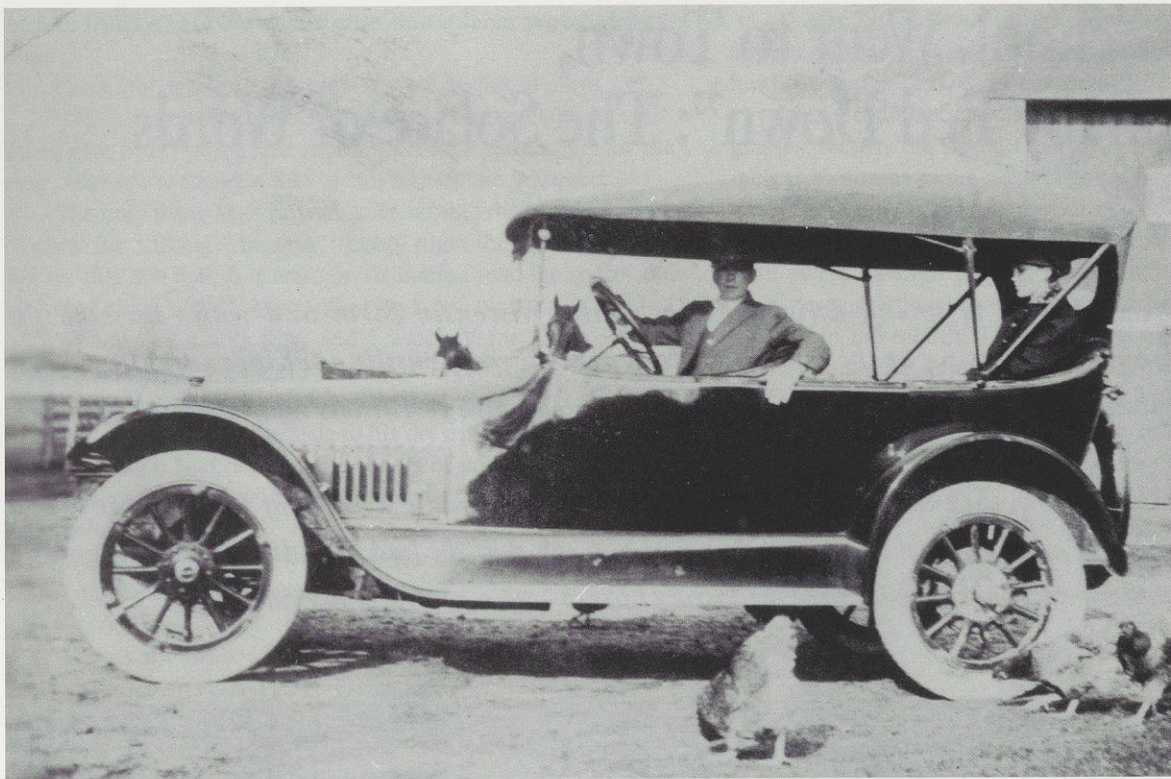
by Richard Quinney

I had expected a season of spring delights. Trips to the Wisconsin farm and walks through the marsh. Afternoons of sitting at the kitchen table, a gentle breeze rustling the lace curtains. A few words of encouragement and hope offered before I headed south to Illinois again. We would wave another goodbye.

But otherwise. I sit now with the diaries. I found them in the middle drawer of the high bureau. I learned of their existence a year ago, when my mother had told me that she had kept diaries when she was a young girl. Her mother had given her the blank books in which to keep a record of her daily life.



The author, Ralph, and our father Floyd Quinney working in the grain field at the farm in Walworth County, 1942. I sneezed all summer long in that hot and dusty field. Photograph by Alice Holloway Quinney.



My mother's parents, W. V. B. Holloway and Lorena Taylor, in their new Buick, 7 May 1916. My grandmother would die five years later of Bright's disease at the age of thirty-eight. Photograph by Alice Holloway, age ten.

A year ago I asked my mother if I might read the diaries, if I might take them home for the weekend. "Oh, you won't find anything of interest in them," she had said, "nothing much happened in those days." She would have let me take them home if I had insisted, but I did not. "Some other time," she said.

My mother—Alice Holloway Quinney—began keeping a diary in 1916 when she was nine years old. She made an entry every day for five years. "You have neither the time nor the inclination, possibly, to keep a full diary," begins the inscription at the front of one of the small volumes. It continues:

Suppose, however, out of the multitude of matters that crowd each day, you jot down in a line or two those most worthy of remembrance. Such a book will be of the greatest value in after years. What a record of events, incidents, joys, sorrows, successes, failures, things accomplished, things attempted. This book is designed for just such a record.



It was 20 below zero. Alice Jordan froze her face going to school. (Thursday, January 13, 1916)

Warmer. It snowed some. Mama played with colored dolls and blocks with me. Mama made me two little cakes and a pumpkin pie. (Saturday, January 15, 1916)

Papa went to church and in the afternoon we went to Grandma's and we had popcorn. It was very cold. (Sunday, January 16, 1916)

Went to Elkhorn and bought a dish for mama and a handkerchief for papa and an eraser, tablet and composition book. Had dinner at the Hotel. (Saturday, January 22, 1916)

I played out doors. Mama put a hen nest up for me. I did not get any eggs at night. We got some little pigs. One pig had 16 pigs. Two had 10 apiece. (Saturday, March 11, 1916)

Went to school. We sawed wood. I got 1 egg. I got an invitation to Hazel McQuillen's birthday party. Mama got 25 eggs. (Monday, March 20, 1916)

Your young words—your voice—your young life. Growing up on the farm north of Millard, attending the South Heart Prairie School, visiting your grandparents, traveling to church and to town, being cared for by your mother and father, playing with your dolls, gathering eggs from the hen's nest. The person that I would know as my mother, the mother that I would be with until the very end. And yesterday I placed flowers on your grave. A year ago this time, you and I together placed flowers on your parents' graves.

For days I have been listening to Allen Ginsberg's reading of the "Kaddish" poem written for his mother. Yes, maybe we are as old as the universe and, yes, at the same time, "what came

is gone forever every time.” Done with this earthly existence. Eternity without day or night.



