# "THIS MOST DEMOCRATIC PROVINCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS": AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND PERIODICAL PUBLISHING IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation investigates the conjunction of periodical publishing, autobiographical expression, and cultural "democratization" at the turn of the twentieth century in America. By examining a range of texts originally published in leading American periodicals, this study seeks to appraise the social relevance and literary significance of autobiographical writing at a time when William Dean Howells proclaimed autobiography "this most democratic province of the republic of letters." While the democratization of both the form of autobiography and the forum of American periodicals opened the way for many who aspired to national publication, this study contends that such access was circumscribed and shaped by the problematic democracy that characterized American life and letters at the turn of the century.

This dissertation also proposes and applies a critical method that combines the theoretical questions of periodical studies and autobiography studies. Critical questions regarding authorship, reading, and publishing, mediation and immediacy, and authority and authenticity guide this study's examination of

autobiographical expression at the turn of the century. Chapter One considers a set of brief autobiographical texts originally published in the New York *Independent* and later collected and reprinted as *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told by Themselves* (1906). This chapter argues that, by privileging authenticity of the autobiographical subject over traditional notions of authorship, the editors of the *Independent* contributed to new conceptions of autobiography itself. Chapter Two examines a series of life stories from the *Independent* that directly addressed America's "race problem" from what W. E. B. Du Bois called "the Negro point of view." Fusing personal and editorial points of view, "human interest" and political interests, these stories put autobiography to the service of cultural critique in unique ways. Finally, Chapter Three investigates the social significance of Native American autobiographical expression in American periodicals at the turn of the century. Focusing on Charles Alexander Eastman's "Recollections of the Wild Life," this chapter contextualizes such narratives of Indian childhood by engaging contemporary assumptions about Native Americans as a "child race" and by examining the popular children's pastime, "Playing Indian."

To Melissa
For sustaining faith and inspiring hope

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# INTRODUCTION

## Autobiographical Expression, Periodical Publishing, and the Democratization of American Culture

"Although everyone cannot be a Gargantua-Napoleon-Bismarck and walk off with the great bells of Notre Dame," Henry Adams wrote in the early years of the twentieth century, "every one must bear his own universe, and most persons are moderately interested in learning how their neighbors have managed to carry theirs" (4-5). Adams's own probing, prophetic interest in his American contemporaries and his singular manner of examining his "life and times" mark *The Education of Henry Adams* as a unique intellectual project and literary product of the turn of the century. Many of Adams's American contemporaries, however, satisfied a more-than-moderate interest in the lives of their "neighbors" not through private intellectual contemplation but by indulging in the simple pleasures of the "human interest" stories that filled the era's newspapers and magazines. Nationally circulated periodicals in America at the time, and the weekly or monthly magazine in particular, offered to readers less cultivated than Adams a more democratic and more expedient, if less refined, means of learning how their neighbors "managed to carry" the universe. By catering to this interest (and creating it, in turn), American magazines flourished at the end of the nineteenth

century in an altogether new fashion, experiencing "a more spectacular enlargement and increase in effectiveness" than any other mass medium and becoming the primary source of information and entertainment for reading Americans (Mott 4: 2). By the turn of the century, magazines had become the means by which Americans of all types satisfied "interests" of almost any description, not least of which was an interest in how other Americans lived, worked, and gave shape and meaning to their lives.

Among the myriad journalistic and literary forms and formulas invented to cater to that interest, autobiography acquired a particular resonance among American readers as a form which combined presumably truthful reporting of the events of a life with the inherent interest of the first-person narrative voice.[1] "An autobiography must be very ill conceived indeed," wrote William Dean Howells in 1904, "not to interest, not to please, not to delight" ("Editor's" 478). In the same essay, Howells asserts that an autobiography need not be based upon an "extreme" or a "distinguished" life to please and delight but may be rooted instead in "that easy ground which we explore for ourselves in the affairs and characters of our neighbors when our neighbors do not invite us to join them in it" (478). From just this "common" ground, autobiography flourished at the turn of the century, written in a variety of forms and styles by well-known public figures as well as by

[1] For contemporary commentary on the veracity enabled by the form of autobiography (and the related issue of the individual autobiographer's capacity for truthfulness), see Gill, "The Nude in Autobiography"; Burr, "Sincerity in

unknown and "undistinguished" American individuals.[2] Indeed, in his commentary on autobiography, Howells quips that he will leave it to the reading public to determine "whether we have not of late been having rather too much of a good thing" (478).

Yet Howells also urges "intending autobiographers" to embrace "a true sense of their office in its highest effects": Only by dispensing with unnecessary "modesty" as well as the desire to indulge in distracting "reminiscences" of other lives, Howells contends, can the autobiographer provide to his or her reader an "unmixed" story of the life of a single individual and an opportunity to delight in "that precious intimacy" between writer and reader that only autobiography affords (482). This curious suggestion that the sublime appeal of autobiography may derive in no small part from the form itself—a form intrinsically qualified, as it were, to draw profound "human interest" out of even the most humble lives—offers one compelling interpretation of the prevalence and significance of autobiographical writing at the turn of the century. But Howells was not alone in noting the prominence of autobiographical expression at the time; many other cultural commentators, on both sides of the Atlantic and in high-brow as well as popular periodicals, heralded "'this autobiographical age of ours'" and announced "the vogue of 'reminiscences'" that characterized it (Gill 72; "Vogue").

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Autobiography"; "The Charm of Autobiography"; and Howells's "Editor's Easy Chair" columns of 1904 and 1909.

[2] See Holt, *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*; Slosson, "Undistinguished Americans."

A number of these cultural observers, notably, had more serious reservations than Howells about the "increasing multitude" of autobiographers at the turn of the century (482), and their critiques highlight an intriguing connection between autobiography and periodical publishing at the time. In "The Decline of the Memoir," an essay reprinted in June 1900 in the American *Living Age* after it appeared initially in the British *Spectator*, the essayist begins by noting that "on every hand there are signs that an age of memoirs is upon us" but goes on to argue that "the memoir has become too common and too careless" ("Decline" 651, 653). "For one thing," the writer continues, "there are too many": "The smallest notable in any walk of life must have this tribute to his merits," while more and more memoirs are sought out by editors and publishers as "a sop to public curiosity" (652). But more ruinous to the literary quality of the autobiographical form, the writer contends, is that memoirs have become altogether too commercial, too hastily and crudely drawn, too much imbued, in short, with "the atmosphere of journalism" (653). The reading public's "habit" of demanding such "pithless memoirs," the writer suggests, derives from the same "vulgar curiosity which gives personal journalism its vogue; and, indeed, this type of memoir is simply a systematized and padded journalism" (652-53). In this interpretation, autobiography becomes the ground on which the author seeks to distinguish sharply between the journalistic impulse—crude, hasty, and "commercial"—and the literary impulse, marked by "distinction, conscience and a nice discrimination" (652-53). Notably, while Howells expresses at least tacit egalitarian approval of

the "increasing multitude" of aspiring autobiographers at the turn of the century, this writer perceives in the diffusion of autobiographical writing a "decline" from the literary to the merely journalistic, a trend that "corrupts the whole art" by degrading the aesthetic integrity of the form of the memoir itself (652).

Two other essays that appeared a decade later in leading British periodicals underscore a connection between periodical publishing and the considerable expansion of public interest in autobiographical writing at the turn of the century. In the first essay, published in *Blackwood's Magazine* of December 1911, a cultural observer contends that "the supremacy of the novel" as "an article of public consumption" has encountered a new "adversary" in autobiography: "This confectionary is known by many names, Memories, Recollections, Reminiscences, and the like," the essayist notes, "but whatever name it assume, it is always inspired by the same purpose—to excite the curiosity of the humble reader . . ." ("Musings" 840). As this writer interprets it, the new autobiographical writing duplicates the ephemeral and unrefined qualities of newspaper and magazine writing; like that writing, the essayist predicts, the vast majority of new memoirs will not "survive the season's close" (840). The same ephemeral qualities of "periodical literature" are noted by another commentator writing during the same year in the *Edinburgh Review*, but in this case autobiography, in its more classic manifestations, is positioned in direct opposition to those forces ("Famous" 332). Arguing that "the interest of a good newspaper is past in a week or two" while "the interest of a good book is permanent," the writer highlights six "celebrated"

autobiographies as works that represent a unique cultural stay against the passing fads and impermanent values of newspapers and magazines (332). Autobiography represents, to this essayist, an abiding source of insight into human motives and "sentiments" that "the student of human nature" cannot find in the "more ephemeral, less solid, and therefore less valuable" writing provided by the periodical press (332-33).

Each of these cultural critics seeks to contextualize the increased public interest in autobiographical expression at the turn of the century within the broader cultural frame of periodical publishing, albeit in a variety of ways: Autobiography is associated by the first two writers with periodical literature's journalistic excesses and literary failings, invoked by the third as the antithesis of those excesses. None, to be sure, express the enthusiasm of Howells for the range and variety of new autobiographical writing. But these and other commentators, including Howells himself, unite in their desire to explain the cultural significance of both the rise of periodical literature and the contemporary emergence of new forms of autobiographical writing. Their essays originate from the common recognition that both autobiography as a literary form and periodicals as a publishing medium were undergoing real transformations at the turn of the century. Though some observers express greater skepticism or suspicion about those changes than others, decrying the "decline" of autobiography and the "vulgarity" of popular periodicals, each perceives that the developments in both

arenas represent significant and meaningful changes in what Howells calls the "republic of letters" in America ("Editor's Easy Chair" 1909: 798).

Transformations in the social significance of both autobiography and periodical publishing at the turn of the century also, as these essays implicitly affirm, made the boundaries between the "literary" and the "journalistic" more difficult to distinguish sharply. The clear distinction drawn by one essayist between the "substantial reading" that good books offer and the superficial information provided by "periodical literature" became impossible to sustain at the turn of the century, and especially so in America. Most observers of American periodical publishing, in fact, testified that the astonishing increase in the quantity of periodicals had not occurred without a corresponding increase in quality. An essayist in the *Dial*, for example, takes note of the "vulgar ephemera" among popular periodicals but contends that the prevailing "tendency of periodical literature in our day is towards the satisfaction of a distinctly higher and finer standard than was dreamed of by most of the magazines and weeklies of twenty years ago" (Nelson 350, 352). Howells, too, challenges the notion that periodical literature could be clearly distinguished from literary production in America: "In belles-lettres at least," he asserts, "most of the best literature now sees the light in the magazines, and most of the second-best appears first in book form"; magazines, he continues, are "ephemeral in form, but in substance they are not ephemeral" (qtd. in Mott 4: 41). Finally, in the first edition of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917-21), a scholar appraising the changes in

periodical publishing of two decades earlier maintains that "it is hardly an overstatement to say that the rise of the magazine has been the most significant phenomenon in the development of American publishing" (Cairns 299). Affirming Howells's claims about magazine literature, the writer notes that much of the best literature produced in America during the previous fifty years appeared initially in magazines: "The patron of the newsstand" at the turn of the century, he concludes, could "procure, sometimes for so small a sum as a dime, a periodical that contained the work by the best living authors" (299-301).

Notably, the commentator on American magazines in the *Cambridge History* offhandedly provides an explanation of the disquiet expressed by some cultural observers at the turn of the century about the expansion of periodical literature: "These changes," he notes, "have been accompanied by the good and the questionable effects that always accompany the democratization of culture" (300). The latter phrase suggests that the changes that occurred at the turn of the century posed a challenge not only to conventional aesthetic distinctions and generic definitions but also to established social and political categories. The expansion of American periodicals to meet the desires of every conceivable "interest group" (a term coined in 1908), together with the marked reduction in the price of all periodicals after advertising replaced subscriptions as a source of revenue (Mott 4: 20-22), inevitably opened the "republic of letters" to a wider range of the American reading public than had ever before participated in it. "An immense reading public has sprung into being," noted a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*

("New Conditions" 572), while a British observer asserted that recent "social changes" bring "literature as a whole within the reach of nearly everybody" ("Famous" 332). Whereas "Forty years ago writers were literary men and women, . . . and readers were people of their own kind," the *Atlantic* essayist continues, "To-day, the readers are the people, the masses, and writers are in the main those who supply them with what they want" (572). Such comments highlight a growing awareness that designations such as "readers," "writers," and the "literary" had become more difficult to apply, less self-evident in their cultural significance, with the rise of periodical publishing at the turn of the century.

This "democratization" of the reading public clearly distressed those who considered themselves "literary men and women," and many raised alarms about the threat to "literary life" posed by such changes ("New Conditions" 572, 574). Others, however, saw in these developments not danger but promise,[3] a progressive movement toward greater democratization throughout American society. At a time when social critics heralded a new "spirit of democracy" in America marked by "the discovery of the importance of the average man" (Slosson 3), a number of cultural observers explicitly linked American democracy and civilization and American literature in social commentary. In an essay on "The

[3] See, e.g., George Pellew's commentary in the *Critic* in 1891: "In France, England, and the United States, the most obvious recent changes are the result of what may be called the democratization of literature. Never before has reading been so general; never have so many people been able to write so variously and so well. . . . Literature and journalism have joined hands as never before . . ." (qtd. in Mott 4: 110).

New Literature" in the *Atlantic Monthly*, for example, Bliss Perry contended that "It is this unadvertised majority, this unheralded multitude, that walks quietly to the polls and renders a common-sense verdict, which holds the key to the literary as well as to the political future" of America (7). In thus perceiving a connection between political representation and literary representation, this commentator and others also provide a powerful means of interpreting the rise of both periodical literature and autobiographical expression at the turn of the century. Another essayist in the *Atlantic* noted, for example, that "the interest in the individual, everyday man has grown with the growth of the democratic spirit, which involves a passion for biography" ("Modern" 574). Edwin E. Slosson linked the "spirit of democracy" and the form of autobiography even more explicitly in his introduction to *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told by Themselves* (1906), maintaining that "the ordinary man under ordinary circumstances" had come to represent not only the "controlling vote in the governmental firm" but also the principal subject of contemporary literature (3, 5). "In politics he has gained his rights," Slosson continued, "and in history and literature he is coming to be recognized" (3). The implication in such essays that cultural representation and political representation might be closely connected, that biographical or autobiographical writing might intrinsically express a "spirit of democracy," underscores the particular significance of autobiography in American social life and letters at the turn of the century.

Together, the rise of periodical literature and the prominence of autobiographical expression contributed to a broad movement of democratization within the republic of letters in America not only by admitting new readers, creating an "immense reading public," but also by making that republic more accessible to new writers. Eager to satisfy the reading public's desire for first-person accounts of first-hand experiences, magazine editors printed full-length autobiographies in serial form even as they sought out brief autobiographical essays to publish independently. Furthermore, responding to what Slosson called "the discovery of the importance of the average man," progressive editors solicited personal narratives from "average" or "undistinguished" American citizens as a way of representing—one "vote" or one "voice" at a time, as it were—American democracy itself. Representatives of various professions, classes, regions, ethnic groups, and immigrant populations, in turn, responded to expanded opportunities for publication in mainstream periodicals by seizing the agency of public expression, often in the form of autobiographical narratives. Many individuals who, before the turn of the century, might never have found an opening for their voices in such periodicals, now found occasions to present their experiences of American life to a national audience. As representatives of an "unadvertised" and "unheralded multitude" of American citizens, these individuals presented lives that had remained until the turn of the century largely unheard of—and entirely unheard *from*—within the American republic of letters.

To the degree that autobiography enabled this new access to print for previously excluded Americans, it was justly declared, in Howells's authoritative and enthusiastic phrasing, "this most democratic province in the republic of letters" ("Editor's Easy Chair" 1909: 798). To the extent, too, that "ordinary specifications for authorship" were set aside in the case of autobiography, requiring of even the most "obscure or humble" aspiring writer merely the "sincere relation of what he has been and done and felt and thought" (798), autobiography at the turn of the century embodied the "spirit of democracy" in America. Without a doubt, that spirit guided the production and reception of much of the autobiographical writing of the period: Not before the turn of the century, one imagines, would a reviewer in the *Ladies' Home Journal* have presented the autobiographies of an African-American ex-slave and an immigrant—Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and Jacob Riis's *Making of an American*—as "Two Books of Real American Life," "not only autobiographies of very interesting men" but "also in a very real sense autobiographies of a nation . . ." (Mabie 17). At the same time, however, the democratization of literature at the turn of the century was by no means complete, the new openness of the republic of letters by no means unlimited or unrestricted. The enthusiastic zeal of some observers at the time about the triumph of democratic principles in American life and letters easily embraced figures such as Washington and Riis, individuals who, in the words of the *Ladies' Home Journal* review, "formed themselves on American models and developed themselves by means of American opportunities" (17). Individuals who

did not experience such striking "American opportunities" or live such exemplary American lives, and those whose life stories posed more significant challenges to "American models" of identity, community, and success, encountered greater difficulties in seeking access to the avenues of publication and circulation that constituted the republic of letters in America.

In *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*, Michael Warner contends that "No one had a relation to linguistic technologies—speaking, reading, writing, and printing—unmediated by such forms of domination as race, gender, and status" (17). In spite of immense changes in the forms of American publication as well as in its public sphere between the eighteenth century and the turn of the twentieth, much the same argument might be made about the latter period. When Howells proclaimed in 1909 that "we would not restrict autobiography to any age or sex, creed, class, or color," he could not have lost sight of the myriad extraliterary restrictions on publication that remained in place at the turn of the century—restrictions maintained, in a sense, by the very "we" of which Howells counted himself a part. The newly democratic republic of letters heralded by many observers at the turn of the century, in short, was still characterized by a number of aristocratic tendencies. To be sure, the spectacular rise of both autobiographical expression and periodical publishing during this period greatly expanded the opportunities available to those who aspired to write for a national audience and, in the process, permanently altered the meaning of print and publication in America. Finally, however, the

advances in the democratization of American literature and culture during this period must not be isolated from the contradictions and tensions that marked and circumscribed those advances. A critical examination of periodical publishing and autobiographical expression at the turn of the century requires an attentiveness to both aspects of the republic of letters of the day, its capacity to forge new, democratic relations among the American population as well as the enduring limitations of that capacity.

* * *

As the preceding overview suggests, autobiography and periodical publishing can be fruitfully examined as cultural forms that functioned, to a considerable extent, in dynamic relation to each other at the turn of the century. The precise nature of that relation, its consequences for individual autobiographers, forms the primary subject of the three chapters that follow, and the social and literary transformations outlined above represent the common historical context for those separate discussions. But the theoretical issues at stake in the following chapters might also be said to unite autobiography and periodical publishing as subjects of critical analysis. The critical questions involved in reading autobiography, that is, overlap in significant ways with the questions raised by reading periodicals, and an examination of either form illuminates some of the particular challenges posed by both. While the rise of autobiographical expression and periodical publishing at the turn of the century represents the common historical context of the following chapters, then, the critical questions

involved in reading and interpreting autobiography and periodicals constitute the theoretical thread that unifies those chapters.

The first question raised by a study of autobiography and periodical publishing—why study them at all?—is answered to some degree by the discussion above: In American literary history, at least, periodicals and autobiographical expression deserve critical attention because each played a key role in literary production and cultural expression in America and contributed to developing notions of authorship, publication, culture, and national identity. But the question that follows—how are they to be read?—raises more challenging issues of method and interpretation. To be sure, both autobiographies and periodicals often present an appearance of interpretive transparency, the former by establishing that sense of intimacy between author and reader noted by Howells, the latter by conveying the image of the periodical as a neutral mediator between writers and readers. This notion of a direct and easily discernible correspondence between the periodical or the autobiography and the reality that each documents may account for the lack of critical attention given to both forms. But another source of such critical oversight may be the particular barriers to close critical analysis that each form presents. Autobiography, for example, may be "the least complicated of writing performances," but it is at the same time, as James Olney asserts, "the most elusive of literary documents":

> In talking about autobiography, one always feels that there is a great and present danger that the subject will slip away altogether, that it will vanish into thinnest air, leaving behind the perception . . . that

> there is no way to bring autobiography to heel as a literary genre with its own proper form, terminology, and observances. (3-4)

Impossible to confine within clear boundaries as a distinct genre, autobiography belies its own self-evidence, forcing the critic who seeks the firm interpretive ground of generic definition to proceed, as Olney quips, "by an act of faith" alone (4).

Periodicals pose a similar challenge to the critical reader. In one sense, periodicals seem to offer direct access to another time, its social and cultural forms, its distinct ways of seeing, knowing, and feeling. Furthermore, their "overwhelming empirical presence," as B. E. Maidment writes of Victorian periodicals, "the sense that they had something to say on everything," makes them "a crucial and obvious resource" (144). Yet, as Maidment continues, "it is just this bagginess, this variety, this hugeness, which makes precise attention to periodicals as a genre, or hierarchy of genres, with their own logic, rules and determinants, so difficult to sustain" (144). The correspondence between Maidment's observations on periodicals and Olney's discussion of autobiography is striking: Both assert the richness of their respective fields but also highlight the fundamental challenge of definition and classification, of sufficiently pinning down the objects of their analysis to allow analysis to proceed. In Olney's portrayal, autobiography is an untrained "creature" among more well-behaved literary genres, impossible to "heel" to "its own proper form, terminology, and observances" (4); periodicals, in Maidment's depiction, similarly resist classification as a "genre" or set of genres

with "their own logic, rules and determinants" (144). What both descriptions suggest is that the critic who would read both autobiography and periodicals in conjunction must remain alert to "proper" as well as improper forms, general "rules" as well as frequent exceptions, broad "observances" as well as unconventional cases.

The critic who would read *American* autobiographies and periodicals in conjunction, meanwhile, encounters additional challenges. First, the sheer profusion of both forms in America is staggering: Louis Kaplan's *Bibliography of American Autobiography* includes over 6000 titles written before 1945, while Frank Luther Mott's *History of American Magazines* estimates that in the year 1900 alone, 5500 periodicals were in publication (4: 11). The content of both periodicals and autobiographies, furthermore, resists any unifying or overarching classification. Albert Stone suggests, for example, that "the range of personality, experience, and profession reflected in the forms of American autobiography is as varied as American life itself" ("Autobiography" 23); Robert Sayre, likewise, rhapsodizes about American autobiographies "in all their bewildering number and variety" and proposes that, taken together, they constitute a "catalogue . . . as great as one of Whitman's own" ("Proper" 241). Comprehending the full extent of American autobiographical writing of even a limited period requires, as a result, not only the arduous work of recovery but also the more daunting task of identifying some sense of generic continuity and coherence. An inclusive approach to reading periodical literature, meanwhile, is manifestly impossible: A single weekly magazine published over a ten-year period, for instance, might

exceed 30,000 pages of text and advertising. More significantly, as Maidment asserts, a working sense of the "range, interconnectedness, and consciousness of each other among periodicals . . . can never be recovered from ranks of bound volumes in a library stack" (145). Neither the single salvaged issue nor an entire run of a given periodical, in other words, can transparently reveal to the scholarly researcher those myriad associations and allusions that gave the periodical its unique position in the social and cultural life of its time.

Nevertheless, the enduring sense that both autobiographies and periodicals offer, in Sayre's words, "a broader and more direct contact with American experience" than any other literary or cultural forms has made them attractive to scholars of various disciplines—though generally as secondary, not primary, sources. The apparent promise of transparency (or "direct contact") that these forms project, together with the impression of comprehensive coverage—the sense that "everybody" in America has written an autobiography (Sayre, "Proper" 263) and that periodicals "had something to say on everything" (Maidment 144)—mark them as ideal sources of "background" information for a variety of scholarly projects; the same characteristics, however, have led scholars to ignore autobiographies and periodicals as subjects of primary research and analysis. By this critical logic, periodicals and autobiographies have been relegated to the roles of a supporting crew for the literary critic's or the historian's main-stage show, invoked merely to provide supplementary information on the person, product, text, or event under primary investigation.

In recent decades, however, critical attention has increasingly challenged the assumptions and methods of previous scholarship on both autobiographies and periodicals. Albert Stone notes that scholarship on autobiography, for instance, has moved from a "purist criticism" that "insisted upon testing for the 'true autobiography'" to "more inclusive expectations and looser definitions" ("Introduction" 7). Olney describes the transformation within autobiographical criticism as a widespread "shift of attention from *bios* to *autos*—from the life to the self": that is, from reading autobiography as a direct representation of the events of a life to reading for those "philosophical, psychological, literary, or historical implications" of the "I" that informs every autobiographical text (19, 20). In periodical studies, likewise, critics have attempted in recent years "to shift attention from journalism as a source for other studies and to treat it as a subject in its own right," challenging those who would limit periodicals only to "evidential and illustrative uses."[4] In both fields, scholars have called for new modes of reading that do greater justice to the breadth and complexity of autobiographies and periodicals and to the particular critical challenges inherent in reading them.

Few if any of those scholars have examined autobiographical expression and periodical publishing in conjunction, in spite of considerable correspondence between them and the possibility that the two fields of study might prove mutually informative. In "Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre," for

[4] Brake, Jones, and Madden, "Introduction" xii; Maidment 153. See also Pykett; Beetham; and Smith and Price.

instance, Margaret Beetham's formal analysis of periodicals clearly parallels contemporary discussions of autobiography: "The concept of open and closed forms," Beetham writes, "provides a way of explaining the relationship between the forms of texts, the psychic structures in which the individual self constructs meaning, and the structures of the social world" (27). Notably, Albert Stone argues that autobiography might be read through a similar framework, examined both for its "individual stories"—those "psychic structures in which the individual self constructs meaning"—and for its "cultural narratives," the ways in which those stories invoke and interpret "the structures of the social world" ("Introduction"). In spite of such critical overlap, however, scholars of autobiography or periodical publishing have not explicitly addressed the nature of autobiographical texts published in periodicals or the critical issues such texts might raise.

The new modes of reading and research suggested by these and other scholars of autobiography and periodical publishing might be summarized in a phrase of Paul John Eakin, who urges scholars of autobiography to pursue "authoritative account[s] of actual autobiographical practice" in place of isolated readings of individual autobiographies (7). Such a focus on the "generic practice" of a particular period is, Eakin continues, "a relatively new development, and highly significant":

> Whereas before the literary historical space of autobiography was a largely unvisited terrain, . . . now a working sense of the life of texts and a concomitant sense of the tastes and

> expectations of the reading public in particular periods is beginning to emerge. (14)

What Eakin characterizes as a "new development" among scholars of autobiography can also be found, as suggested above, among scholars of periodical publishing. The common desire for "a working sense of the life of texts," whether those texts be autobiographies or periodicals, reflects a similar commitment in both fields not only to new theoretical models of reading but also to renewed efforts at "empirical description" (Maidment 145). The work of producing authoritative accounts of the actual autobiographical or periodical "practice" of a given period, these scholars agree, requires critical methods that can engage the profusion of individual autobiographies and periodicals—some method of empirical description, though inevitably limited—as well as theoretical approaches that illuminate the social and cultural position, the literary significance, and the ideological implications of individual texts.

Applied to the turn of the century period, the method suggested by Eakin and others offers a powerful means of examining not only the autobiographical and periodical practice of the time but also the extent and meaning of the contemporary democratization of American literature and culture. As illustrated above, even a brief examination of the former reveals its correlation and relevance to the latter: Clearly, an "authoritative account" of the democratization of American culture at the turn of the

century cannot be achieved without some recognition of the role of periodicals and autobiographical expression in those changes. An account that limits that role to one of secondary comment, finding evidence of democratization only in its invocation as editorial topic or literary theme, overlooks the importance of periodical and autobiographical forms as primary sites of those changes and, furthermore, as tangible illustrations of both democratization and its limits.

In an essay written to introduce a volume of essays on American autobiography, Eakin commends the fact that "in several essays well-known, lesser known, and virtually unknown autobiographers figure *in relation to each other* for the first time in criticism, as they once did in the day of their original publication" (15; emphasis in original). At the turn of the century, notably, many of those known and unknown autobiographers figured quite literally in relation to each other within the pages of American magazines.[5] Restoring that relation, reading the "marginal" literature of

[5] A fascinating example of autobiographies read "in relation to each other" can be found in a letter of Charles Chesnutt to Walter Hines Page, then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, in 1899: "My dear Mr. Page, I have been reading the March *Atlantic*, and haven't found a dull line in it. The contrast between slavery struggling for existence in an essentially free democracy, and liberty struggling vainly for life in a despotism, is strongly marked in Mrs. Howe's "Reminiscences" and Prince Kropotkin's autobiography . . ." (Chesnutt, *"To Be an Author"* 120). Beyond offering a concrete illustration of Eakin's thesis, Chesnutt's reading of the autobiographies in terms directly related to "democracy" and "despotism" reinforces my own linking of autobiographical expression and the issue of democratization. Chesnutt's comment on not finding "a dull line" in the entire issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* may also

unknown autobiographers back into "the practice of mainstream autobiography," can illuminate not only the impact of the dominant culture on those it marginalizes but also the "reciprocity of influence" between mainstream and margin (Eakin 8-9).

In a suggestive sentence, Eakin goes on to propose that "the true history of American autobiography and the culture in which it is produced and consumed may turn out to be the history of identifiable groups within the culture and of the network of relations among them" (12). Whether or not Eakin's prediction proves accurate, it is particularly suggestive for reading turn-of-the-century autobiographical expression, not least of all because of its close connection to periodical publishing. Periodicals at the turn of the century represented, more explicitly than book publishing or any other medium, the place at which literary production and consumption met: The typical editor functioned in one sense as both collaborative producer, influencing and editorially shaping the writing of contributors, and representative consumer, seeking out material that would appeal to the periodical's subscribing audience and, if possible, attract new readers.

At the same time, the broad social questions surrounding the very idea of "identifiable groups" were marked by a particular urgency at the turn of the century. During that period, as Philip Gleason notes, "ethnicity

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underscore the significance of "human interest" to periodical publishing at the turn of the century.

assumed greater salience as an element in the national identity than it has had at any other time before or since": The "ethnic factors of 'race,' nationality, language, and so on," Gleason continues, "were the issues that sprang immediately to mind when Americans asked themselves, 'What does it mean to be an American? What kind of Americanism do we want?'" (46). Furthermore, while ethnic and national identity became increasingly problematic concepts, the question of the proper "relations" between "identifiable groups" became the source of considerable social commentary and contention: Vigorous debates about "the Negro Problem" or "the Indian Problem," for example, derived in part from widely divergent notions about whether social relations between distinct groups and classes ought to be based on traditional social structures, on new scientific theories of human evolution, on measures of educational or intellectual ability, or on ideals of universal social and civil rights. Within these broad social discussions, national magazines functioned in various ways as arbiters of American national identity, while autobiographies offered a useful form for probing the relation of individual and ethnic identity to national identity and for distinguishing the actual practice of democratic ideals in America from their theoretical articulations.

In the following chapters, then, the questions that guide my discussion of autobiographical expression and periodical publishing resonate not only with questions that predominated in social discourse at the

turn of the century but also with questions that preoccupy theorists of both autobiography and periodicals today. In seeking to produce an "accurate account" of the "actual autobiographical practice" in America at the turn of the century, I am aware of the unique challenges posed by the form of autobiography and by the publishing medium of the periodical. I am also aware that the conjunction of autobiography and periodical publishing is, in Eakin's terms, "largely unvisited terrain" in scholarly work on this period. But as I have maintained above, and as the following chapters illustrate, that conjunction offers a unique way of perceiving the literary expression and the broader cultural conditions of turn-of-the-century America, including the nation's halting progress toward what some contemporary observers termed "democratization."

* * *

In making a case for "the centrality of the study of periodicals as a scholarly project," B. E. Maidment notes that "one obvious task for periodicals research . . . is to re-think modes of empirical description so that, however modest we may feel confronted by the size and complexity of the subject, we might at least have a chart or a map of major tendencies" (145). Nancy Glazener, meanwhile, in a full-length study of the "literary institution" of Realism as it gained legitimacy in a set of magazines she calls "the *Atlantic* [*Monthly*] Group," concedes that the sort of literary history she is proposing "is necessarily a collaborative project in which the

limits of individual studies provide the preconditions for other work" (7). In presenting the dissertation that follows, I want to begin by echoing the sentiments of these scholars: The chapters that follow, in short, are by no means intended as exhaustive studies but rather as modest efforts at drafting "a chart or a map" of a few "major tendencies" in autobiographical expression and periodical publishing at the turn of the century. These chapters should be read as initial (and, I hope, initiatory) forays into an immense and complex field, small contributions to a broadly collaborative critical project.

Each of the chapters that follow addresses a similar conjunction of autobiographical expression, periodical publishing, and the relation of margin and mainstream in America at the turn of the century, but each begins from the vantage point of distinct critical questions about that conjunction. In Chapter One, I examine the ways in which autobiographical expression in national periodicals contributed to changing conceptions of authorship and authenticity, focusing my attention on a series of short life-stories published in the early years of the twentieth century in the New York *Independent*. A selection of these autobiographical essays was collected and published in 1906 as *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told by Themselves*, a title that points to the democratic ideals underlying the procurement and publication of the essays. But the stories served the purposes of the *Independent* as

much as they fulfilled the desires for self-expression or for "authorship" on the part of various "undistinguished" subjects. The essays reveal the unusual ways in which the magazine's editors compromised traditional notions of authorship in favor of the appearance of authenticity, mediating the individual agency available to the unknown autobiographers. Yet the essays also illustrate the sense of immediacy that the form of autobiography offered: While the *Independent* clearly capitalized on the appeal of "human interest" stories in publishing the brief essays, I maintain that the subjects of the life stories were also enabled by the medium of the national magazine and the immediacy of autobiography to communicate their individual experiences of American life to a national American audience.