Hunted eggs all day. I got eggs for myself and 30 for mama. Played in the mud with ma’s boots on. Papa went to town. I got my Kodak. (Saturday, March 25, 1916)

Went to school. Papa went to Whitewater. Someone broke the window playing antiover. Papa got some film for my camera. (Tuesday, April 11, 1916)

Had a birthday party. There were 21 here (all girls). Each one brought me a present. Grandma came and helped mama with supper. I was 10 years old. (Saturday, April 29, 1916)

I took my camera to school. Teacher showed me how to take a picture. Teacher took a picture of me. Jack (my cat) would not hold still so I could not take his picture. We went to Millard and back in the car. I wore my hat to school. (Tuesday, May 4, 1916)

We had a short auto ride. Took Grandma’s picture. I had the head ache all day. Papa and I went to the woods. I took a picture of mama and papa in the car. Papa took a picture of me at night. (Sunday, May 7, 1916)

Did not go to school. I was not sick. I was lazy. Papa painted some of the garage. Jack (is my cat) slept with me in the afternoon. I got up at 4:30 P.M. Papa painted the milkhouse. (Monday, May 8, 1916)

I am looking through the boxes of photographs, the boxes that I have labeled “Family.” I am making prints of a photo I took of my mother on Thanksgiving day two years ago to give to my daughters and to my brother’s children. A lifetime of trying to stop time. Twenty years ago, my mother placed her camera in the bureau drawer and took no more photographs the rest of her life.

How many times had I almost asked my mother about her understanding of the meaning of life? How many times had I nearly asked her about death and its meaning? At the last moment I would withhold the question for fear of disturbing her or intimating that I was anticipating her death. All along it was I who feared the question. Likely my mother would have responded with something like “I don’t know,” or “You ask such impossible questions.” We live the best we can while we are here was the philosophy of her life. Whether she feared death—or to what extent—I will never know. Certainly in her last hour she did not have the look in her eyes of wanting to go.

Still surviving in a cardboard box are the photographs my mother took of her mother and father sitting in the automobile in the driveway of the farm and of her grandmother standing on the lawn in front of the house. These were taken in the spring of 1916 when my mother

was learning how to use her new camera. The photographs remain, reminding us that what we see will change and finally pass away.



Stayed home. Snowed all day. (Tuesday, January 1, 1918)

Everyone got out and broke roads. No school. Beautiful day. Snow 4 feet deep in the road. Uncle Lloyd put cattle in the new barn. (Monday, January 14, 1918)

Everyone moved with sleighs. Lots of ice and water. Went to school. Am knitting squares for Belgium blanket. (Friday, March 1, 1918)



Alice Holloway and Floyd Quinney on their wedding day, 15 September, 1930. Photograph by W. V. B. Holloway.

Went to Lyden to see the soldiers. 3000 all on horses. (Thursday, May 16, 1918)

Paper hanger was here. Papered the parlor and sitting room. (Monday, May 20, 1918)

Had picnic. Passed in all studies with high standings. Will be in 7th grade next year. (won 2 prizes.) (Friday, May 24, 1918)

Thrashed in the afternoon. Got 860 bushels of barley. (Wednesday, August 21, 1918)

Went to Delavan to the picnic in Tilden's woods. A soldier that had been a prisoner in Germany 2 years spoke. (Wednesday, August 28, 1918)

Had salt fish for dinner. (Drank water all the afternoon.) Mama and I picked ducks. Feathers all over. (Thursday, October 24, 1918)

Went to school. Telegram came saying Germany had surrendered. We rang the school bell. The church bells rang in the towns. They rang for an hour. Everyone was excited. (Thursday, November 7, 1918)

This report was not so. That the war was over. Went to school. (Friday, November 8, 1918)

Report came that the war was over. (It is so this time.) Got word at 2 o'clock A.M. People celebrated all day. Went to Elkhorn at night. (Monday, November 11, 1918)

Went to school. Went to town, Took my baby bed down. (Tuesday, November 26, 1918)

The church was an important part of my mother's life. Growing up on the farm, north of Millard, she attended church nearly every Sunday. She made certain that her two sons went to the Methodist church in Delavan as they were growing up. All of her widowed years, for thirty years, she drove to church each Sunday morning—with the exception of the days of stormy weather or poor health. Yet, outside of the social institution of the church, I never heard my mother speak of religion, or even mention the word "God." Her concern was doing the right thing. Doing unto others as you would have others do unto you. She did tell me once that I was in her prayers.

I am fortunate to have lived near my mother during my own aging years. A friend who was similarly blessed believes



Farm buildings, June 1998. Photograph by the author.

that we will forever be changed by the loss of our mothers. Another friend from afar, whose mother and father died a few months ago, tells me that his own life has changed in unanticipated ways. He has been freed, he tells me, in that he can do anything now, that it makes no difference, in a sense, what he does—"that life is not practice." We are not preparing for anything else; life is what we are doing at the moment. "Everything will work out because it is working out." A loosening unto the world. My mother would have agreed.



Went to Sunday School in the morning. At night went up to Grandma's. Took her for a little ride. (Sunday, June 1, 1918)

Ma and pa went to Janesville after a pony. Bought Trixy. Ma drove her home. Trixy is 4 years old. (Friday, July 25, 1919)

Papa went to mill. Drove Trixy for the first time alone. (Tuesday, July 29, 1919)

Went to Parker's hog sale at Janesville. I got a new camera. Mama got a new skirt and waist. (Tuesday, August 19, 1919)

Cooler today. School at Millard went better. Drove Trixy. (Tuesday, September 9, 1919)

Went up to Grandma's. Stayed up there all night. (Saturday, September 27, 1919)

Went to school. Grandma died in the morning. Rained. (Tuesday, September 30, 1919)

We went to the funeral. Rev. Clemons preached. Clear. (Friday, October 2, 1919)

Cold. We did not go to church. Grandpa came down to supper. November has been cold with lots of rain. Up to now I have driven to school every day and put Trixy in Patchen's barn. (Monday, November 30, 1919)

The day before the funeral, my daughter and I drove up to the farm. We sat for a while in the house, walked the farm, and took a few photographs. We ended our wanderings at the "old place" where my great-grandparents had built their house.

Alice Marie Holloway Quinney was well remembered the next afternoon at the United Methodist Church in Delavan. All of our relatives and neighbors and friends were there to celebrate "A Liturgy of Death and Resurrection." Pastor Johnson delivered a fitting—and much appreciated—eulogy. The recessional was accompanied by the Irish hymn "Be Thou My Vision."

We drove through the streets of Delavan to the Spring Grove Cemetery, to the grave site that already held the remains of my father. Looking over the casket as the last rites were being read, through the gentle rain, I noticed my father's cousin,

holding a pink flowered umbrella, his head bowed. A reception and late lunch served by the Methodist women brought us back to the church. Tonight I am listening to a new bluegrass song, "Yours Forever Blue." The line repeats, "I can't get over you—forever blue."



Nineteen-twenty was the last year that my mother kept a diary. She was then fourteen. Her own mother would die in September of the following year. I always knew that my mother missed and remembered her mother daily for the rest of her life.

We and Uncle Lloyds and Grandpa went to Uncle Franks to dinner. Snowed and drifted the night before. 18 below. We were going sleigh riding at night, but it was too cold. (Thursday, January 1, 1920)

Elkhorn school closed until after the flu. Ma and pa's wedding day. (Tuesday, February 3, 1920)

Went to school. Walked home. Papa went to Delavan and brought home a Victrola. (Friday, February 20, 1920)

Easter. Went to church. Snowed a little.

Cold at night. Went up to Aunt Elsie's at night. (Saturday, April 4, 1920)

School picnic at Turtle Lake. Got my diploma and standings. Was valedictorian of my class. (Friday, June 4, 1920)

Rained. Papa went to town with oats. An aeroplane went over. (Thursday, June 17, 1920)

Nice day. Picked gooseberries and currants. I made some current jam. (Friday, July 9, 1920)

Fine day. We all went to Racine. Aunt Rachel went with us. In the afternoon went to the shore of Lake Michigan. At night went to a vaudeville. (Saturday, August 7, 1920)

I began high school at Elkhorn. Nice day. (Monday, September 13, 1920)

Moved down to Millard. (Wednesday, November 10, 1920)

Went up to Uncle Lloyds. Mrs. Uglow and Myrtle and Elva were there. Had a swell dinner. Stayed to supper. Had oysters. (cold) (Saturday, December 25, 1920)

I was not ready, preparing for the funeral, to be told by the pastor that we mourn, but that we mourn with *hope*. (The hope having to do with eternal life.) The day after the funeral, I went to the basement, found my copy of W. H. Auden's *Collected Poems*, and turned to "Twelve Songs," the poem popularized in the movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. One stanza of this poem conveys utter hopelessness and despair:

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Like my mother, I am more uplifted—and able to go on—when I am facing the reality of the moment. Eventually, I am certain, there will be hope. For now, I am thankful, and I know my good fortune.



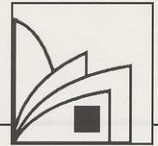
My mother, at least in the later years, gave me little direct advice on how to live. But I knew from the example of her life,

from the way she had lived and the way she continued to live, that the instructions were clear and obvious: Be kind, be thoughtful, and be helpful whenever you can.

These days I find myself reciting the ending she gave to all the letters and the many notes of thanks that she wrote to me. These letters and notes are in a wooden box on the top shelf of my closet. Someday I will get them down to read. Whenever I need to be reminded of her voice—of her good life. In the meantime, the departing words of each letter will suffice, unceasingly: *As ever, Mom.* ♡



Front porch of the farmhouse, April 1999. For awhile, if not forever, this house will belong to another time and to the mother and father who built this house the year they were married. This is the homeplace, and it will be as much of home as I will ever know. Photograph by the author.



THE WISCONSIN FRONTIER by Mark Wyman.
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,
1998. 336 pages. \$29.95, hardcover. ISBN 0-253-33414-4.

by Leslie H. Fishel, Jr.

There is a slim tradition of father-son American historians in the United States, slim only in numbers. Arthur Schlesinger Sr. and Jr. come immediately to mind; less well known are Dexter and Bradford Perkins. In Wisconsin, the two Cronons, David and William, have established reputations, but their contemporaries, Walker and Mark Wyman, have received less public attention. The recently deceased Walker Wyman, a former history professor at the University of Wisconsin–River Falls and president of the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, published many books on Wisconsin history. His son, Mark, Distinguished Professor of History at Illinois State University, continues to revitalize that family tradition.

The Wisconsin Frontier is a volume in the History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier series, but it easily stands on its own. Wyman has a smooth style, with an eye for informative yet catchy quotations. He has compressed volumes of material without losing the “you-are-there” dynamic that characterizes all good history. This is a book for the general public to which professional historians might well turn to discover an original interpretation. Wyman has depended on scholars who have preceded him—Louise Kellogg, Alice Smith, Paul Prucha, Richard Current, Robert Nesbit, and others—extracting data and summarizing trends, but he has rechecked primary sources and consulted the more recent works. His bibliographic essay updates the comprehensive bibliography in Smith’s superb *History of Wisconsin*, vol. 1: *From Exploration to Statehood* (1973).

Wyman defines “frontier” as the “contact area between settlement and wilderness, or between a more complex, technologically developed society and a less developed one” (p. 3). He begins with the French explorers in the seventeenth century (Brule, Allouez, Nicolet, Marquette, and others) intruding on the multiple Indian tribes and lush forest wilderness of the upper Great Lakes in search of fur. Although this story has been told quite often, authoritative popular narratives of Native American societies and culture like this one are rare.

Wyman probes behind the surface conflicts. He recounts the ravages of alcohol on Indian tribes and records the important role of Indian women. He cites Jonathan Carver’s description of the Sac town where Sauk City and Prairie du Sac now sit, a village of ninety well-built houses, “each large enough for several families,” with “regular and spacious” streets (p. 90). On June 14, 1671, the French announced their claim to all of North America to a large gathering including delegations from the Sacs, Winnebagos, Potawatomis, Chippewas, and ten other tribes. After the European ceremonies, the Indians ripped down and burned a posted copy of the French announcement. The fear and anger that motivated this action, Wyman argues, “would dominate the frontier era in Wisconsin and the Great Lakes region over the next two centuries” (p. 39). He spends

much of the rest of his book expanding on this important theme.