Chapter Two also centers on the *Independent* but shifts attention from the broad range of autobiographical writing by "undistinguished Americans" published by the magazine to the particular contributions of African-American autobiographers and essayists. After briefly outlining the magazine's engagement in the national discussion of America's "race problems," and the so-called "Negro problem" more specifically, I turn to an examination of several individual autobiographical essays by African-American contributors. Those essays reflect a wide range of experiences, class positions, and political points of view, but all of them illuminate aspects of the turn-of-the-century relationship between autobiographical expression by marginalized Americans and mainstream periodical

publishing. In two essays that invoke the trope of a "new slavery" at the turn of the century, for example, a former peon and a nurse present life-stories that combine personal narrative with editorial argument in compelling first-person commentaries on the "Negro Problem." The partial literacy of both autobiographical subjects, however, limits the extent to which they can seize the agency of free expression, and I conclude that only the nurse succeeds in achieving what William Andrews terms "a distinctive authorizing voice" (*To Tell* 99). Turning to the personal essays of two educated, middle-class African-American women (presented in the *Independent* with two essays on the "race problem" by white women), I maintain that these women use the form of autobiography and the forum of periodical publication to advance not only forceful "individual stories" but also challenging "cultural narratives" (Stone, "Introduction").

Chapter Three investigates both the problems and the potential that the genre of autobiography and the forum of mass-media publication presented to Native American writers at the turn of the century. Focusing primarily on the early autobiographical writing of Charles Alexander Eastman, I explore the curious (if seemingly innocuous) fact that Eastman and other contemporary Indian autobiographers chose to write primarily about Indian childhood at a time when Native Americans were widely conceived of as a "child race." By examining closely the prevailing notions of the day regarding Native Americans, childhood as a discrete period of

development, and the curious contemporary pastime, "Playing Indian," I set the work of Indian autobiographers at the turn of the century in a richer cultural context in order to more fully appreciate their "bi-cultural" position in American life and letters.

At the same time, by considering at some length the autobiographical writing of a single, widely recognized writer, I hope to illustrate in Chapter Three the usefulness of reading individual autobiographical texts not only against the backdrop of a specific cultural context but also in conjunction with research on a single periodical. In this case, I support my reading of Eastman's "Recollections of the Wild Life" (and its later incarnation, *Indian Boyhood*) with my analysis of the periodical in which it first appeared, *St. Nicholas*, even as my reading of Eastman's text informs my understanding of that influential children's magazine. Furthermore, my effort to delineate the complex negotiations required of Eastman as a mediating figure—positioned, in a sense, between the Native American world of his childhood and the white American world of his adult years, between "savage" and "civilized"—corresponds to my interest in the powerful mediating function of periodicals such as *St. Nicholas*. I contend that both the editorial efforts of *St. Nicholas* to make Eastman's writing more palatable to its audience and Eastman's own autobiographical negotiations participate, albeit to divergent ends, in the related cultural preoccupations at the turn of the century with the life of the Indian and the

life of the child. Chapter Three concludes by positioning Eastman's autobiographical writing next to that of two other Native American writers, Zitkala-Sa [Gertrude Simmons Bonnin] and Francis La Flesche, each of whom used autobiography to express powerful and provocative responses to white America's fascination with the "vanishing" Indian.

My focus in much of this study on ethnic American writing reflects my conviction that the recovery and reconsideration of ethnic American and African-American literature in recent decades has significantly enriched and expanded traditional conceptions of the American literary canon. The small oeuvre of Zitkala-Sa, for example, has in recent years inspired considerable critical commentary and attained a secure position in two leading anthologies of American literature, changing in the process the ways in which turn-of-the-century American literature is conceived.[6] My primary aim in the following chapters, however, is not to further the work of reconceiving or reconstructing the American canon. In reading texts that have been largely unknown or uninteresting to scholars of American literature (and of American autobiography in particular), I am not primarily interested in recovering texts for possible canonization, evaluating those

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[6] For recent critical commentary on Zitkala-Sa, see Bernardin; Okker; J. Smith; Sidonie Smith, "Cheesecake"; and Wexler, esp. 173-83. Zitkala-Sa's autobiographical essays are excerpted in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* and reprinted in their entirety in the Fifth Edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (1998). Okker offers several compelling suggestions about how

texts in terms of aesthetic accomplishment, or defining any new standards of literary merit. Instead, my interest lies in exploring new ways of reading American autobiographical expression and American periodical publishing and in discovering the potential for critical insight that might be achieved by reading both forms in conjunction. Though my subject clearly intersects with issues of canonization, insofar as I address the initial production and reception of American autobiographical texts, my principal aim is not to valorize or revalorize particular texts but to understand the complex ways by which texts first become eligible for critical consideration through the stages of writing, publication, circulation, and reception.

The particular opportunities and obstacles encountered at each of those stages by ethnic American and African-American autobiographers make their writing especially compelling as the subject of such critical analysis. In his early essay on "Autobiography and the Making of America," Robert Sayre defends his exclusive focus on "famous autobiographies" by noting that, in contrast to both "the memoir of the public person," who is "perhaps too much a citizen," and "the private experience of the uncelebrated person," who "takes his citizenship more or less for granted," the celebrated American autobiographers treat citizenship as "a major issue in their total development" (168). Sayre suggests at the

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Zitkala-Sa's writing conforms to as well as challenges traditional conceptions of the American literary canon.

close of his essay that the autobiographies of American women need to be read "to tell the rest of the story—of what went on *in* the House" (168), but he overlooks the wealth of autobiographical expression by "uncelebrated" American individuals who by no means took citizenship for granted, individuals for whom citizenship was "a major issue in their total development" often through no choice of their own. Autobiography can indeed provide significant material for telling "the rest of the story" of American life, but that story ought to include what went on not only in the House but also in the southern labor camp, the western farming community, the northern factory, the eastern tenement. Autobiographical writing by marginalized Americans can expand the outlines of American social and cultural as well as literary history, telling of aspects and arenas of American life that have remained unrecognized.

That writing is noteworthy, however, not only for its content but also for its form, for what it reveals about the practice of autobiography at the turn of the century as well as the particular characteristics of periodical publishing. Many marginalized American individuals, as Olney notes of African-American writers in particular, have "entered the house of literature through the door of autobiography" (15), perhaps especially, as suggested above, at the turn of the century. Yet even as it admitted large numbers of uncelebrated or undistinguished individuals, that doorway to the "house of literature" remained a contentious site, and a site at which the vaunted

democracy of American life and letters was tested and defined. In the following chapters, an examination of the ways in which marginalized Americans sought to enter that house of literature through the form of autobiography and the forum of periodical publishing reveals the unique opportunities as well as the real obstacles that enabled and prevented such access.

Because my interest centers on the autobiographical expression of marginalized Americans published by nationally circulated American periodicals, I do not consider in the following chapters the profusion of foreign-language periodicals established by various immigrant groups[7] or the continued development of African-American periodicals at the turn of the century—though such periodicals clearly exerted a powerful influence within particular communities and, in ways that need to be further investigated, on the nation as a whole. Presumably, too, autobiography and other generic forms functioned in distinct ways in such periodicals, and the conjunction of autobiography and "marginal" American periodicals might offer further insight on the autobiographical and periodical practice of the turn of the century. The following study also focuses primarily on Native American and African-American autobiographical expression while overlooking the contemporary writing of other ethnic or racial groups in

America. In part, this choice reflects the preponderance of autobiographical writing by Native American and African-American individuals, itself perhaps the result of larger populations (and immigration restrictions such as the Chinese Exclusion Act) as well as the greater visibility of those groups at the height of national debate over the so-called "Negro Problem" and "Indian Problem." My sustained attention to the writing of two marginalized groups is intended to be representative of a kind of critical approach that might be applied to others at the turn of the century for whom "democratization" was both a promise and a problem. But clearly much work remains to be done before the range of experiences and expressions of American life can be fully appreciated, before the "actual autobiographical practice" of this period can be recognized and read in all its wealth and variety.

One way in which the following study seeks to contribute to that larger, collaborative critical project is by advocating for a new attention to shorter autobiographical texts published in the inherently ephemeral medium of the periodical. To be sure, my interest in the brief autobiographical essay derives in part from the cultural significance of short forms at the turn of the century, when brevity was associated with efficiency and the acceleration and increasing automation of American life:

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[7] Ashley notes that "the influx of immigrants" at the end of the nineteenth century "led to an increase in the foreign language press from 315 newspapers in 1880 to

The New York *Independent*, for example, in an editorial entitled "Scientific Management in Reading," touted itself as "the busy man's magazine," providing "what is most important to be known of what the world is doing and thinking" but insistently "boiling [it] down" to "save . . . the reader's time" (76). Walter Hines Page, likewise, noted in 1902 that "Effective style is changing" and that "the man who would write convincingly and entertainingly of things of our day and our time must write with more directness, with more clearness, with greater nervous force" (qtd. in Mott 4: 13). These transformations in "effective style" clearly influenced the shape of autobiographical writing at the turn of the century, when a brief essay might be termed an "Autobiography."[8] One of my aims in this dissertation is to expand and amend the predominant emphasis of autobiographical criticism on full-length, independently published texts by taking seriously such uses of generic classification at the turn of the century, approaching the period's autobiographical practice "inclusively and inductively" rather than through any "prescriptive" or "essentialist" definitions of the genre (Eakin 7).

At the same time, I am less interested in the following study in seeking a new and inclusive definition of autobiography as a genre than in examining the intersection of autobiographical expression, periodical

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1,150 in 1900" (xii).

[8] See, e.g., De Cora; "New Slavery"; "Race Problem"; and Williams, "Northern."

publishing, and the question of American democratization, and my emphasis on brief autobiographical forms also reflects this primary concern. Marginalized Americans at the turn of the century clearly had wider access to the "house of literature" through short forms of literary expression such as poetry, short stories, and autobiographical essays than through longer forms such as novels or full-length autobiographies, just as they had greater access to the newspapers and magazines that specialized in short forms than to the publishing houses that printed only full-length volumes. The short autobiographical essay, in particular, opened the door to the house of literature in a way that other forms could not, appealing to the interest of American readers in the lives of other, largely unknown American individuals and enabling those individuals to bring unrecognized lives and points of view before a national audience. For many marginalized Americans at the turn of the century, the conjunction of autobiographical writing and mainstream publication created a new and powerful means of public expression, a way of representing, in both a political and a literary sense, their own experiences and perspectives as well as those of a larger class or group.

Critical consideration of the shorter, more ephemeral forms of autobiographical expression that flourished at the turn of the century in American periodicals enables, finally, not only a more accurate account of the autobiographical practice of the period but also an informed evaluation

of Howells's appraisal of autobiography as "this most democratic province of the republic of letters." Notably, citations of Howells's statement have become ubiquitous in recent years in critical commentary on American autobiography, but few critics have read the phrase as anything more than transparent description.[9] Yet Howells's comment clearly encapsulates deep contradictions that marked the republic of letters and, indeed, American culture in its entirety at the turn of the century. Scholarly reappraisals of turn-of-the-century autobiography must come to terms with both the possibilities and the limitations of "this most democratic province of the republic of letters." Assessing the complex negotiations required of those who entered the "house of literature" by way of autobiographical expression and periodical publication is the primary aim of the chapters that follow.

[9] See, e.g., Couser (31, 253); Egan (70); McKay (27); Sayre, *American Autobiography* (443); Stone, "Introduction" (2) and *Autobiographical Occasions* (2); and Foster (34-35). Only Couser (253) and Foster (35) take explicit exception to Howells's characterization of the democratic openness of autobiography.

## *Chapter One*

# "A New Form of Literature": Autobiography and *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*

American autobiographical writing from the turn of the twentieth century is generally represented in criticism by a few exceptional texts. Henry Adams's *Education*, for example, has often been elevated as the zenith and culmination of the period's efforts in the genre. But as Paul John Eakin contends, recent interest in the "literary historical space of autobiography" in America has fostered a desire to replace a narrow critical focus on selected monumental texts with a more richly nuanced and broadly conceived sense of the "actual autobiographical practice" of particular periods (14). Such an approach seems ideally suited for the period surrounding the turn of the twentieth century in America, a time when the monumental autobiographies of figures such as Adams and Henry James shared the cultural stage with a profusion of autobiographical expression and experimentation by lesser-known and, indeed, unknown figures. As an age proud of its "democratic spirit" and its "interest in the individual, everyday man" ("Modern" 574), turn-of-the-century America opened the doors of literary opportunity to individuals and "types" never before represented in the American republic of letters. In addition, while Henry Adams privately distributed just one

hundred copies of his *Education* to select friends and family, the vast majority of literary expression at the time was published initially (and often solely) in a manner more suited to the much-vaunted democratic spirit of the age: that is, in daily newspapers or weekly and monthly magazines. Understanding the "actual autobiographical practice" of this period, then, requires a shift in focus to include not only the classic autobiographical texts of the period, the permanent fixtures of autobiographical criticism, but also the more common, more conventional, more popular, and more ephemeral texts of the period.

A curious collection of just such texts was published in 1906 (the same year Adams "lent out" his book to friends such as Henry James for "correction, suggestion, and amendment") with the suggestive title, *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told by Themselves*.[1] Culled from approximately eighty short autobiographical texts first published in the New York *Independent*, the sixteen "life stories" offer an intriguing counterpoint to the more traditional autobiographies of the period. These "lifelets," as one reader dubbed them, introduced the national readership of a popular weekly magazine to the lives of unknown and "undistinguished" Americans of various occupations and "races" who made up the "composite nationality" of the United States at the turn of the century (Slosson 4). Containing the stories of a Greek peddler, a French dressmaker, an Irish cook, a Swedish farmer, and a Japanese servant, to name a

[1] For Adams's comments on his *Education*, see his letter to James, 6 May 1908 (Monteiro 76).

few, the collection represented immigrants of both the "desirable" and "undesirable" variety; at the same time, the collection accounted for various "native" American lives by including the life stories of "a farmer's wife" from Illinois, an "itinerant minister" from the South, a Native American nurse and an African-American peon. As a curious and diverse set of autobiographical texts, *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* provides a unique opportunity for an examination of the range of American autobiographical practice at the turn of the century.

## I

## Autobiography and *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*

As the managing editor of the *Independent*, Hamilton Holt was responsible for both the ongoing magazine series and the 1906 collection of life stories—projects he pursued, in the words of one of his associates, "with the object of ultimately presenting in this way a complete picture of American life in all its strata" (Slosson 4). The inflated idealism of the latter claim reflects, certainly, the self-congratulatory rhetoric with which many periodicals of the day vied for readers and advertisers. But such self-promotion aside, it is clear that Holt and the *Independent* presented the series of brief autobiographical essays as a new use of the genre and a vital, important contribution to the literature of the day. Perhaps prompted by such exalted aims, readers of the collection responded favorably to both its form and its "value." Rebecca Harding Davis, for example, in a review

commissioned by the *Independent* itself, notes the freshness of Holt's conception with the assertion, "As far as I know, Mr. Hamilton Holt, in compiling this book, has struck an absolutely untrodden path in the field of literature" (458). Davis goes on to compare Holt to Thomas Edison as a "discoverer of every day wonders," a note voiced also by several other reviewers (458). Many of these readers comment on the volume's surprising "weight" and significance in spite of its commonplace subject matter, its curious sense of distinction in spite of its "undistinguished" subjects. Holt's collection drew considerable praise from reviewers in a wide variety of periodicals as a "unique," "decidedly unusual" volume, marked by "a naïve charm," and "not less entertaining than curious."[2] Furthermore, while the reviewer for the *Dial* felt obliged to hold the high ground by noting that, "As literature, the volume has but slight value" (Rev. of *Life Stories*), others recognized in both the individual stories and in Holt's conception of the whole something fresh and vital. Several reviewers compared the stories to contemporary fiction, generally to the advantage of the *Life Stories*.[3] Particularly

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[2] These comments can be found in contemporary reviews collected in Scrapbook #33 of the Hamilton Holt collection held at the Rollins College Archives. Because many of the original citations in Holt's scrapbook are unreadable or incomplete, volume numbers, dates of publication, and page numbers for many of these reviews are impossible to determine. The latter two phrases quoted above are found in the Brooklyn *Times* 12 May 1906: n.p. and *Critic* July 1906: n.p., respectively.

[3] The *Annals of the American Academy* found the stories "as interesting as any novel with the additional advantage that they are stories of actual life"; the reviewer for the Brooklyn *Eagle* (20 Aug. 1906) went further, declaring them "far more entertaining than the average run of fiction"; Brooklyn *Life* asserted that "there is little fiction that is as good reading as these narratives"; and the Boston *Congregationalist*

amidst the tepid, predictable popular fiction of the day, the "intensely simple, intensely vital and convincing" stories in Holt's collection stood out for their revelation of "life at first hand, without romanticism, sentimentalism, didacticism, or generalization" (Hackett).