Though Indians receive a major share of attention, Wyman does not ignore the French and their efforts to capitalize on the fur trade, followed by the British in the mid-eighteenth century, followed in turn by the Americans after the American Revolution. All three groups gouged the Indians, exhausted fur sources, and scrounged to make a living. The frontier was not a hospitable host. Established settlements, led by the fort towns of Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, began in the early nineteenth century, by which time the Indians, pressured between tribal culture and assimilation, were treated like pawns. The sad saga of the Sac chief Black Hawk, and the war that carries his name, was the final gasp of Indian armed resistance in Wisconsin. Wyman tells the story in revealing detail, concluding that it was “an expected, almost predictable event. . . the Indian was in the way” (p. 156).

The settlement of Wisconsin and the creation of a territorial and then a state government is a more familiar part of Wyman’s narrative. The frontier moved slowly north and west across the state until, by 1880, driven by the search for lumber, it touched Ashland on Lake Superior. The ethnic mix, creating a potpourri of religious practices, added a rich but not always easily assimilated dimension to the settlements. One consequence, not widely known, though reflecting a national undercurrent, was the effort of a minority of Wisconsinites to defend the Native American and protest further removal.

The book has few failings, other than the expected one of compression. The maps are numerous but small and not always helpful. These trivialities cannot obscure a well-told, well-documented tale. Wyman’s effort to relate Wisconsin’s uniqueness as a frontier area to Wisconsin’s intimate relationship to the region and the country is another example of his sharpness of vision. The frontier, he concludes, revealed an optimism, “bred by success,” which “may have contained not only the seeds of its own destruction—but also of mankind’s ultimate survival” (p. 297).

Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., was director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin from 1959 to 1969.

WHEN GOVERNMENT WAS GOOD: MEMORIES OF A LIFE IN POLITICS by Henry S. Reuss. Foreword by John Kenneth Galbraith. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 200 pages. \$22.95, hardcover. ISBN 0-299-16190-0.

by Roland B. Day

Henry Reuss’s “memories of a life in politics” begin, appropriately, with a chapter on Reuss’s German heritage and his family’s participation in the history of Milwaukee.

Milwaukee acquired the name “Cream City” not because it was the largest city in America’s Dairyland but because of the color of the bricks used to build much of the city from its

beginning. They all came from a kiln owned by Augusta Vogel, Henry Reuss's maternal great-grandmother. One of the first women entrepreneurs in the area, she started the business in the 1840s.

Reuss's grandfather, Gustav Reuss, became president of Marshall & Ilsley Bank in Milwaukee, and his father, Gustav Adolph Reuss, later became executive vice president. Henry Reuss was a director for a short time but left in 1947 to run for mayor of Milwaukee. Reuss acknowledges the political advantage of being German American in a city known as the "German Athens," but he points out that he had political supporters among twenty-seven different ethnic groups, from Albanians to Welsh.

Reuss graduated from Cornell University and Harvard Law School. One of the purposes of his memoir, he explains, is to describe how, through his education and later experiences, "a liberal-progressive Democrat . . . sprang from such a long line of conservative-industrial-financial Republicans" (p. 10).

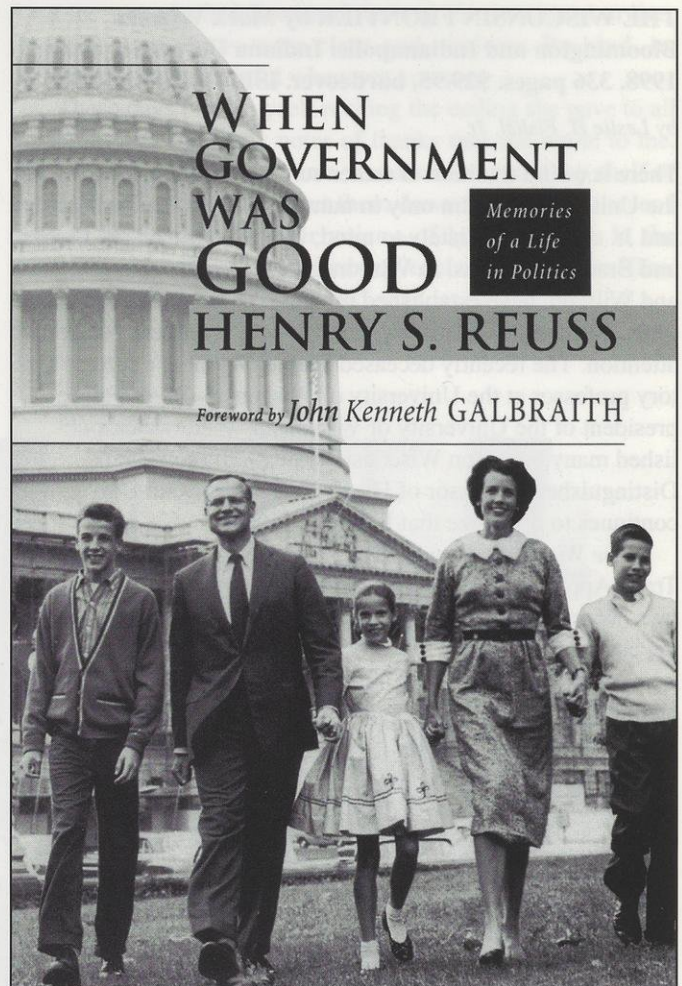
From 1936 to 1940, Reuss was an associate in a large Milwaukee law firm where he got to know members of the local bar, including some labor lawyers, who would turn out to be allies in his later political career. In 1940, with World War II just underway, Reuss went to work for the Office of Price Administration. He developed a lifetime friendship with the man who headed the OPA, the renowned economist John Kenneth Galbraith.