In nearly every review of Holt's collection, however, questions about literary value held less importance than assertions about the social (or "sociological") value of the autobiographical stories. The reviewer for the *Dial*, for example, while discounting even the suggestion that the stories deserve recognition as "literature," notes that "many of the tales are of vital human interest" as "social studies" (Rev. of *Life Stories*). Beyond their acknowledged appeal "simply as stories," the "lifelets" gathered by Holt garnered considerable attention for their realism, expressive power, and timeliness. Many reviewers called attention to the surprising directness and truth of the stories, applauding their "revelation of the actual." Further, if the stories expressed greater vitality and force than much contemporary fiction, they also compared favorably to scientific studies of the day in detailing the conditions of life among immigrant populations and the native American lower- and middle-classes. As a source of sociological data, according to one reviewer, "the book is worth a score of volumes dealing with general conditions."[4] Finally, the collection earned praise for its timeliness

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(2 June 1906) contended, "they are better worth reading than most of the fiction which attempts to do its work on the same ground" (Holt, Scrapbook).

[4] Rev. of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*, ed. Hamilton Holt, *Times* (Brooklyn, N.Y.) 12 May 1906: n.p. (Holt, Scrapbook).

because of its implicit as well as explicit commentary on American social problems. The very act of gathering together from the "undistinguished" classes representatives of "American life in all its strata" constituted an unspoken social critique, while the specific charges voiced by individual narrators explicitly challenged American social and political arrangements. Reviewers noted along these lines those stories concerning labor and management conflicts in Chicago, sweatshop conditions in New York, the system of peonage that was effectively re-enslaving African-Americans in the South, and, most of all, the presence in America generally of increasing numbers of "new immigrants" from eastern and southern Europe.

The latter development represented a particularly charged issue in 1906, as the number of immigrants from these areas reached its highest level and fears and stereotypes about their negative traits were widespread in American society.[5] In this context, the value of first-hand accounts from immigrants themselves is repeatedly affirmed in reviews of Holt's collection, although a noteworthy tension can be detected between those who read the stories as predominantly "cheerful" and those who see in them "a rather melancholy disallusion" of the American promise (Holt, Scrapbook). As a contribution to the discussion of these social "problems," however, Holt's series in the *Independent* and the resulting volume of life stories received widespread critical approval.

A similar, late-twentieth-century interest in the social relevance and sociological revelations of Holt's collection might be said to have inspired two slightly modified reprints of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* in recent years. In 1982, two social historians returned to Holt's original series of stories to assemble a new collection, organized under four headings: "Men at Work," "Women at Work," "The Question of Labor and Capital," and "The Question of Race." As their headings suggest, and as an explanatory note confirms, David M. Katzman and William M. Tuttle, Jr. decided to reprint a new selection of Holt's "lifelets" in order to illustrate a few prominent themes from the turn-of-the-century period of American history, not merely—as they interpret Holt's intention—"to have each type of 'race' represented with little or no concern for the larger themes that their experiences illustrated" (xi, n3). In addition, Katzman and Tuttle engage the life stories through the prism of issues particularly relevant in the early 1980s, following the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and heightened interest in ethnic-group identification: namely, questions of immigration, assimilation, and the value of preserving cultural traditions. The two historians approach the texts as first-hand expressions of the "tensions of the adaptive-resistance process," representations of the struggle by new immigrants (and, indeed, all Americans) to come to terms with a rapidly changing America

[5] Katzman and Tuttle note that the "new immigrants" from countries such as Italy, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Greece, Rumania, and Turkey "comprised eighty-one percent of all immigrants in the peak year of 1907" (xiii).

(xviii). Katzman and Tuttle read the life stories, that is, strictly as useful and intriguing examples of oral history, not as examples of "autobiography" in any imaginative or literary sense of that term.

Werner Sollors, the scholar of literature and ethnicity who edited the 1990 reprint of Holt's collection, presents *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* in a slightly different guise. Sollors considers his edition more strictly a reprint than the Katzman and Tuttle collection: He retains Holt's prefatory Note and Edwin E. Slosson's original Introduction (and credits Holt as the editor of the volume), and he maintains the original contents and order of the collection. Sollors does, however, add four stories to the end of the collection, "chosen with the intention of rounding off the panorama," including stories of a Florida sponge fisherman, a Hungarian peon, a "southern white woman" and a "southern colored woman" (ix). Sollors's brief "Note on the Second Edition" points to the guiding impulse of his return to the *Life Stories*, his primary interest not in American social history but American ethnic identity. While the social historians Katzman and Tuttle were drawn to the stories through the prism of cultural pluralism, Sollors—perhaps most often cited for his controversial essay, "A Critique of Pure Pluralism"—approaches the stories for their representations of ethnic identity after massive immigration and social upheaval had refashioned America into an increasingly "modern" and "polyethnic" nation (xiii). Sollors does briefly address the "literary value" of the collection, and his Introduction reveals an interest in and sensitivity to literary theme and language absent from Katzman and Tuttle's

edition. The editors of neither edition, however, locate in the form of autobiography a key to the persistent interest of the *Life Stories*, instead approaching autobiography primarily as a point of access to other concerns. For Katzman and Tuttle, the autobiographical stories present "an accurate, insightful, and suggestive portrait" of turn-of-the-century America (xii); Sollors, likewise, values the collection of texts as "a rich and unsurpassed resource for an understanding of the inward experience of how social and individual forces may interact" (xi). Neither edition approaches the lifelets as examples of autobiography per se or probes the significance of the collection for a study of autobiography more generally (and generically) during this period of American letters.

Despite the obvious importance accorded to Holt's original collection of life stories by two separate reprints in recent years, few scholars have responded to the scholarly call issued both by Katzman and Tuttle and by Sollors. In fact, with the exception of a few scattered reviews,[6] neither reprint has inspired any scholarly attention. Much of this critical neglect may be the result of the curious form that the life stories take, individually and collectively: For different practical and theoretical reasons, the stories might be seen as troubling texts for scholars of history and literature alike. First, as autobiographies of a sort, the life stories stand between the territory claimed by scholars of each discipline, inspiring what Eakin

[6] See Namias; Morris. It might be noted that Namias critiques the form of the more-faithful Sollors reprint, arguing that "this collection of pieces does not cohere as a form" (90); and that Morris addresses the issue of literary value by asserting, "At

has referred to as "the long-standing perplexity of both historians and literary critics about a kind of imaginative literature that claims a basis in referential fact" (5). But the particular nature of Holt's collection of life stories raises other questions as well. For historians, even those attracted to oral history as a powerful source of historical information, the authenticity of the stories must be of central concern: Most were recorded or "procured" not by anthropologists or other social scientists (whose objectivity itself is often questioned), but by reporters for a popular weekly magazine. Furthermore, the role of the editor in the shaping of each narrative is often impossible to gauge; in spite of repeated editorial claims by the *Independent* for the authenticity and veracity of the stories, it is clear in at least a few cases that editorial intervention has effectively eliminated the significance of the texts as historical documents.[7]

In many ways, the life stories raise more troubling issues for scholars of literature. First, while historians are primarily concerned with issues of *authenticity*, literary critics often ground their work in questions about *authorship*: Theoretical claims about the "death of the Author" notwithstanding, most literary scholarship focuses on individual authors and draws on knowledge of an author's oeuvre, intention, biography, or cultural context to make assertions about a text. *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* obviously disrupts such an

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least two 'Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans' transcend the primitive and, by means of their grace and poignancy, qualify as lasting literature" (102).

approach, as it gives priority to the "authors" of the individual texts only insofar as it relates their "lives," their "stories." (In many cases, in fact, the name of the autobiographical subject is not published, presumably for the sake of a protective anonymity.) Additionally, literary scholars typically confer critical attention on writers who "made a living" from their writing, figuratively if not financially, and writers who wrote a series of works over a period of time. By contrast, the subjects represented in the *Life Stories* were anything but literary professionals, each one chosen, in part, precisely because they "made a living" in an "undistinguished" fashion: as a peddler, a bootblack, a cook, a dressmaker, or a sponge fisherman. Further, as documents explicitly intended (by the *Independent*) to be "representative" of particular classes, races, and occupations, the life stories accentuate the sociological and the personal aspects of life far more than the aesthetic and universal aspects traditionally privileged by critics of literature. Finally, these short, autobiographical texts, so clearly implicated in the economic determinants of the commercial marketplace, simply do not conform to the traditional preferences of most literary critics for extended, self-consciously literary works of fiction.

Employing a form of autobiographical criticism would appear to be a way to resolve the "perplexity" of both historians and literary critics in the face of a text

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[7] Cf. the comments of one reviewer of Holt's original collection on several stories that ought to be "discounted," including one that appears to be "too well edited" (Hackett).

as difficult to define or approach as *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*. But in spite of the convergence of the two reprintings of Holt's collection and a rising critical interest in autobiography, those theorizing and practicing new versions of autobiographical criticism also have shown no interest in these stories. This neglect, too, may reflect an inability to reconcile the unusual form and circumstances of the *Life Stories* with most "common sense" definitions of what constitutes autobiography, generally or generically. They do not record the lives of figures celebrated for public or literary accomplishments, or indeed *any* distinguishing deeds; most are thoroughly grounded in present struggles, not restricted to reminiscences of early triumphs or tragedies; nearly all represent individuals at the economic, political, and cultural margins of American society, not those at its center; and, finally, each life story is narrated in several pages, not chapters or volumes. Moreover, as noted above, the unstable and ambiguous nature of authorship in Holt's collection challenges theorists of autobiography perhaps more than other literary critics, as it disrupts the very "authority of autobiography" (Couser). For various reasons, it seems, one might be justified in excluding these life stories from the category of autobiography altogether, just as they might be eliminated from consideration by historians and literary critics.

Most reviewers of Holt's original collection, however, recognized the life stories precisely as "autobiographies," even (as the New York *Times* headlined its

review) "Genuine Autobiographies."[8] Edwin Slosson, meanwhile, in his introduction to Holt's volume, takes pains to herald autobiography as the most likely candidate for "the literature of the future" and the autobiographical "lifelet" as "likely to become a distinct type" of that literature (3). Following Eakin's phrasing, readers in 1906 clearly recognized the life stories as part of the "autobiographical practice" of the day; consequently, critics who are interested in the outlines and varieties of that practice need to include texts such as *Life Stories* in any broad investigation of the uses and function of autobiography at the time. A comprehensive account of the autobiographical practice in America at the turn of the century should be able to encompass such marginal voices as well as the era's most impressive literary texts. To achieve what Eakin calls "a working sense of the life of texts and a concomitant sense of the tastes and expectations of the reading public" during this period (14), one might begin by confronting directly the complications and questions raised by a text such as *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*.

[8] Reviews referring to the life stories as autobiographies include those in the *Critic*, Boston *Transcript*, Brooklyn *Citizen*, Boston *Congregationalist*, *Springfield City Library Bulletin*, and Brooklyn *Eagle* (Holt, Scrapbook), and Rebecca Harding Davis' review for the *Independent*. The full headline for the New York *Times* review reads "Humble Folks. Genuine Autobiographies of Men and Women Who Live and Suffer in This Country in the Present Hour" ("Humble").

## II

## Authorship, Authenticity, and "Autobiography of an Unconventional Kind"

In a trenchant analysis of the myriad complications attending "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write," the French theorist Philippe Lejeune begins with the obvious but fundamental question, "Who Is the Author?" Citing a French law of 1957 that declares, "The quality of author belongs, save proof to the contrary, to the one or ones under whose name the work comes out," Lejeune probes the ways in which ghostwriting, collaboration, and the use of interviews in autobiography complicate and disrupt any such straightforward attempts to identify authorship (265n15). Indeed, Lejeune argues that these common methods of composing autobiographies, when fully understood, threaten to upset even the bedrock assumptions most readers hold about the responsibility and identity of the author (as a writer and a "real person"): The notion of the author, he suggests, is "in a certain way the fundamental message that the autobiographical genre conveys" (194). As Lejeune goes on to address, however, such ambiguities in the notion of authorship only intensify and increase when the subject of a ghostwritten or collaborative autobiography is not a culturally prominent public figure but a culturally marginal figure who, even if he or she is able to write, has little or no access to "the networks of communication of the printed work" (200). Access to one such network of communication is precisely what the editors of the *Independent* offered to various "undistinguished" Americans at the turn of the

century, and the nature of their "authorship" of autobiographical works can only be understood within the context of that medium and the particular limits and liabilities of their access to it.

The role of magazines such as the *Independent* in the cultural life of America at the turn of the century can hardly be overstated. Before the mass-media explosion of the twentieth-century, magazines held the cultural position and power later shared by periodicals, radio, television, film, and the internet as sources of entertainment, education, information, and commentary. As cultural messengers and mediators, magazines were more timely and less expensive than books, not as ephemeral and "cheap" as many newspapers, and generally recognized as the primary source for informed, intelligent "comment" on the topics of the time. Though related to newspaper journalism, American magazines garnered far more respect than the daily "journals" as a vital force in American life. In politics and social reform, the role of magazines in this period is well-known: The era's powerful "muckraking" magazines such as *McClure's*, for example, helped to bring about pure food and drug standards, railroad regulations, child labor laws, and anti-trust measures (Ward 325). But the significance of the periodical press was also frequently noted in contemporary discussions of American literature. William Dean Howells, among others, saw in magazines the leading edge of literary production in America, asserting that, "in belles-lettres at least, most of the best literature now sees the light in the magazines, and most of the second-best appears first in book form"; magazines, he continued, are

"ephemeral in form, but in substance they are not ephemeral" (qtd. in Mott 4: 41). As networks of communication, then, the leading national magazines in turn-of-the-century America held an important mediating role not only in politics or popular culture but in the broad cultural arena. In this light, the intention of Hamilton Holt (as suggested by Edwin Slosson) to present "a complete picture of American life in all its strata" expresses a sort of grandiose idealism befitting a magazine like the *Independent*, conceived of as a powerful mediating force among those various strata and as a sanctioned voice both of and for the American people as a whole.

Autobiography as a genre takes on a particular resonance and relevance in such a conception of magazine literature. To be sure, part of its resonance must be attributed to the frantic journalistic quest at the turn of the century for "human interest" and "timeliness" in reporting, two elements believed to be essential for increasing circulation and thereby increasing advertising revenue. (The significance of both of these factors in the reception of Holt's collection can be noted in the subtitle of the New York *Times*'s review: "Genuine Autobiographies of Men and Women Who Live and Suffer in This Country in the Present Hour.") In addition, stories like those published by the *Independent* appealed to the prevailing enthusiasm for realism in literature, the desire to witness "life at first hand, without romanticism, sentimentalism, didacticism, or generalization" (Hackett). But magazines that felt "a sympathy for democracy," like the

*Independent*, may also have recognized in the genre of autobiography what William Dean Howells expressed in 1909:

> . . . we will only intimate to any hesitating autobiographer that he need not forbear because he does not seem to meet the ordinary specifications for authorship. Let him be ever so obscure or humble, it needs but the sincere relation of what he has been and done and felt and thought to give him a place with any other in this most democratic province of the republic of letters.[9]

This "province," one might say, became more democratic than ever before in the first decade of the twentieth century with the help of magazines like the *Independent*. But of course, Howells's blithe rendering of the "republic of letters" as a whole masks the obstacles in the way of such access to leading networks of communication: In fact, a "sincere relation" of a life did not guarantee the relaying of that story to the public, did not automatically secure the subject "a place with any other" in print. Howells's vision of immediacy aside, gaining an audience for the telling of one's life story in fact required the mediation of a magazine or an individual "distinguished" in the republic of letters.