After being drafted in January 1943, Reuss began a distinguished period of wartime service. He became part of the Officer Corps and served in the Pentagon and later with General Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters in Europe. As a member of the Seventy-fifth Infantry Division he crossed the Rhine and played an important role in the occupation government that followed the German retreat.

Back in Milwaukee after the war, he ran for mayor in the 1948 election but lost to Frank Zeidler in the primary. Shortly thereafter, he returned to Europe as a member of the legal team that advised those operating the Marshall Plan.

Reuss tried for political office again in 1950, when he ran for attorney general, but that year all the Democrats running for statewide offices were defeated. He remained active in the Democratic Party and participated in the fight against Senator Joe McCarthy, though he lost a bid to run against McCarthy in the 1952 election. In 1954 Reuss defeated a three-term Republican incumbent and became the congressman from the Fifth Congressional District. Thus began a notable twenty-eight-year incumbency.

Study and research were the tools—or weapons—that Congressman Reuss brought to the business—and battles—of Congress, where he was recognized as a leader and intellectual resource by his colleagues. Early on, he questioned the Cold War policies of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. He was instrumental in the formation and promotion of the Peace Corps. The environment, programs to promote full employment without inflation, Vietnam, international banking and



monetary policy—his activity in these and many other areas earned for Congressman Reuss the reputation, in John Kenneth Galbraith's words, as "perhaps the best-informed member of [the House of Representatives] and certainly one of the most influential" (p. xi). After retiring from Congress in 1984, Reuss became involved in nongovernmental organizations that support or enhance projects and programs that he has long cherished.

Reuss's title, *When Government Was Good*, refers to the middle decades of the century:

the great questions as the postwar years began were whether the governments to follow could continue the equalizing thrust of the New Deal, . . . achieve full employment and civil rights for African Americans . . . , and . . . lay the foundation for preventing a nuclear World War III.

Between the late 1940s and the late 1960s government proved that it could. (p. 164)

What followed after that, including the recent scandals in Washington, left the congressman disappointed, but not disillusioned.

As to the possibility of another golden age in the early twenty-first century, Reuss says rather hopefully: "The Muse of History may now be willing to grant us a second chance" (p. 168).

For anyone interested in the history of the last half of the twentieth century, this memoir, if not a "must," is a book that "ought" to be read.

Roland B. Day, retired chief justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, is a former member of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

GRASSROOTS THEATER: A SEARCH FOR REGIONAL ARTS IN AMERICA by Robert Gard. Foreword by David H. Stevens. Introduction by Maryo Gard Ewell. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 268 pages. \$14.95, softcover. ISBN 0-299-01234-4.

by March M. Schweitzer

I have often wondered how a state the size of Wisconsin could support eight hundred theaters and theater organizations, especially given the low levels of direct financial support the state provides its arts community (Wisconsin ranks 49 out of 56 states and special jurisdictions on a per capita basis, according to the Wisconsin Arts Board). In this fascinating and important book, I suspect I have discovered at least part of the answer.

The reprint of Robert Gard's *Grassroots Theater*, originally published in 1955, is a must-read for anyone interested in the evolution of theater in Wisconsin. The book reviews the history surrounding the growth of the theater movement and the people and institutions responsible for its development.

The importance of the University of Wisconsin in encouraging the growth of the arts in the state cannot be overstated. This commitment was an outgrowth of the Progressive Movement's Wisconsin Idea of a partnership between the university and the state government to improve the lives of Wisconsin's citizens. One way in which the "Idea" was translated into action was in support for the growth of a grassroots artistic community.

The university's Extension Division played an integral role in encouraging cultural arts throughout the state, thus making the arts dependent on the vicissitudes of university budgets. As early as 1916, the Extension Division had created a Bureau of Community Music and Drama. Between 1927 and 1940 a Bureau of Dramatic Activities flourished and then expired.

Gard's appointment to the University of Wisconsin in 1945 to "cultivate community, regional and folk drama" and his subsequent development of the Wisconsin Idea Theater represented yet another swing in the cycle of budgetary support for the arts. The Wisconsin Idea Theater provided help to Wisconsin playwrights through classes and conferences and through providing critiques of their work by mail.

Under Gard's leadership a magazine, the *Wisconsin Idea Theater Quarterly*, was created which for many years published the best dramas by Wisconsin writers. Gard was also instrumental in creating the Wisconsin Rural Writers' Association, the Rhinelander Northwoods Arts and Crafts Festival, and a publication called *Pen and Plow*.

Why was all this emphasis put into organizing rural writers and production groups? Gard, like many of his predecessors, believed in the value of a locale's dramatic voice in developing a sense of community and identity. For him, theater was not merely entertainment but a way of bringing people together to share and communicate their common experience.

As interesting as this book is, it ultimately left me unsatisfied. The history of Wisconsin theater didn't stop in 1955 when Gard completed his book—or did it? What, if anything, that Gard helped to create has remained? In reprinting the book, the editors might have served readers better if they had commissioned an update—even a brief one—about what has transpired over the last forty-five years. The book could also have used some editing. It includes endless lists of plays written and playwrights writing between 1945 and 1955 which are meaningless to modern readers and should have been pared down.

Ultimately the book is most useful for understanding the degree to which community theater and playwrights have been supported in the past. It helps us to understand how such a relatively robust theater community can exist here in Wisconsin. And it provides benchmarks and a road map which could be used for advocating the growth of arts funding in the future.