The special role of autobiography in magazine literature and the influence of that role on conceptions of authorship during this period might be illustrated by the work of Hutchins Hapgood, a journalist whose writing connects in several intriguing ways with the *Life Stories* series in the *Independent*. In 1903, one year

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[9] The *Independent*'s "sympathy for democracy" was noted by a contemporary observer, George Perry Morris, in *The Congregationalist and Christian World* (9 Dec. 1905), qtd. in Kuehl 29. Howells's commentary on autobiography appeared in his "Editor's Easy Chair" of October 1909 (798).

after the *Independent* initiated its series, Hapgood published *The Autobiography of a Thief*, a full-length volume depicting the common life of crime and eventual reform and moral regeneration of the ex-thief "Jim." Hapgood explains his role in the writing of this "autobiography" in his "Editor's Note":

> The method employed in composing the volume was that, practically, of the interview . . . . I took voluminous notes, often asking questions, but taking down as literally as possible his story in his own words; to such a degree is this true, that the following narrative is an authentic account of his life, with occasional descriptions and character-sketches of his friends of the Under World. Even without my explicit assurance, the autobiography bears sufficient internal evidence of the fact that, essentially, it is a thief's own story. (12)

Hapgood's "explicit assurance" and "internal evidence" aside, the necessity for such insistent pledges of authenticity highlights the unusual character of this volume as autobiography. Considering the French law cited by Lejeune, by which "The quality of author belongs . . . to the one or ones under whose name the work comes out," this ambiguity only heightens, as the title page of the volume reads thus:

*The* Autobiography *of*

a Thief

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*Recorded by*

HUTCHINS HAPGOOD

*Author of "The Spirit of the Ghetto," etc.*

Nowhere is "Jim's" name given to attest that the autobiography is indeed his "own story." Indeed, though the overt moral of his life story is, on the one hand, that

"crime does not pay" and, on the other, that even the criminal can effect a (secular) redemption and become an honest citizen, Jim's authorship remains grounded in his status and identity as "a Thief." Hapgood's identity as "author," meanwhile, is reinforced by his record of previous authorship (neatly captured in "*etc.*"). Furthermore, if *initiative*—the desire to tell one's life story—is understood as a key element in autobiography (Lejeune 193), Jim's role as autobiographer becomes increasingly ambiguous, as Hapgood proudly asserts his own role as initiator: After he "became morally certain that [Jim's] reform was as genuine as possible" and that the ex-thief would "remain honest," Hapgood "proposed to him to write an autobiography" (11-12).

Hapgood's unusual conception of the relationship of autobiography and authorship finds explicit expression in a 1905 essay for the *Bookman* magazine entitled "A New Form of Literature." Citing a recent complaint by Gertrude Atherton that American literature lacked "force and vitality," Hapgood suggests that the solution to this cultural anemia lies in a "new form" of literature that would draw its inspiration from the prevailing methods of the newspaper, and specifically, from the interview. Hapgood acknowledges that the "art" of the interview is undeveloped, and is unlikely to develop in the newspapers; however, he continues, "why not carry on the method outside the newspaper, until the interview is developed into the autobiography, but into the autobiography of an unconventional kind?" (424). This new form of autobiography would, Hapgood suggests, breathe new life into American literature by "go[ing] directly to the lives

of the people," answering the demands of a "democratic age" while simultaneously replacing exhausted literary conventions with "the drama of real life" (424-25). The *subjects* for such unconventional autobiographies would be "expressive" individuals who happened to be not merely "interesting" in themselves but also representative of a class, thus assuring that the resulting autobiographies might not only tell "a human story" but also portray an entire "section" of American life (424). The work of *writing* such autobiographies, therefore, would require "taking only what fits into the picture and . . . rejecting what is untypical and superfluous" (425). And the *author* of such autobiographies, finally, would not be the subject but the interviewer: As the one responsible for seeking out an individual, conducting interviews, capturing the "accent" and the "very language" used by the subject, selecting what fits and eliminating what does not, the journalist becomes "the literary artist," the interviewer becomes the "author" (425).

Hapgood obviously intends his essay to justify the work he had already been engaged in (e.g., *The Autobiography of A Thief*) as well as to claim credit for what was fast becoming a cultural trend ("The *novelty* of *my* idea . . ." [425; emphasis added]). In addition, Hapgood clearly directs his argument not only to writers of fiction befogged by "romantic and historical conventions" but also to newspaper journalists (at the height of the era of "yellow journalism") who aspire to a more socially respected role as writers of "literature" (425). But more significant to an understanding of the relation of authorship and autobiography at this time is Hapgood's claim that his "new form of literature" is in fact

"autobiography," albeit "of an unconventional kind." Indeed, the "convention" of individual authorship in autobiography seems to concern Hapgood not at all: Though he consciously aligns his writing with autobiography as a genre, he does not hesitate to divide "autobio-" from "graphy," the "self" and the "life" from their expression in writing.

Of course, Hapgood's splitting of the subject of an autobiography from its author produced one enormous convenience for the literary aspirant who still retained the journalist's drive: Such an writer could "author" as many autobiographies as he or she could locate suitable subjects.[10] But Hapgood's approach was not without certain inherent difficulties as well. The ease with which Hapgood claimed responsibility for both the initiation and production of another individual's autobiography might always come into conflict with the desires of the subject: The perfect candidate, once located, might simply refuse Hapgood's proposal. In fact, Hapgood records just such a refusal in *The Spirit of Labor* (1907), his volume on "the world of the workingman" in Chicago (published thirteen months after Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* had exposed, in fictional form, the conditions of the meat-packing industry in that city). In his Preface to the volume, Hapgood reports that his original intention had been to repeat his earlier experiments with autobiography in order to express both the life

[10] Lejeune makes a similar point in contrasting the professional "ghostwriter" to the "amateur 'ethnobiographer'": While the former must be chosen, in effect, from many at the disposal of the famous individual, the latter can choose from "hundreds of

of an individual and the "ideals and conditions" of a "whole class," but that his intentions had been thwarted by the unwillingness of the individual he had selected to be the subject of an autobiography. Hapgood attempts various sociological explanations of the distinct lack of interest among the workingmen of Chicago to have their life stories told in autobiography: He suggests, for example, that "the active impersonality and seriousness of a laborer lacks the pleasure in subjective contemplation and in the *recherche* of the ego which is of prime necessity in autobiography" (15). But he cannot mask his own disappointment in being "compelled to choose the more circumstantial, comprehensive, if slower, less vivid and less exciting form of biography" (19). "The man and the subject" he had selected, Hapgood concludes, "was at once too interesting, too significant and *too inexpressive*" (19; emphasis added). In his zeal for pioneering a "new form of literature," Hapgood had overlooked the inconvenient fact that, without the consent of the interviewee, the author would be forced to opt for two less-appealing forms: the *fictional autobiography*, which drew on a similar ethnographic gathering of information but employed an imagined protagonist[11]; or

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thousands of possible models, and the model chosen should consider himself happy to attain a notoriety for which he was in no way destined" (196).

[11] That fictional autobiographies constituted a recognized type in the publishing world of the time—and that autobiographies composed from interviews were recognized *as* autobiographies—might be illustrated by a comment in *The Critic* following the publication of Hapgood's *Autobiography of a Thief*: "This is not, *as one might suppose*, a bit of fiction. It is really an autobiography taken down by Mr. Hapgood from the lips of an ex-convict. It is as interesting as fiction, but being true its lesson is more salutary" (Rev. of *Autobiography*; emphasis added).

the *biography*, which portrayed an individual's life story in its *milieu* but sacrificed the immediacy and "excitement" of the first-person narrative.

Hapgood's curious conception of the subject of autobiography, it should be noted, coincides perfectly with Hamilton Holt's in *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*: "The aim of each autobiography," Holt asserted, "was to typify the life of the average worker in some particular vocation, and to make each story the genuine experience of a real person" (Note xxix). Both editors conceived of autobiography, it seems, as the perfect vehicle for achieving these two ends, and for appealing to two different desires of their readers: First, the desire for genuine knowledge of how fellow Americans—and those of "the other half" in particular—lived their lives; and second, the desire for the *personalized* knowledge that only first-hand accounts and first-person narratives seemed capable of supplying. Hapgood and Holt privileged—no doubt, because they believed their readers to privilege—*authenticity* over *authorship*, and thus both fearlessly explored "unconventional kinds" of authorship in an effort to procure compelling stories of actual lives.

Hapgood's explicit commentary on his experiments with autobiography during the years of the *Independent*'s series of life stories helps to illuminate the ideals and intentions of the magazine's editors in procuring those stories, motives that are difficult to discern fully from the life stories themselves. In contrast to the more self-consciously "authored" autobiographies produced by Hapgood, however, the life stories published in the *Independent* complicate the role of the

editor by the sheer number and variety of autobiographical subjects. Holt's collection of sixteen stories alone includes some written by educated and literate individuals (including one by "A Farmer's Wife" and a literary aspirant, "printed exactly as she penned it") as well as several others transcribed from interviews.[12] Transcription in this case, of course, must be understood as a markedly different process than it became when recording devices were readily available and portable: Some of the ambiguity surrounding authorship noted above, in other words, derives from technological factors more than from literary conventions or expectations. However, as an editorial comment at the head of "The Life Story of an Indian" indicates, many of the stories written by the subjects themselves were also "aided" by the editors "to the extent of some very slight rewriting and rearrangement" (124). It is, in fact, impossible to read the *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* without questioning the authorship of the stories at various points. Yet, as even the more skeptical reviews of Holt's collection reveal, it is equally impossible to dismiss the stories entirely as, for example, merely fictional autobiography or as sociology-in-the-first-person.

Indeed, the fact that first-person narration inevitably *masks* the work of transcribers, editors, and others involved in the production of those narratives may be the key to both the appeal and the limitations of the form of the "lifelet" as an

[12] Holt, *Life Stories* 93. All further references to individual stories are taken from this edition (1990), unless otherwise noted, and will be cited by page number within the text.

example of autobiographical expression. One example from the *Life Stories* clearly illustrates both tendencies as well as the difficulty of weighing the limitations of the form against its "conditions of possibility" (Lejeune 202). "The Life Story of a Syrian," one of the more compelling tales in Holt's collection, narrates a young man's childhood in Lebanon, his awakening interest in America and his eventual immigration, and his successful establishment of a Syrian-language newspaper in New York. The narrator's recollections of childhood include commentary on the religious and political tensions in Syria as well as memories of boyhood games and fear of graveyard "ghouls" (150). He recalls his education in Syrian schools as narrowly religious while celebrating his move to an American mission school (in which, ironically, "the American teacher never talked . . . about religion") as the beginning of his real enlightenment, opening his eyes to the narrowness and corruption of his own country in marked contrast to the freedoms of American life (152). His awakening to a powerful sense of America's promise is dramatized in a key scene in which another boy—"a bold, wild boy"—mysteriously directs him to a hiding place under the roots of "a great tree," where he finds Arabic newspapers written by Syrians living in New York (152). The papers advocated revolution in Lebanon and Syria, and the frightened narrator "quickly put them back where I had found them and ran away from the place, for I thought that if any priest found me with them I might lose my life" (153). The scene neatly illustrates the life-and-death contrast between the freedom of expression and the press enjoyed by Syrians in America and the restrictions on

such expression in Lebanon, and it celebrates as well the power of the American press to circulate American principles around the world. But the impact of this scene is heightened by the conclusion of the story, where the frightened Syrian boy appears transformed into the confident New York newspaper editor, self-assured and outspoken in spite of an order by the officials of the Turkish Government condemning him to death. Between these two points, the narrator recounts his arrival in New York and his fascination with all that was "strange and new and suggestive of life and power" in the immense cityscape, which he observes with awe from the center of the Brooklyn Bridge every day for a week after his arrival (154).

The story of the successful young Syrian illustrates many of the attractions of the brief life story as developed by the *Independent*: It includes pleasant memories of childhood exploits and education, affirming recollections of arrival in America, commentary on the lack of (American) freedoms elsewhere in the world, and an introduction to the Syrian-American community ("The little Syrian city which we have established within the big city of New York") with "its distinctive life and its distinctive institutions" (157). But the story also exposes the nonchalance of the magazine's editors with regard to the notion of authorship. Reprinted in Holt's collection of life stories, "The Story of a Young Syrian" was prefaced by this editorial headnote:

> The following chapter is a composite. Three young Syrians of Washington Street, New York, each lent a part of his life to the

> making of it, in order that the story might be nearly representative of the average Syrian immigrant. (147)

This brief editorial confession of sorts suggests the bizarre lengths to which editors such as Holt might go to procure vivid life stories, producing what can only be called (borrowing a coinage of Lejeune) "heterobiography in the first person" (264n10). Perhaps more shocking is the absence of such a confession in the original headnote accompanying "The Story of a Young Syrian": It is difficult to surmise why the editors felt justified in publishing the story initially without any explanation of its "composite" origins, then opted to reveal this information—with no suggestion of apology—in republishing the story as one of many "life stories" "told by" the subjects themselves.[13]

A number of possible explanations for this editorial nonchalance on the part of the *Independent* find expression in Lejeune's discussion of collaborative writing and "the autobiography of those who do not write." He suggests, first of all, that the reading public often finds itself both eager to challenge authenticity and uncover "scandal" *and* "prepared to lend itself to the games of illusion and not see through the transparent veils" that hide the realities of production behind any text (194). What excites the indignation of the general public, Lejeune argues, is generally not collaboration per se but the concealment of it—perhaps the reason

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[13] The *Independent* first published the story with this headnote: "The following article is the result of an interview with a very well-known local Syrian who is under sentence of death for his utterances against Turkish misrule. He was *assisted by two friends*, and his political views are fairly representative of young Syria . . ." ("Story" 1007; emphasis added).

that Holt felt comfortable revealing the composition of the Syrian's (or more properly, perhaps, the Syrians') life story (195). Furthermore, Lejeune notes that the concern over the nature of authorship may be more pressing for the intellectual than the common reader (195), a point echoed by the American critic Albert E. Stone in remarking the "monumental unconcern" of readers of popular American autobiographies about the fact of collaborative authorship (*Autobiographical* 2). Perhaps Holt recognized a similar tendency in the readers of the *Independent* at the turn of the century, a willingness to suspend judgment about the *individual* subject of autobiographical expression as long as the life story's content satisfied a certain threshold of authenticity and the first-person voice of the story "spoke" to them with a certain authority.

As their comments suggest, both Stone and Lejeune advocate critical approaches that recognize autobiography as not only as a literary genre but a form of "cultural narrative" (Stone, "Introduction"), not solely a private, contemplative art of personal recollection but a socially situated, culturally determined act. Approaching *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* in this way requires critical sensitivity not only to the motives of autobiographical subjects in seeking public expression of their life stories, but also to the desires of readers (prompting them to subscribe to the magazine, read the life stories, and, very often, respond to them with their own stories) and to the interests of magazine editors (prompting them to seek out the former and appeal to the latter, all the while attempting to express a coherent "picture of American life in all its strata"). The unusual uses of

autobiography and the shifting values of authorship and authenticity examined above are best understood, finally, not in the terms of traditional autobiographical criticism—as innovations of independent literary artists working in an autonomous literary genre—but rather as literary developments grounded in particular cultural settings, circumstances, and associations, those "cultures of letters" that connected writers and readers at the turn of the century (Brodhead 1-12).

## III

## Autobiography, Immediacy, and (Mass-)Mediation

A critical approach that seeks to ground the study of autobiography as a genre in the particular "cultures of letters" that supported its production and shaped its consumption must examine not only the *form* of autobiographical texts but also the *forum* in and through which those texts were presented to the public. As noted above, the prevailing literary and cultural forum at the turn of the century was the nationally circulated magazine, in many ways (as Howells suggested) a more significant force in the literary production and distribution of the day than books. As a "mass-medium" before that term came into common usage, magazines during this period expanded enormously in numbers, circulation, and variety, driven by reductions in the cost of paper and printing, advances in illustrating techniques, and, more than any other factor, the rise of advertising as the primary source of magazine revenue (Mott 4: 5, 20-24). With sometimes-drastic reductions in the price of weekly and monthly magazines, the market for magazines increased

exponentially, new periodicals emerging to satisfy the curiosities of every imaginable American reader from religious and philosophical devotees to cat- and dog-lovers, from architects who worked with brick to women interested in "Bicycle Fashions."[14] But the more significant periodicals of the age were those that envisioned their role as mediators not in the limited sense of conveying information between two parties but in the broadest sense of acting as "intermediary agents" in American culture: Such periodicals sought to effect societal reform by intervening between conflicting parties or points of view and promoting resolution, reconciliation, or compromise ("Mediate"; "Mediation"). Editors of "leading" magazines such as the *Independent* self-consciously located their periodicals not merely as a conduit between writers and readers, but as a mediating force in the American body politic, interceding between citizens and politicians and actively participating in the fray of societal reform and progress. Indeed, the concept of *mediation* and the corresponding notions of *mediacy* and *immediacy* provide a useful perspective not only on the cultural position of magazines such as the *Independent* but also on the cultural work of a series of autobiographical essays such as that initiated by the *Independent*.

First, the role of the magazine editor was inherently one of mediation, not only in providing a forum that might unite readers and writers but also in

[14] See Mott, vol. 4, esp. 276-305, 323, 379, and 382, for discussion of religious and philosophical magazines as well as such turn-of-the-century upstarts as *Dogdom* and *Cat Journal*, *Brickbuilder*, and *Bicycle Fashions*.

controlling what passed between the two parties. Richard Ohmann describes the mass-circulation magazine of the late-nineteenth century as "a gate-keeping medium," responsible for "admit[ting] ideas and feelings into the arena of the discussable" but always doing so within the limits established by the nature of their relationship to subscribers (151). Granted, the role of editors as genteel censors of a sort had, by the beginning of the twentieth century, largely given way to the new trends of sensationalized journalism and "muckraking" magazine reporting. However, the role of the magazine editor as a cultural mediator also took on new importance during this period as even the most distinguished magazines—including the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Century*, and *Scribner's*, magazines known for their aloofness from passing concerns of the moment—increasingly turned their attention to "timely" issues of contemporary relevance (Mott 4: 8-9). Lengthy, learned treatises were replaced during this period by articles on significant social issues and by symposia in which two or more writers would respond to a single pressing question (Mott 4:13-14), thereby increasing the responsibility of magazine editors to act as moderators if not mediators. The *Independent* in particular devoted itself to the publication of not only various points of view on important issues but also editorial commentary on those matters. In a 1908 essay, Hamilton Holt noted with pride that "In the 'Survey of the World' [the *Independent*'s section of unsigned news stories] we aim to present to the jury of our readers the evidence uncolored and unbiased; in our signed articles we let the plaintiffs and defendants argue the case, and in our editorials we assume the

omniscient air and deliver judgment" ("Our Contributors" 1429). Holt's telling courtroom metaphor elucidates the authoritative role assumed by the *Independent* as a judicial branch of the nation's social and cultural leadership, self-appointed but also "elected" by subscribers to mediate between the various contending parties and points of view in America.

By declaring their judgment on all of the pressing concerns of the nation, the *Independent* envisioned their mediating role in broad social and cultural terms. But the magazine's interest in autobiography as a form might also be interpreted in terms of mediation and, relatedly, in terms of a tension between "mediacy" and "immediacy." First, autobiography as conceived of in the manner of Holt and Hapgood might be said to mediate between groups defined by their differences: between, for example, middle-class readers and working-class subjects, "native" Americans and "new" immigrants, white Americans and ethnic or black Americans. Holt's interest in finding "representative" individuals from "the humbler classes," from a variety of occupations, and from "the five great races of mankind" to "typify" the lives of entire groups of people points to the presumed capacity of autobiography to mediate the experiences of many by way of the "genuine experience" of one ("Note" xxix). At the same time, as Holt's emphasis on "genuine" experience suggests, the form of autobiography appears to promise a certain *immediacy*—more direct, un-mediated access to the lives of these "other" Americans than either fiction or sociology can offer. (Thus the several reviews of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* that point out the vitality, freshness,

and charm of the stories by contrasting them with the overly conventional fiction and overly academic ethnographic studies of the day.) Autobiography, that is, seems to guarantee an "insider's voice," a voice unmediated by the intrusive presence of the novelist, the biographer, or the sociologist—those generally middle-class figures who represented much the same class and position as the average magazine reader, and thus would have been considered similarly removed from the real lives of marginalized Americans.

The autobiographical narratives published in the *Independent* also pose questions about mediation and immediacy that complicate any individual or collective reading of the stories. First, as examined above, the authorship of the life stories is mediated by peculiar conditions of composition and publication: The *Independent* compromises the notion of individual *authorship* in the name of projecting a certain *authority* in the life stories. At the same time, the magazine clearly succeeds on some level in the more fundamental sense of mediation, that of simply establishing a conduit between unknown or undistinguished Americans and their fellow citizens throughout the nation. As Werner Sollors asserts, the various expressions of selfhood in the life stories represent "*gestures of mediation* between the private self and the public realm, often made in the hope of achieving higher esteem for the speaker's past and improving his or her social lot" (xxviii; emphasis added). However compromised their "authorship," the subjects of the life stories are enabled by the medium of the magazine to communicate their stories and their lives, in some fashion, to the rest of the country. Though this access to print

carries with it certain limitations, it clearly also creates "conditions of possibility" that otherwise would not be available to undistinguished Americans.

Indeed, several of the life stories point to an awareness on the part of individual narrators of the opportunity as well as the responsibility to serve a mediating function of their own. Many of the stories, especially those by representatives of "undesirable" immigrant groups, can be read as efforts by the narrators to act as cultural interpreters for a predominantly white, middle-class American readership. Lee Chew, for example, the narrator of "The Life Story of a Chinaman," explains various Chinese and Chinese-American ways to his readers in order to dispel stereotypes or resentments about everything from the idea that the Chinese eat rats to the dress and social customs of Chinese in America (182). "The Life Story of a Syrian," likewise, in spite of the difficulties noted above, serves to illuminate "the distinctive life and its distinctive institutions" of Syrians in America, explaining to the rest of America, in a sense, the social significance of "the little Syrian city . . . established within the big city of New York" (157). At the same time, the story assuages the contemporary charge that many of the new immigrants maintained ties to their countries of origin that compromised their American-ness: As a newspaper editor and advocate for Syrian independence, the narrator's vocal celebration of American freedoms of speech and the press mediates to a certain extent his potentially threatening involvement in "foreign" politics.

However, if a number of narrators embrace the role of cultural mediator, many also use their life stories to indict America precisely for failing to live up to its democratic ideals, not only in its treatment of recent immigrants but in its blindness to the ill-treatment of the working classes, African Americans, and women. Thus, while Lee Chew's life story functions in part to bridge the gulf between native Americans and immigrant Chinese-Americans and to prove the value of Chinese labor, Chew also includes stinging commentary on American racism against the Chinese and concludes, "Under the circumstances, how can I call this my home, and how can any one blame me if I take my money and go back to my village in China?" (185). Mike Trudics, the "Hungarian Peon," tells a more tragic story of life in America as a series of reversals of his expectations, concluding his tale, like Chew, with powerful questions: "Shall I become a citizen? Why should I?" (207). While several of the stories by immigrants illustrate a relatively easy assimilation to American ways of life (and, often more to the point, ways of business), many others contain unmitigated anger, bitterness, and complaint against America.

It is noteworthy that much of the bitterness expressed by immigrant and other narrators of these life stories is targeted to ethnic groups other than the narrator's own. In this sense, the *Independent* series might also be said to mediate (though not, in this case, mitigate) the tensions *among* ethnic groups in America at the same time that it mediates the tensions between ethnic and "native" Americans.

Lee Chew's story once more provides a telling example. After answering several charges against the Chinese and refuting various stereotypes, Chew writes:

> Irish fill the almshouses and prisons and orphan asylums, Italians are among the most dangerous of men, Jews are unclean and ignorant. Yet they are all let in, while Chinese, who are sober, or duly law abiding, clean, educated and industrious, are shut out. (185)

In challenging American laws that prohibited Chinese immigration, Chew seeks to reverse one set of cultural stereotypes by invoking several others. Similarly, Charles Chesnutt, a well-educated African-American novelist and social critic (and, it might be noted, a strong supporter and occasional contributor to the *Independent*), expressed his own abhorrence of the inequities and inconsistencies of American race distinctions in a 1903 letter to Booker T. Washington:

> To my mind it is nothing less than an outrage that the very off-scourings of Europe, and even of Western Asia may pour into this Union almost by the millions annually, and be endued with full citizenship after a year or two of residence, while native-born [black] Americans . . . must be led around by the nose as members of a 'child race,' and be told that they must meekly and patiently await the result of an evolution which may last through several thousand years, before they can stand upon the same level of citizenship which any Sicilian, or Syrian or Turk or Greek or any other sort of European proletarian may enjoy in the State of Alabama. (195)

These disconcerting examples furnish important reminders of the extent of racial and ethnic hostility and alienation at the turn of the century, not only between whites and others but among various groups. They also point to the symbolic resonance of Holt's attempt to gather, serially and then in book form, representatives of "the five great races of mankind" in an effort to mediate the conflict that many saw at the heart of American society at the time. The effect of

Holt's undertaking, like the effect of many of the individual life stories, was to show America to itself: to reinforce the nation's sense of itself as a land of freedom and opportunity that welcomed new immigrants, yet at the same time to reveal the distinct lack of freedom or opportunity (or welcome) experienced by so many of America's marginalized citizens and immigrants.

It is interesting to note that the reviewers of Holt's collection, while almost universally pointing out the "human interest" of the stories, tend to focus on one or the other of these two themes. The reviewer for the New York *Evening Post*, for example, concludes that "The prevailing note of these tales is, indeed, a cheerful one," and Rebecca Harding Davis praises "this little unpretentious volume" as "the first effort to show in detail how the experiment [of American independence] has succeeded"; another reviewer, on the contrary, reads in the stories "a rather melancholy disallusion" of the idea that America represents "a sanctuary for the oppressed of all nations."[15] But what stands out in nearly all contemporary reviews of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* is the ease with which readers perceived the stories as commentaries on American society, whether positive or negative. In the terms suggested by Albert Stone, readers of the life stories engaged them as *both* "individual stories and cultural narratives" ("Introduction"), as vital stories of individual lives as well as important sources of sociological "data."

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[15] See "Humble Confessions," New York *Evening Post* (Holt, Scrapbook); Davis 460; "The Looker-On," Brooklyn *Life* (Holt, Scrapbook).

As cultural narratives, the stories (and especially those from "new" immigrants) offered crucial information about the real conditions of life of many unknown Americans, information required for the effective implementation of social reform. In the curious phrasing of a reviewer for the Dayton *Religious Telescope*, "information is the mother of interest and the grandmother of helpful activity" (Holt, Scrapbook). In this reading, the human "interest" of the stories is grounded in explicitly reformist concerns, and Holt's collection is praised specifically as a volume "calculated to do so much of Christian and patriotic good." As individual stories, on the other hand, the series of "lifelets" appealed to a desire on the part of readers for "human interest" of a different kind, unrelated to the broader social or sociological value of the stories. This interest might be said to reflect, in the elevated rhetoric of Edwin Slosson, a new "spirit of democracy, the discovery of the importance of the average man" (3); but more to the point, the life stories appealed to readers and reviewers for their "directness," "poignancy," "naïve charm"—that is, for representing individual lives genuinely and concretely. As "intensely simple, intensely vital and convincing" texts, the life stories seemed to offer a unique *immediacy*: "Between the reader and that rare and wonderful thing, the truth, there stands no intruder with a theory or a preachment," no "would-be interpreter of life."[16]

[16] See "Humble Folks"; Hackett.

As these two divergent readings of Holt's collection illustrate, one can speak not only of the uses of autobiography by writers at the turn of the century but also the uses that readers had for the genre: In this case, where one reviewer saw "sermons of real value for our people, rich in lessons" ("Transformation" 329), another celebrated the simple revelation of life without the overlay of a particular "preachment." These twin approaches to the life stories might also reveal something about the varied uses of autobiography recognized by the editors of the *Independent*. On the one hand, the magazine's life stories promised progressive reformers an especially direct sort of sociological data and, further, a series of first-person objections to many of the prevailing stereotypes of the day regarding the lives of the working classes and the "traits" of various new immigrant groups. On the other hand, these autobiographical texts appealed to readers as first-hand reports, in a sense, of life itself—"life" with no interpretation offered, "the truth" with no intermediating theory. To these readers, the fact that these stories were both "genuine autobiographies" and the expressions of "humble folks" seemed to guarantee a proximity to the sources of life—not life merely "realistically" portrayed, that is, but *real life*. If the former approach to the life stories might be grounded in the growing concern at the turn of the century over broad social questions about the constitution of the American body politic, this latter reading might be said to reflect a more fundamental concern that the meaning and significance of life itself were becoming increasingly elusive. At a

time when, as T. J. Jackson Lears writes, "both physical and moral life began to seem suffocating in their ease, weightless in their lack of significance" (45), access to "real life" seemed to many Americans increasingly mediated by the overlay of middle-class convention. Stories of unignorably "real" lives narrated in a direct, seemingly unmediated fashion would have held, for such Americans, an inherent appeal.

The expectation that a certain immediacy of experience might be found in autobiography—and in the autobiographies of unknown figures in particular, who, having no *public* life to speak of, would presumably be left with only the *private* life to write of—resonates in some of the contemporary commentary on the genre. Howells, for example, after issuing his invitation to "any hesitating autobiographer" to enter "this most democratic province of the republic of letters," goes on to speculate on what such a humble autobiographer might accomplish:

> For once we should like to have such an autobiographer wreak himself upon the very truth, and we should not join any detective force in compelling him to put off his mask, if he should choose to remain anonymous . . . . His book would not be one that could be put into all hands, and we should not desire general circulation for it; but for the student of man, in and out of one's self, it would be a manual such as has never yet been supplied. (798)

Howells expresses what might be called a dream of complete self-exposure, a desire to see the "very truth" so freely expressed that it would require (ironically) that the author's name remain hidden and that the text be kept from "general circulation." Howells, the early champion of realism in America sometimes accused of a facile and outmoded gentility, here playfully imagines what *true*

(even scandalous) autobiographical realism might provide: a lesson in life so vivid and revealing that it would satisfy the most basic quest, answer the most fundamental questions, of the "student of man" and the student of self. Howells's suggestion that the author of such a "manual" of life might be "some entirely unknown person" and might remain anonymous, and his advice to such an autobiographer to aspire to "brevity" as well, may illuminate the underlying desires of those who sought in *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* "that rare and wonderful thing, the truth."

This fascination with discovering the truth of human life beneath the concealments of convention similarly inspires an intriguing series that began in the June 1893 inaugural issue of *McClure's Magazine*, the periodical that would go on to become a central player in the muckraking era. Entitled "Human Documents," this popular feature printed several portraits of a few famous individuals (Howells was among those featured in the first issue), taken at various points in their lives, with the intention of chronicling the progression of a life in pictures. Sarah Orne Jewett, in the essay that introduced the series, explains its appeal this way: "To give to the world a collection of the successive portraits of a man is to tell his affairs openly, and so betray intimate personalities" (16). Jewett goes on to defend the reader's interest in such "intimate" information by distinguishing between the indecorous "curiosity" that fuels the "public press" and a "noble" and "honest interest" in other lives, the latter deriving, according to Jewett, largely from the

autobiographical desire to understand one's own "former selves" (16-17). Finally, Jewett catalogues all that might be read "in any Human Document":

> . . . the look of race, the look of family, the look that is set like a seal by a man's occupation, the look of the spirit's free or hindered life, and success or failure—they are all plain to see. If we could read one human face aright, the history not only of the man, but of humanity itself, is written there. (18)

Here Jewett sounds the same note that Howells would voice several years later, the dream of transparency, of seeing through to the very depths of human life. In this case, of course, the "lines" that tell a life story are the lines of the face, the language of the "text" is "the sign-language of faces"—but as Jewett contends, "Who cannot read faces?" (17). Where Howells imagined one complete autobiography, written with nothing concealed, Jewett posits "one human face," read "aright." In each case, the dream of unmediated access to the truth of life, of finding "the look of the spirit's free or hindered life . . . plain to see," simultaneously points to the elusiveness of such knowledge: Jewett's imaginary insight falls to the conditional in her final sentence ("*If* we could read . . ."), while Howells cedes that a "perfectly candid and complete autobiography" is "very likely . . . impossible of realization" (798). But the popularity of the "Human Documents" series in *McClure's*, the "Life Stories" series in the *Independent*, and autobiography in general during this period suggests that the desire to discover the truth of human life, *unmediated* and *documented*, inspired both writers and readers at the turn of the century.

It is worth noting, in this light, that several reviewers of Holt's collection of life stories agreed (in the words of one) that "These are surely 'human documents' in the real sense of that term, and they have the fascination of such documents."[17] Just what "the real sense" of this curious phrase might have amounted to in 1906 is difficult to recover fully, but its popular usage may very well stem from the series inaugurated thirteen years earlier in *McClure's*.[18] As that series suggests, "documents" need not refer to written texts: If a series of portraits can qualify as a "human document," then perhaps the New York *Times*'s reviewer may have wished to point to the textual quality of the life stories by distinguishing them as human documents "in the real sense of that term." But of course the phrase is figurative, not literal, in any sense: A text can be no more "human" than a series of photographs. The resonance of the phrase appears to be grounded, rather, in the idea of *documentation*, a newly emergent term at the end of the nineteenth century

[17] See "Humble Folks." Other reviews that refer to the life stories as "human documents" can be found in the Brooklyn *Life*, Brooklyn *Times*, New York *Democrat*, and one unidentified periodical (Holt, Scrapbook).

[18] The Oxford English Dictionary gives 1892 as the earliest recorded use of the collocation "human document," 1896 (in *Badminton Magazine*!) as the next ("Human"), overlooking its prominent and regular use in *McClure's* beginning in June 1893 and at least one earlier American use in the *Critic* of January 1891: "The scientific spirit of the age has popularized the love of accurate description, of 'human documents'" (qtd. in Mott 4: 110). Jewett, in her introduction to the *McClure's* series, credits novelist and poet Alphonse Daudet as the author of the phrase (17). As implied by its repeated use in reviews of *Life Stories*, the phrase was in common use at the turn of the century; by 1931, a writer for *American Speech* could include "human document" (with tongue in cheek) among a list of frequently used commendatory phrases in "The Book Reviewer's Vocabulary" (Clough 181).

corresponding to the rise of Realism as a literary and artistic movement.[19] In this sense, the *Independent*'s life stories represent "human documents" insofar as they faithfully *document*—offer evidence, explain, prove—that which is constitutive of human life, in contrast to the merely natural or mechanical ("Document"; "Human"). The phrase captures in miniature the two approaches to the life stories outlined above, what might be termed the sociological and the humanistic. More broadly, it highlights two dominant strains of thought in turn-of-the-century America: on the one hand, the scientific drive of the age to document not only the natural world but also the human world, both sociologically and psychologically; and on the other hand, the wavering and waning of confidence in human understanding and the old ways of knowing and living. In the context of both broad cultural inclinations, at least some readers looked to the autobiographies of unknown, "undistinguished" individuals to discover the "truth" of human life, to find "real life" documented.