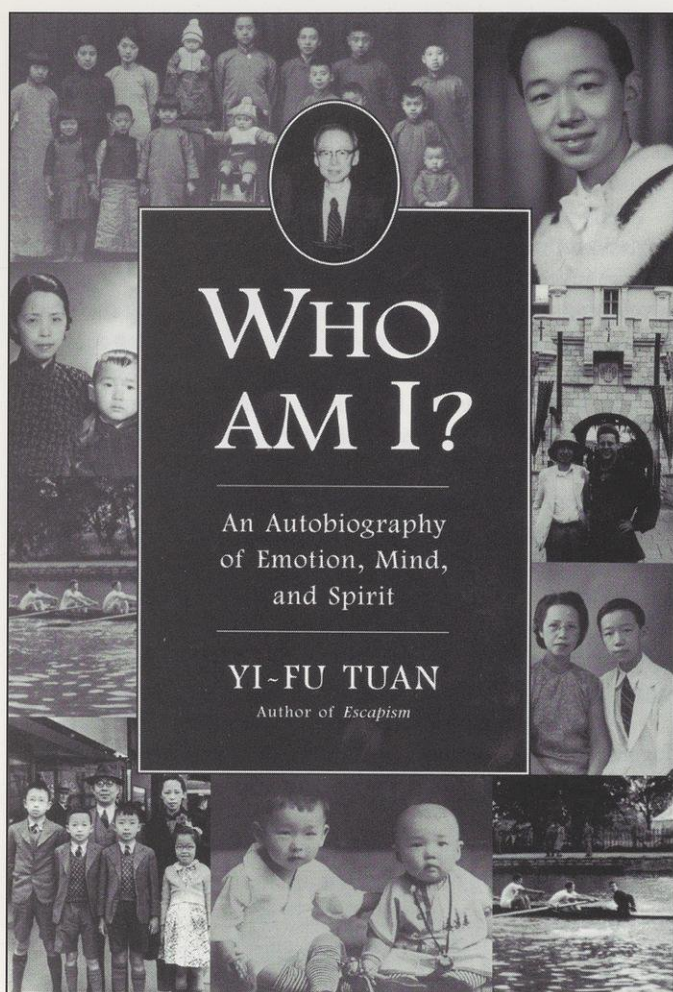
March Schweitzer is a member of the Board of Directors of the Madison Theatre Guild and the Gerald A. Bartell Community Theatre Foundation.

WHO AM I? AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF EMOTION, MIND, AND SPIRIT by Yi-Fu Tuan. *Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 139 pages. \$21.95, hardcover. ISBN 0-299-16660-0.

by Fa-ti Fan

I never took a course with Professor Yi-Fu Tuan when I was a student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, but I often saw him walking, alone or occasionally in company, out of Science Hall, across Library Mall, and onto State Street, frail, reserved, and yet spirited. There was an oddity, a mischievous beauty, about the scene: Why was a Chinese sage or hermit in attire best suited for an Oxford don sailing among robust mid-western youngsters? His autobiography provides part of the answer.

In many ways, Tuan's recent books in human geography (e.g., *Cosmos and Hearth* and *Escapism*) have been increasingly personal and even autobiographical, and this last one differs from them mainly in its direct and systematic engagement with the author's life. Here, his life becomes the locus of soul-searching whence explorations into the inner self and the outer



world radiate. The book therefore is as much an essay on certain aspects of humanity—the moral, the spiritual, and the emotional—as a narrative of Tuan’s own life, from a child in war-torn China to a distinguished geographer in the United States.

Born to a family of relatively high social status and good political connections, Tuan was nonetheless caught in the turmoil of war and had to move with his family from one city to another in China and then from one nation to another. He received his education in China, Australia, England, and finally the United States, and lived, in addition to those places, in the Philippines, France, and Panama. This personal history, no doubt, contributed to his cosmopolitan view of humanity, which prevents him from appreciating the insistence on cultural diversity in much recent scholarship and educational policy. He is convinced that young minds should aspire to transcend existing cultural boundaries and that diversity for diversity’s sake breeds parochialism.

The second half of his life saw an ostensible turn to regularity: Tuan became an American academic and achieved success in his profession. But he was, to paraphrase himself, an odd fish in the pond of academic geography. His essays, glit-

tering with philosophical wisdom and psychological observations, flowed through the pigeonholes of academic disciplines. More than anyone else, Tuan himself views his fame with a sense of irony. By temperament a European or Chinese intellectual, who values fine writing, erudition, and insights more than technical perfection, he nevertheless helped to open up a new research area that has won respect, if not full acceptance, among academic geographers.

Yet there was another, much deeper and more personal, side to his life. He felt rootless and drifting, acutely so, in spite of his academic success. After decades in the United States, he was still not at home. He was highly conscious of his background as an immigrant. Being single, furthermore, he found himself a misfit in the rigid social world of American academia, which recognizes only family life and colleague-ship. Genuine and deep friendship is rare. This stern reality was compounded by his concerns about his sexual orientation. He feared that close friendship would unleash his intense, but suppressed, desire to love and to be loved. He had sought escapes in geography, in the beauty of the desert, in hard work. But increasingly he found himself besieged by loneliness. All human beings need caring, love, and intimacy. He craved them, painfully, but did nothing. Now, looking back, he sighs: Why should he have wrung his hands throughout his adult life? Why did he lack the fortitude, courage, and vitality that would have enabled him to confront the walls of disapproval and hostility? Regrets, regrets, sadness. But his emotional life has not been completely barren, and he cherishes the few fleeting moments by which he has warmed himself. And perhaps he wrote this book to come to terms with himself, to reconcile with his past, to replay his life in a dark room, as now he is retired and entirely alone.

A friendly laugh, murmur, greeting, or thank-you, however, might break through the sepia silence and, to his surprise, bring the filled room to life.

Fa-ti Fan is a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin.

WISCONSIN FOLKLORE compiled and annotated by James P. Leary. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 542 pages. \$69.95, hardcover; \$27.95, softcover. ISBN 0-299-16034-3.

by Philip Nusbaum

Folklorists hold that their field encompasses a wide swath of human expression. This point of view is amply demonstrated in *Wisconsin Folklore*, compiled, with an introduction, by the director of the University of Wisconsin’s Folklore Program, Jim Leary. The book is divided into five sections: “Terms and Talk,” “Storytelling,” “Music, Song, and Dance,” “Beliefs and Customs,” and “Material Traditions and Folklife.” The subject matter includes areas as diverse as rural shrines, sauerkraut, tavern amusements, Ojibwe stories, Hmong music, and

African American music. The book shows that Wisconsin, like most other North American places, contains a grand variety of folk traditions that are found in many regions, yet nurtures specific, local phenomena.