The considerable appeal of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*, then, might be said to derive (as Jewett would have it) from "an honest interest" in other lives "which is as noble a thing as curiosity is contemptible" (16). Both

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[19] The Oxford English Dictionary dates the use of *documentation* to refer to faithful reproduction of historical and objective facts (as in realistic fiction) to 1888, citing an example from the *Athenæum* that links the term to the realist movement: "Is art simply an affair of documentation, as the phrase of the day goes?" ("Documentation"). The use of the term *documentary* (and related terms) to refer to a work of literature, photography or film did not emerge until several decades later, with the development of documentary recording (and a corresponding methodology) during the 1930s and 1940s.

Slosson and Rebecca Harding Davis concur that the collection of life stories "means something higher" than the mere "gratification of the curiosity . . ." (Davis 459; cf. Slosson 5). In fact, however, both honest interest and corrupt curiosity clearly contributed to the appeal of the autobiographical "lifelets" produced by the *Independent* and consumed by its readers. The magazine's editors capitalized on precisely the type of voyeuristic curiosity about "how the other half lives" that Jewett and Davis disdained, and at times they "mediated" in a calculated way the purported immediacy of individual life stories. The headnote to "The Life Story of a Japanese Servant," for example, begins this way:

> Those who have wondered what was behind the uniform politeness and unreadable face of a Japanese servant will be interested in this very frank confession of one, whose preconceived ideal of America as a land of opportunity and equality has been disproved by his experience here. (159)

Such a prefatory note seeks to confirm that the subject of the story is an "authentic" spokesman for "Japanese servants" as a group but does so by reinforcing stereotypical notions about Japanese immigrants as "uniformly" polite and, more pointedly, as "unreadable." The story of the Japanese servant is presented by the *Independent*, that is, to appeal not simply to a "noble" human interest but also to the curiosities of readers about what lies "behind" the polite face of such a servant ("Those who have wondered . . ."). Recalling Jewett's rhetorical query, "Who cannot read faces?," the lighthearted description of the Japanese immigrant's "unreadable face" serves as a corroboration of the

impenetrable and unintelligible nature of his "type" and unsettles the high-minded reception of his story as one of many "human documents."

What this and other examples illustrate is a certain blindness—or, perhaps, a simple lack of "interest"—in the actual *selves* at the heart of these life stories. Caught between the broad sociological significance and the equally broad human interest of the stories, that is, are the various undistinguished individuals whose lives provide the material for these texts. As a result, the life stories must be read as autobiographical texts of a unique but also limited sort—compelling for what they reveal about the conditions of life and of literature at the turn of the century, but compromised in significant ways by the assumptions of magazine editors and of the readers for whom the stories were produced. In much the same way that the early slave narratives were edited to satisfy the interests of readers about the conditions of slavery rather than the unique identity of the individual narrator,[20] the life stories were "procured" by the *Independent*'s editors with the needs and desires of their subscribers in mind, not the desires—for self-expression, for conventional authorship, for truth-telling—of the undistinguished subjects themselves. Though the magazine invited representatives of underrepresented groups into what Howells termed "this most democratic province of the republic of letters," that access did not guarantee those individuals free expression or the

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[20] William Andrews develops this argument at the beginning of his foundational study of slave narratives, *To Tell A Free Story* (6). See Chapter Two, below, for further discussion of this connection between antebellum slave narrative and African-American autobiography at the turn of the century.

reception they desired, just as life in America did not guarantee (in the words of one Lithuanian immigrant) "life, liberty, and the getting of happiness" (10).

## *Chapter Two*

# Answering the Unasked Question: African-American Autobiographical Expression at the Turn of the Century

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it . . . . How does it feel to be a problem?
>
> —W. E. B. Du Bois

With these words, first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897 and reprinted in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W. E. B. Du Bois limned the lived reality of the "Negro problem" in America at the turn of the century, a problem that divided not only the two "worlds" of the "nation" and the "Negro people" but also, and more pointedly, individual white and black Americans ("Strivings" 194-95). Throughout his essay in the *Atlantic*, Du Bois powerfully merges the third-person objective voice of the sociologist and historian, invoked to document the literal, physical "strivings of the Negro people" over three decades since Emancipation, and the first-person subjective voice of the autobiographer, invoked to document his own psychological strivings. Du Bois continually modulates his editorial point of view, shifting freely from "me" to "he" to "one," "they," and "we," a range that allows him to speak of the "strivings" of an entire "people" even

as he recalls his own "early days of rollicking boyhood" and the moment when the "revelation" of the color line first swept over him in a New England schoolhouse (194). By reckoning the "Negro problem" as not merely a sociological or historical problem but also a profoundly psychological one, and by defining his people's quest for freedom less in material terms than in terms of the "strange experience" and "peculiar sensation" of being "both a Negro and an American," Du Bois joins a long tradition of African-American response to the "unasked question" of white America (194). For many of those respondents, the genre of autobiography in particular has proved a compelling form for answering that question and, at the same time, for making broader social and individual claims. African-Americans have found in autobiography—in the stories told and in the telling itself, in the content as well as the form—a way to express the freedom of individual agency and to assert that "true self-consciousness" consistently denied to them "in this American world" (*Souls* 5).

As a result, autobiography "holds a position of priority," as William Andrews contends, "indeed many would say preeminence, among the narrative traditions of black America" (Introduction 1). Critical attention to the tradition of African-American autobiographical expression, however, has until recently focused on two significant subsets of that tradition by granting primary importance to the slave narrative and secondary consideration to the profusion of twentieth-century autobiographies by African-Americans. Of the period between the end of the Civil War and the Great Depression, Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*

holds a certain priority as the towering representative example of the autobiographical writing that emerged after emancipation to take the place of the antebellum slave narrative. But as Andrews has noted repeatedly, autobiographical writing flourished throughout this "vast middle period," representing a wide range of experiences and outlooks among African-American teachers and ministers, institutional figures, women, and working-class individuals.[1] "Black autobiography of this era," Andrews concluded in 1986, "remains another country to most of us" ("Forgotten" 21).

In the decade since that pronouncement, critics responding to Andrews's call have begun to investigate and map that other country of African-American literary expression at the turn of the century. Joanne M. Braxton published *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition* in 1989, setting the stage for further attention to this period by tracing "common themes and archetypal figures" through a variety of autobiographical texts by African-American women (17). Frances Smith Foster, who had already written briefly on "Post-bellum Influence" in her 1979 study of antebellum slave narratives (*Witnessing Slavery* 142-54), extended the range of her subject to the end of the nineteenth century in *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892*. But this work of reclamation and examination has largely

[1] Andrews, Introduction 5; "Forgotten Voices" (22, 26). On the variety and range of autobiographical writing during this "vast middle period in the history of African American autobiography," see also Andrews, "Representation"; Andrews, "Toward" 82; and Foster and Yarborough, 468-69.

been limited to single, full-length autobiographies. Following a trend common to literary critics generally and critics of autobiography in particular, Andrews and others have focused their analyses on separately published, full-length texts from this period, texts that support sustained literary analysis in part because they are sustained textual performances. In doing so, critics have largely overlooked those texts that had a more ephemeral existence—though not necessarily a more limited circulation—in the public sphere of the turn of the century.[2]

In the introduction to her study of black women's autobiography, Joanne Braxton posits a useful corrective to an overemphasis on textuality by African-American critics, urging critical attention to the "unwritten [oral] literature" that inspires and "informs written literature on many levels" (5). In the same spirit, one might also call attention to that range of writing that exists between, as it were, the poles of oral expression and formal, full-length texts. What place, for example, might sermons, speeches, song lyrics, and folk-tales hold in a critical examination of African-American literature? And in an analysis of African-American autobiography in particular, what place ought to be accorded to the vast range of

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[2] In the final sentence of his essay on "Forgotten Voices of Afro-American Autobiography," notably, Andrews suggests that the full-length texts he has considered need to be studied in their "interaction with other groups of black memoirists between 1865 and 1930" such as "black women and black working-class people" (26). In a similar vein, Foster, in her "Introduction to the Second Edition" of *Witnessing Slavery*, acknowledges that her initial "choice to focus on separately published and relatively straightforward texts effectively excluded virtually all the narratives written by women" (xxii). The extent to which other autobiographical voices have been similarly excluded from critical consideration largely remains to be discovered.

autobiographical expression that appeared in the guise of printed sermons or speeches or songs as well as in the pages of the periodical press? Not unlike antebellum slave narratives, which were published not only as separate texts but also in "newspapers, magazines, anthologies, court records, church documents, and state and federal reports" (Foster, *Witnessing* ix), postbellum autobiographical writing by African-Americans appeared in a wide variety of forms and forums. Much of this material, to be sure, remains hidden from critical view, difficult not only to locate but also to classify neatly within the critical categories and conventions of past scholarship. But as Andrews remarks in his call for a new "Poetics of Afro-American Autobiography," "we need to take an inclusive approach to the study of Afro-American autobiography[,] . . . to put in abeyance our normal expectations about what should and should not happen in a text or between a text and its reader" (88). If critics of African-American autobiography have, in the past, "theorized about the function of black autobiography as marginal to white autobiography," the "knottier problem" of identifying and reading the marginal *within* the African-American tradition remains largely unsolved (84).

Approaching African-American autobiographical writing at the turn of the century through the framework suggested by Andrews requires an awareness of the different kinds of autobiographical texts that appeared in print and the conditions of publication that enabled the circulation of those texts to a wide range of American readers. Attention to both the forms and the forums in and through which African-American autobiographical writing appeared at the turn of the

century is necessary to yield a dynamic sense of the "actual autobiographical practice" of the period (Eakin 14). This understanding should, in turn, include not only the range of motives that inspired writers of personal narratives and the ways in which those narratives appealed to (or appalled) readers of the day, but also the significant role played by the periodicals and editors that mediated between the two parties. To borrow Du Bois's phrasing, between every aspiring autobiographer and that "other world" of his or her audience there was not only an "unasked question" but also a medium of communication that enabled and mediated the ways in which that question might be answered. A close examination of one such medium—the New York *Independent*—and of the forms of self-expression that it sponsored offers a compelling illustration of the intersections of African-American autobiographical expression and the "Negro problem" in turn-of-the-century America.

## I

## The *Independent*, the Race Question, and "the Negro Point of View"

As if to announce anew each week its lofty aspirations as a cultural mediator, the New York *Independent* opened each issue at the turn of the century with a news column entitled "Survey of the World." Given its self-proclaimed international scope, the American "Negro problem" could occupy only a small part of the magazine's coverage; however, as a magazine established in 1848 in part to express opposition to slavery, and nearly brought down a few years later by its

advocacy of armed resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act (Mott 2: 368-69), the *Independent* at the turn of the century had a long tradition behind it of comment on America's race questions. Furthermore, as a periodical dedicated to printing various points of view on the pressing questions of the day, allowing the figurative "plaintiffs and defendants" of a given debate to present opposing arguments, the *Independent* differed both from partisan newspapers and magazines and from the popular periodicals that feared to take a stand on any controversial topic (Holt, "Our Contributors" 1429). As a result, the magazine represents better than most of its contemporaries the range of "informed" opinion on the nation's "race questions." Finally, because managing editor Hamilton Holt actively sought out short autobiographical essays for the magazine during the first decade of the twentieth century, including many by African-American individuals, the *Independent* represents a useful starting-point for an investigation of African-American autobiographical expression within the context of America's struggle to comprehend and resolve its intractable "Negro problem."

Of course, this singular "problem," like the more generic "race question," was in fact made up of a plurality of contentious social issues including suffrage, education, and crime. The progressive *Independent* addressed these issues at the turn of the century in occasional essays, editorials, and news columns, often in response to current events or to provocative articles in other magazines. In 1889, for example, an essay in the *Forum* on "Race Antagonism in the South," written by a Senator from Louisiana, prompted the *Independent*'s editors to publish first a

response, then an entire symposium on the question, "Shall the Negro Be Educated or Suppressed?" The respondents universally approved the former course of action but also agreed more broadly on two points, summarized in novelist George W. Cable's response: First, "that it is folly for the South and shame for the North to call the negro question less than national"; and second, that "the difficulties of the problem demand that it be subjected to the most careful, dispassionate, studious discussion, a discussion purged of personalities, partisan rallying cries and unauthenticated conjectures and recriminations, especially a *progressive* discussion" (225; emphasis in original). Such discussion, Cable goes on to suggest, will be carried on primarily in the nation's magazines, forums not only more "literary" but also more "dispassionate" than those "devoted primarily to news" (225)—forums, that is, such as the *Independent* itself.

In the two decades following Cable's pronouncement, the *Independent* in fact pursued such a course, seeking to "bring into the clear light and air of a calm, friendly and faithful national literary debate" the issue of the civil, social, and political rights of all African-Americans (Cable 225).[3] The magazine frequently

[3] One especially notable example of the *Independent*'s engagement with issues of civil rights is an article that appeared following a riot in Springfield, Illinois in August 1908. William English Walling's "Race War in the North" (3 Sept. 1908) inspired a meeting of concerned American citizens, white and black, on the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, a meeting which led directly to the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. William H. Ward, editor of the *Independent*, and Hamilton Holt, managing editor, both participated in the initial meeting along with Du Bois, William Dean Howells, Jane Addams, and many other leading figures of the time. Rayford W. Logan suggests that, in light of its eventual

spoke out against the denial of suffrage to African-American voters in the South, against inequities in public education for black and white children, and against the horrific incidents of lynching in both the South and the North that peaked in the 1890s. However, much of the *Independent*'s commentary on these issues shared the common premise, implicit in the 1889 symposium, that the "race question" would be answered by the combined efforts of the nation's intelligent, sympathetic, white men. An editorial on "The Psychology of the Race Question," for example, after contrasting the psychology of Southern "Feeling" with Northern "Reason," concludes that "the hope of the negro lies in the growth of . . . feelings of humanity" that are "consistent with the conclusions of abstract reason" and thus agreeable to both the white North and the white South (1939-40). The author of "Solving the Race Questions," meanwhile, views the issue of race conflict from the detached perspective of a theory of "universal evolution" and the "development of mankind from the earliest days" (1994). Notably, however, the latter editorial concludes with a return to hard and fast material realities:

> It is time for both North and South, with mature purpose and sound judgment, to co-operate man-fashion in the great work of making the negro race not merely an endurable but even a highly useful element in our great industrial population. (1994-95)

Clearly, in thus proposing the terms on which "the negro race" might become part of the nation's social, political, and (especially) economic life, the responsibility

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impact, Walling's brief but contentious essay in the *Independent* "must be counted as one of the more important articles in the history of American magazines" (352).

for "*making* the negro race" into a "useful element" of the American population rests entirely with those already assured of their own place in that national life: No consideration is given to the point of view of the individuals who collectively represent the "problem" under discussion.

In light of the *Independent*'s stated intentions of opening its columns to a variety of viewpoints, however, it is noteworthy that several African-American individuals did in fact contribute to the magazine's ongoing discussion of the race question. In 1889, for example, several months after the symposium on Negro education, the *Independent* published Charles W. Chesnutt's first essay, a thoroughly provocative discussion of the question, "What Is A White Man?" Though the editors did not identify Chesnutt as a person of mixed race, the article clearly differs from others in the magazine in its sharp analysis of the ironies and paradoxes of American public opinion and laws opposing racial intermingling: Chesnutt suggests, for example, that "the purity of the white race" might be "as well preserved by the exercise of virtue, and the operation of those natural laws which are so often quoted by Southern writers as the justification of all sorts of Southern 'policies'" (6). Similar expressions of an alternate point of view on the race question appear with greater frequency in the *Independent* at the turn of the century, in essays such as Ida B. Wells Barnett's "The Negro's Case in Equity." Like Chesnutt, Wells Barnett challenges white Americans not merely to take responsibility for the solution of the race question but also to admit responsibility

for the problem itself. At the same time, she charges the nation's media establishment with refusing to hear the voices of the negro in their own defense: "The columns of the powerful dailies, religious periodicals and thoughtful magazines have printed these charges [against the negro] wholesale until the civilized world has accepted them, but few wish to consider the refutation of them or give space for the possible other side" (1010). Expressions of that "other side"—"the thought of the things themselves," in Du Bois's biting phrase—increasingly found a place in national magazines at the turn of the century, answering a growing national interest in the point of view of individuals whose first-hand experience of the race question went far beyond the limited knowledge of the white editorialist ("Of the Training" 289).