Wisconsin Folklore contains polished analyses of cultural practices as well as primary documents such as transcribed interviews and lists of terms. The range of treatments reflects the fact that the field of folklore has been attended to by a mixture of professional folklorists, amateur enthusiasts, and representatives of other areas who were only faintly, if at all, aware that they were contributing to the field. The diversity of subject matter and types of articles has two outcomes. One is that the volume has something for everyone, and will serve well as a coffee-table book. The other is that the book will stand as a good entry-level textbook into the study of the folk culture of Wisconsin.

Leary's experienced hand brings unity to the multiple subject matters, cultures, and lines of analysis. In the preface Leary gives a visceral account of his Wisconsin upbringing, including the sights and personages which gave his hometown of Rice Lake its character. He tells us that his earlier wanderings in search of education and employment only made him a more "hard-core" cheesehead. Leary's introduction displays decades of thinking about Wisconsin, as he presents substantive themes that are different from the five section headings of the book. These themes reflect both Leary's thorough knowledge of past scholarship and his keen awareness of contemporary folk culture: "People, Words, and Foods" refers to Wisconsinites' interest in each other's ethnic backgrounds, with specific words and foods as commonplace means of representing those backgrounds. "Packermania," the enthusiasm for the Green Bay National Football League team, is an enduring Wisconsin theme. Leary uses an Ole and Lena joke with a Packers-related punchline as an example of how the team has worked its way into the lore of the state. "Ed Gein," an infamous murderer, is the theme of a major cycle of jokes and stories. Under the heading "The Long Winter," Leary includes lore about ice and considers the many ways Wisconsinites have of expressing their love/hate relationship with the season that dominates the state's climate. He describes winter games

that kids play and the popular pastime of ice fishing as means by which Wisconsin folk reconcile themselves to, and engage in, winter. Finally, in a section on "Images and Borders," Leary writes of interstate "rivalries," especially with Illinois and Minnesota, through which Wisconsin folk define how their state is different from others.

Leary has wisely chosen to write informative headnotes for all of the articles included in *Wisconsin Folklore*, and they provide context in a variety of ways. Among other things, the headnotes give credibility to the editorial decision to present primary data. For example, the Terms and Talk section contains an anonymous "Application to Live in Northern Wisconsin." The "application" asks an "applicant" to tell the make and model of his pickup truck, to indicate his favorite recreation (only hunting, fishing, sexual, and television-watching recreations are listed), and to enter his favorite tavern name. Leary's headnote tells readers that the mock application reflects the widely held Wisconsin stereotype that those living north of State Highway 29 represent, as Leary puts it, an "insular, inbred, male-dominated, outdoorsy, gearhead culture of sex-crazed, drunken Packer fans" (p. 106).

The headnote to Warden Alan Curtis's article, "The Light Fantastic in the Central West: Country Dances of Many Nationalities in Wisconsin," is for quite another purpose. Although the article, originally published in *Century* in 1907, has some useful information, it also reflects the ideology that immigrant groups other than Anglo-Saxons were causing an overall deterioration in the character of the state's population. Leary's headnote explains the genesis of this point of view, making Curtis's ideology a topic in itself.

Leary's knowledge of Wisconsin, combined with his erudition in the field of folklore, result in an important book for those with a casual interest in the state, as well as for those undertaking serious study of the subject. *Wisconsin Folklore* will serve many publics well, and will also stand as an example of how a state folklore collection should be done.

Philip Nusbaum is the folklorist for the Minnesota State Arts Board.



The Intelligent Consumption Project

by Douglas W. MacCleery and Michael Strigel

In a 1928 essay, "The Home Builder Conserves," Aldo Leopold stated, "the long and the short of the matter is that forest conservation depends in part on intelligent consumption, as well as intelligent production of lumber." Leopold's words serve as the title and the inspiration for a new project sponsored by the Wisconsin Academy and the United States Forest Service.

The Intelligent Consumption Project developed as an offshoot of "Building on Leopold's Legacy: Conservation for a New Century." This conference, hosted by the Wisconsin Academy last fall, brought together an impressive array of conservation's leaders—both recognized and unrecognized—who developed relationships based upon the trust and familiarity fostered by the conference's three-day program and the year-long conference planning process. From the initial stages, all of those involved in the conference recognized the power that these new relationships could bring toward solving some of conservation's most challenging dilemmas. Now the Academy and the Forest Service have begun to take on one of those issues, forest resource conservation. The new project, which began in December 1999 and will continue through August 2000, has established the following draft goal:

to convene and catalyze a dialogue among diverse groups on issues involving the consumption of forest resources and the conservation of forestlands. The dialogue shall focus primarily on the consumption of wood fiber and other forest resources, and the relationship of consumption to the ecological health and sustainability of forest ecosystems. The Intelligent Consumption Project will foster constructive interactions and partnerships among groups that have not traditionally worked together in pursuit of shared conservation goals. These interactions will provide a foundation for further collaboration beyond the life span of this project.

The need for the project and the U.S. Forest Service's interest in it are a result of several interrelated factors affecting forest resource conservation. Over the last two decades there has been a substantial shift in the management emphasis of public lands in the United States. This shift involves increased emphasis on protecting biodiversity and aesthetic

values and on reducing commodity outputs. Many believe that this turn toward "ecosystem management" or "ecological sustainability" is so significant that it constitutes a paradigm shift.

This shift in management emphasis on public lands is occurring in response to changing public preferences. That same public, however, is making no corresponding shift in consumption habits. The dirty little secret about ecological sustainability is that because resource consumption in the United States remains stable or continues to increase (depending on what measures are used), the burden and impacts of that consumption are displaced to ecosystems elsewhere. For example, reduced timber harvesting from public lands leads to increased harvesting from private forests in the United States or from forests of other countries.

Over the last decade or so, federal timber harvests dropped 70 percent, from about 13 to 4 billion board feet annually. Since 1990, softwood lumber imports from Canada rose from 12 to 18 billion board feet, increasing from 27 to 36 percent of softwood lumber consumption in the United States. Much of this additional lumber came from old-growth boreal forests in northern Quebec. The increased harvesting of Quebec's forests has become a public issue there.

Harvesting on private lands in the southern United States has also increased. Today, the rate of harvest of softwood timber in the Southeast exceeds the rate of growth for the first time in 50 years. This, too, has become a public issue.

The United States public consumes more resources today than at any other time in history, as well as more per capita than almost any other nation. Since the first Earth Day in 1970, the average family size in the country has dropped by 16 percent, but the average size of newly constructed single family homes has increased by 48 percent.

The conservation community and the media have given scant attention to the "ecological transfer effects" resulting

from the combination of continued high levels of consumption and the management shift on public lands in the United States. The foundation for ecological sustainability will remain weak, however, unless there is an acknowledgment of the consumption side of the natural resource equation.

Today, fewer than two percent of Americans are farmers, and even people who live in rural areas are disconnected from any direct management of land. But while few people are resource producers, all remain consumers. Personal consumption is one area where individuals can act in a way that will have a positive effect on resource use, demand, and management. Yet, not many people realize how their consumption habits affect the land around them.

The disjunction between people as consumers and as land stewards is reflected in the discord and alienation between producers and consumers. Loggers, ranchers, fishers, miners, and other resource producers have all at times been subjected to scorn and ridicule by the society that benefits from the goods they produce. What is absent from much environmental discourse today is a recognition that urbanized society is no less dependent upon the products of forests and fields than were the subsistence farmers of America's past. Witness, for example, the common practice of referring to rural communities traditionally engaged in timber production as "resource-dependent" communities, while resource-dependent communities such as Denver, Detroit, or Boston are seldom referred to as such.

Many people have attributed the move to ecosystem management as a belated recognition of Aldo Leopold's land ethic—the idea that we should have an ecological conscience, a sense of "individual responsibility for the health of the land." Leopold also spoke of the need for responsible consumption. In the same essay quoted above, he wrote, "A public which lives in wooden houses should be careful about throwing stones at lumbermen, even wasteful ones, until it has learned how its own arbitrary demands as to kinds and qualities of lumber, help cause the waste which it decries."

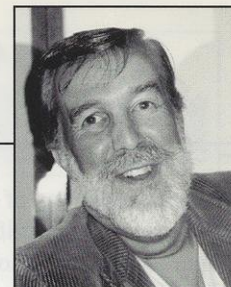
If we can apply ethics to the management of land, why can we not apply ethics to consumption as well? Perhaps it is time for a "personal consumption ethic" to go along with Leopold's land ethic. Ecological sustainability will never be a truly holistic approach to resource management until the consumption side of the equation becomes an integral part of the solution, rather than the afterthought that it is today. The true test as to whether a paradigm shift is really occurring in the United States is whether our society begins to see personal consumption as having an ethical and environmental aspect—and then acts accordingly.

Douglas W. MacCleery is assistant director of forest management, U.S. Forest Service.

Michael Strigel is program director, Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.



Lithograph circa 1933 by Rockwell Kent.



Public Life and the Wisconsin Academy

Treacherous things, stairs and inattention. Early in January I managed to throw myself down my stairs at home and in the process badly sprained my ankle. However, one of the more pleasant consequences of this—shall we say—unwelcome occurrence, was that I did get to do quite a bit of reading during my convalescence.

In addition to finishing *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, which I recommend as an absolutely compelling story about life in the former Belgian Congo, I also had a chance to read the history of the Wisconsin Academy written in 1970 on the occasion of the Academy's one hundredth birthday. There I found the following statement from Dr. Thomas C. Chamberlain, one of the founders of the Academy (reprinted from a 1920 article in *Science*):

the founding of the Academy was the most representative event in the turn to the new order of things [to a "mature civilization" in Wisconsin], for, better than any other single event, it typified the coming of a higher order of endeavor, in that its distinctive feature was cooperative research for the common good, and this, I think you will agree, is the most basal and truest index of real progress.

The "common good." That really caught my attention.

I think Chamberlain's words ring out today as a clarion call to us, the membership of the Academy, to participate in the reinvigoration of public life in Wisconsin. It is clear to me that one of the great challenges facing us is the need for a reassertion of the primacy and centrality of public life. As the noted sociologist Parker J. Palmer has observed in his excellent book *The Company of Strangers*, public life has come to be defined quite narrowly as only "of or pertaining to government" rather than as the much more all-encompassing "common good."

Even as we contemplate our American history, and the rock of the rights of the individual on which we base our celebration of that history—"Don't tread on me"—I think we have great trouble acknowledging that a truly successful and lasting celebration requires an understanding of the public as the coming together and control of a vast diversity of self-interested individuals. Again quoting from Palmer: "We belong to a human community. We are supported by it and must support it."

Sometimes I think we as a people are sliding backward into a high-tech Dark Ages of intellectual isolation and self-indulgence. This is neither an attempt to look at past days through

rose-colored glasses nor a nostalgic yearning for 1959 to come again. My reading of American history tells me that the common good has always had to struggle for its rightful place.

However, today we seem to take for granted—or even express hostility to—those underpinnings of the common good that make our individual lives so rich. Taxes, public schools, an educated populace, the natural environment, artistic venues of all kinds, the infrastructure supporting business, the art of political compromise—these are just a few of those underpinnings that greatly benefit all of us. We can, and *should*, debate just how these are all implemented, but we must stand foursquare behind their importance.

What does all this have to do with the Wisconsin Academy? A great deal, I believe. The Wisconsin Academy should—and must—become a prominent vehicle for the promotion of the common good. How shall we do this?

One way was noted in the February issue of *Inside the Academy*, in the article about our fall 2000 conference, "Genetics, Ethics, and the Public." Our role is to get the best minds together to share with you their thinking about a subject which is often in the news today. It is the Academy's hope that your participation in the conference will help to inform you so that you can influence the formation of public policy concerning this subject. I think—and hope—that the Academy will be hosting more such conferences in the years ahead.

All of us, and certainly the Wisconsin Academy, should be looking for ways to increase the presence and effectiveness of those things that protect and nurture the common good. It is our heritage as members of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, as was so clearly stated by Thomas Chamberlain over eighty years ago.

As always, I welcome your comments, critiques, and suggestions. Write to me at the Academy or by e-mail to rglange@facstaff.wisc.edu.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bob", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Robert G. Lange
Executive Director



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