The *Independent* was not alone in responding to that interest among readers by welcoming the contributions of African-American commentators. The *North American Review*, for example, one month after printing Thomas Nelson Page's essay, "The Lynching of Negroes: Its Cause and Its Prevention," allowed Mary Church Terrell to respond with "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View."[4] But such access to publication was never guaranteed. When *McClure's Magazine* published a series of three similar essays by Page, Du Bois wrote S. S. McClure to express his dismay that "a magazine which has stood so clearly for the problem as McClure's (sic) has hitherto" would "lower itself to the small narrow anti-Negro

[4] See Logan 382, 428n35-36. Logan notes that Page's essay "suggested emasculation of the Negro as an ultimate means of preventing lynching" (428n30).

propaganda of Thomas Nelson Page" (*Correspondence* 128). Du Bois continued, ". . . will you not permit the other side to be heard? Will you not let me write you an article on Social Equality from the Negro point of view—a perfectly frank article?" (128). Notably, though Du Bois eventually submitted such an article, the magazine rejected it—perhaps finding it *too* "perfectly frank," even for one of the most vigilant and outspoken of muckraking periodicals (128).

An early incident in the literary career of Charles Chesnutt illustrates a similar combination of fascination with and fear of "the Negro point of view" influencing the editors of leading American magazines at the turn of the century. In 1889, Chesnutt sent an essay he had composed "on the Negro question" to George W. Cable, a nationally recognized writer of fiction and nonfiction on the race question and a recent acquaintance of Chesnutt's. In his response, Cable praised Chesnutt for writing "a noble essay," volunteered his assistance in placing the article with a national magazine, and suggested that Chesnutt "call it 'The Negro's View of the Negro Question'" (Chesnutt, *"To Be an Author"* 29, 31n1). In spite of Cable's repeated efforts, however, Chesnutt's article (eventually titled "The Negro's Answer to the Negro Question") never appeared in print: The editor of the *Forum* responded with praise for the article but noted that he had just recently "secured a paper from a Negro" (33n1); Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the *Century*, wrote to Cable that "Mr. Chesnutt's . . . is a timely political paper—so timely & so political—in fact so partisan—that we cannot handle it. It should appear at once somewhere" (38n1); and, finally, the *North American Review*, after

keeping the essay "an unconscionably long time," in Chesnutt's words, returned it to him "with the usual polite regrets" (40). Chesnutt—who had written to Cable in February of 1889 expressing optimism that "the Negro question . . . will become a more and more prominent subject of discussion"—wrote again in May to express his "fear" that "the public, as represented by the editors of the leading magazines, is not absolutely yearning for an opportunity to read the utterances of obscure colored writers upon the subject of the Negro's rights; a little of it I suspect goes a long way" (31, 40).

The tone of Chesnutt's comment, at once bitterly ironic and candidly disappointed, suggests a growing awareness on his part that writing from the "Negro point of view" appealed to the nation's desire for stories of "human interest" more than its devotion to human rights. Whether both ends might be pursued simultaneously—whether writing could satisfy the appetite of white readers for stories of feeling and humanity while urging those same readers to reconsider their racial prejudices and preconceptions—represents a fundamental question behind the work of many African-American writers at the turn of the century, including the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, the nonfiction of Du Bois and Washington, and the fiction of Chesnutt and Pauline Hopkins. In her preface to *Contending Forces*, for example, Hopkins optimistically declares that "it is the simple, homely tale, unassumingly told, which cements the bond of brotherhood among all classes and all complexions" (13). Chesnutt, likewise, writing in his personal journal in 1880 at the age of twenty-two, already felt certain that it was

"the province of literature to open the way" for the negro seeking "social recognition and equality," to "accustom the public mind to the idea; and while amusing them to lead them on imperceptibly, unconsciously step by step to the desired state of feeling" (*Journals* 140). But finding an audience at the turn of the century for even a "simple, homely tale, unassumingly told" seemed to require that claims for social recognition and equality remain muted, understated, mediated to fit the preconceptions of most white Americans at the time.

Such was certainly true of the most spectacularly successful text by an African-American writer at the turn of the century, Washington's *Up from Slavery*, a text praised widely for being "unassuming" in both its style and its political substance. William Dean Howells, for example, reviewing *Up from Slavery* in the *North American Review*, praised Washington for "the smiling good humor" and the "constant common sense" with which he narrates his life story, a story "told . . . so simply and charmingly that one could not add to or take from it without marring it" ("Exemplary" 288, 283, 282). The reviewer for the *Nation*, likewise, noted Washington's "simple and direct" style, his "keen" humor, and his "scant attention to race problems" (Rev. of *Up from Slavery* 281). Such simplicity and charm, one might deduce from the positive reviews and the overwhelmingly sales of *Up from Slavery*, was deeply satisfying to those American readers who were interested in the "Negro point of view" but uncomfortable with frank or explicit "attention to race problems."

In fact, Lyman Abbott, who offered to publish a serialized autobiography in *The Outlook* magazine if Washington could find time to compose it, approached the project in just such a light. Writing to encourage Washington to provide detailed description of his "boyhood life in slave days" and during Reconstruction, Abbott noted that the latter period

> is generally looked upon wholly from the white man's point of view, sometimes the Southern white man's, sometimes the Northern white man's. How did it seem then to the Negroes, how does it seem now to one who has the interest of his race at heart and sympathizes with their point of view? (qtd. in Washington 159)

In another letter, Abbott made explicit the appeal of presenting that point of view in the form of an autobiography, suggesting that "in no better way" might Washington's "constituency be enlarged": "Writing as you would necessarily do in an anecdotal and reminiscent mood, your articles would be read by a great many who are not greatly interested in the problem as a problem, and whose interest would be awakened by such a story as you could tell . . ." (qtd. in Washington 157). That Washington's autobiography did in fact awaken interest and widen his "constituency" among white Americans is indisputable: Within a year of the appearance of *Up from Slavery*, to cite just one example, Theodore Roosevelt invited Washington to the White House and solicited his thoughts on the South and the race question (Harlan 3-6). But Abbott's two letters also point to, in effect, two divergent definitions of *interest*—first, the "interest of his race" that Washington is presumed to have "at heart"; and second, the "interest" of his white readers that must be "awakened" by presenting the picturesque details of his early

life (159). These two distinct uses of interest are closely connected, in turn, to two equally distinct ways of reckoning *point of view*: One, an inherently political definition of point of view as an individual's perspective or position *on* a disputed question; the other, an inherently personal, subjective notion of point of view, perhaps best exemplified by the first-person narrative voice of autobiography.

These are the twin notions of interest and point of view that African-American writers struggled to bring together at the turn of the century, the two notions so profoundly captured in Du Bois's attempt to answer the question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" In his efforts to yoke solidly intellectual commentary on the race question with deeply personal reflection on his own "strange experience" of being "both a Negro and an American," Du Bois insists that his autobiographical point of view not be isolated from his social or political point of view. And he insists, likewise, that the most profound "interests" of African-Americans can and must appeal to the deepest "human interest" of white Americans:

> Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depths of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. ("Of the Training" 297)

Into the contentious debate about the race question in magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Independent*, Du Bois proposes a new and profound sense of what the "Negro point of view" might give to America. His proposition is grounded in a vision of the unity of "all human hearts" that is fundamentally

opposed to the base materialistic interests of those concerned with "making the negro race . . . a highly useful element in our great industrial population."

It is noteworthy that Du Bois contributed at least a dozen articles to the *Independent* during the first decade of the twentieth century, including not only scholarly commentaries on crime, suffrage, and education but also two of his most powerful and impassioned writings: "Credo," a profession of public and personal faith that was reproduced and circulated widely after its publication; and "A Litany of Atlanta," a prayer expressing bewilderment, despair, and condemnation in the wake of a "massacre" of African-American citizens in that city.[5] It is equally noteworthy, however, that during the same period the *Independent* also began publishing short autobiographical essays by African-American individuals with none of Du Bois's reputation or recognition. The titles of some of these brief essays—"The Race Problem—An Autobiography"; "The Negro Problem: How It Appeals to a Southern Colored Woman"; and "The New Slavery in the South—An Autobiography"—point to a provocative merging of individual and social interests, a curious blending of personal and political commentary. Like Du Bois's best writings, these essays bring together autobiographical expression and the idea of a

[5] Du Bois's "A Litany of Atlanta" appeared in *Independent* 61 (11 Oct. 1906): 856-58; the magazine also covered the events in "The Atlanta Massacre," 61 (4 Oct. 1906): 799-800, written by an unnamed "educated negro" of the city. Du Bois's "Credo" was published in *Independent* 57 (6 Oct. 1904): 787 and, as Herbert Aptheker documents, was widely reprinted both in other periodicals and on cards and posters suitable for framing (Du Bois, *Correspondence* 82). As a result, the brief essay "had a great impact upon both the white and the Afro-American worlds" (78n2),

"Negro point of view" on the race question in intriguing and illuminating ways. While some of the essays slight the autobiographical element for the editorial, and others reveal limitations of the forum of periodical publishing at the turn of the century, together these narratives illuminate the ways in which African-American individuals seized opportunities to express both "true self-consciousness" and "new points of view" through autobiographical narratives on the race question.

## II

## Sanctioned to "Speak with Authority": Two Narratives of Neo-Slavery

At the end of his review of Washington's *Up from Slavery*, Howells remarks that, while "it is not well to forget slavery," "it is not well to forget that slavery is gone, and that the subjection of the negro race which has followed it does not imply its horrors" (288). To be sure, Howells's comment is rooted in what might be called an "eventualist" position on the negro problem, an assurance that the problem was, in his view, "slowly but surely modifying itself" (288). But as William Andrews has noted, most African-American autobiographers at the turn of the century were similarly interested in putting slavery behind them, eager to convince white readers that the slave past should not be viewed as a sign of degeneracy or shame but as a "school" through which the race had passed and from which it had emerged stronger and better prepared to make a contribution to

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a fact suggestive of the sort of broad "circulation" enabled by a magazine such as the *Independent*.

American economic life ("Representation" 77, 83). Exemplifying this power of positive thinking, Washington even "entertain[s] the idea" in *Up from Slavery* that "the black man got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did," having emerged from bondage with certain marketable skills and neither "ashamed" nor "unwilling" to work (14). Many of Washington's contemporaries, however, questioned whether the essential dynamics of the slave system had not been preserved, or at least restored, in spite of the nation's granting of freedom and citizenship to all African-Americans. For instance, in marked contrast to the optimistic invocation of slavery as a "school" in autobiographies by Washington and others, two autobiographical narratives in the *Independent* use the same trope to describe conditions of life hardly distinguishable from actual bondage. How that trope functions within the narratives of these two anonymous individuals points to the continuing resonance at the turn of the century of the "horrors" of American slavery, even as those narratives highlight new ways in which the form of autobiography and the forum of periodical publishing offered African-American individuals access to a powerful means of public expression.

The first of these narratives of neo-slavery appeared in February 1904, "dictated" by "a Georgia Negro Peon" to "a representative of THE INDEPENDENT specially commissioned for this work" ("The New Slavery" 409). Like many antebellum slave narratives, this story begins with an explanation of why the narrator *cannot* begin with the primary biographical details of his life, such as his father's name and his date of birth, because both are unknown to him. His account

of childhood commences instead with his memories of a time soon after the end of the Civil War and the death of his mother when he was left to the care of his uncle. The narrator's first lesson in the economic realities of the post-emancipation South comes when, tired of his uncle "drawing" all of his wages, he "made a break for liberty" by hiring himself to a white man on a neighboring plantation (409). When the first plantation owner, "Captain _____," arrives with "some kind of officer of the law," the narrator learns that he is not free to make such economic arrangements on his own: Asserting that "He belongs to me until he is twenty-one, and I'm going to make him know his place," the Captain returns the narrator to his plantation and gives him "thirty lashes with a buggy whip" (409).

This opening recollection of hopes dashed and the status quo restored sets a pattern for the rest of the narrator's story, in which every effort to make "a break for liberty" is thwarted by the superior position and power of white men who have the additional resource of "some kind of officer of the law." After the narrator completes his term of indenture at twenty-one, he marries another of the Captain's servants and willingly agrees to contract with the Captain annually for lodging and wages. But after the Captain's death, his son, "the Senator," turns the plantation into a camp for convicts—black prisoners "leased" to him by the state to be used as farm laborers (410). Soon it becomes clear to the "free laborers" on the plantation that very little separates them from the convicts. Because the power of interpreting and administering the "contracts" that they had signed rests entirely with whites, who controlled "all the courts, all the guns, all the hounds, all the

railroads, all the telegraph wires, all the newspapers, all the money, and nearly all the land," the narrator and his fellow free laborers have little recourse but to "shut [their] mouths, say nothing, and go back to work" (411). "In other words," the narrator concludes, "we had sold ourselves into slavery" (411).

The narrator eventually becomes a peon himself, forced to work for an additional three years to repay a debt contrived by the Senator. By the time he leaves the plantation he has lost both his son, who had been "given away" to a neighboring family, and his wife, who "was living in fairly good shape" after giving birth to two children "by some one of the white bosses" (412). Like so many slave narratives, this brief life story indicts the white society that allowed the narrator's virtual enslavement as well as its attendant abuses against fundamental principles of justice, equality, and humanity. Unlike most slave narratives, however, this story ends not with a courageous bid for freedom and a reassertion of personal pride but with the same anticlimax that marked the narrator's first "break for liberty": Having joined a "gang" of laborers bound for Birmingham, the narrator "reckon[s] that [he will] die either in a coal mine or an iron furnace" (414).

The metaphor of slavery in this brief life story, that is, invokes an image of *perennial* enslavement, not the slavery-to-freedom trope of the typical antebellum slave narrative or the slave-to-success story of the typical postbellum narrative. Though the "Georgia peon" ends up a South Carolina laborer, his condition clearly remains unchanged in its essentials: Exploited by the same capitalist forces

(merely embodied in a different white man), he ends his story with only the appearance of employment alternatives—the coal mine or the iron furnace, either of which promises little besides death—and in his own words, "It don't make much difference which" (414). Indeed, the contrast between the peon's story and Washington's in *Up from Slavery* could not be more clear than in this final image, as the narrator ends his story just where Washington begins his own—struggling to satisfy his "intense longing to learn to read" while working in a West Virginia salt-furnace (18). What Washington portrays as merely the first of many obstacles to his ascent "up from slavery," the Georgia peon depicts as the end of all "intense longing" and the end, more pointedly, of both his life and his life story.

To be sure, such "neo-slave narratives" as this one found publication for markedly different reasons than antebellum slave narratives, most of which were published to aid in the cause of abolition, or postbellum narratives written to assert an individual's transcendence of a slave past. Within this life story, the trope of slavery represents the *stasis* of the narrator's life, not the starting-point for an experience of life-altering change and movement. And the title given to the story by the *Independent*—"The New Slavery in the South—An Autobiography"—suggests that its appeal to the magazine's editors and readers derived primarily from the topic of the essay, the conditions of the convict lease system in the South, and only secondarily from the individual who purportedly provides the first-hand point of view of those conditions. Published in a progressive magazine committed to reforming inequities throughout American society, the article might have been

read in much the same fashion as many early slave narratives, which employed the first-person narrator primarily to lend emphasis and veracity to the revelation of the truth about a shameful social institution. As a forceful indictment of the convict lease system in the South, the article functions as an editorial urging action against an institution, not unlike slavery per se, that denies the fundamental humanity of its victims.

Perhaps because of the force of the article's presentation of the outrages of the convict lease system, Hamilton Holt, managing editor of the *Independent*, selected the Georgia peon's story for inclusion in *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told by Themselves*, a collection of sixteen "lifelets" originally published in the magazine. But in spite of the compelling content of the essay, its status as "life story" remains more tenuous. One reviewer of Holt's collection, after challenging the authenticity of a few other selections, dismisses the story of the Georgia peon as "nothing but an article on the peon in the first person" (Hackett). Though the reviewer likely meant that the essay revealed too clearly the work of the transcriber to whom the peon dictated his story, her comment might also be interpreted more broadly to indict the essay as nothing but an article on the peon *question*, in which the purported, first-person speaker of the narration has, finally, little importance save as a narrative "voice." The autobiographical nature of the essay, in other words, appears at least to this reviewer as an editorial fiction, and the form of the essay something qualitatively distinct from autobiography—"nothing but an article."

Several aspects of the article do, indeed, suggest its failure to merge an editorial on "The New Slavery in the South" and "An Autobiography." First, though an editorial headnote seeks to reassure readers that the "representative" of the *Independent* who "secured" the article merely "took the liberty to correct the narrator's errors of grammar and put it in a form suitable for publication" (409), in fact the language of the article points to more significant "liberties." The essay's opening line, "I am a negro . . .," seems an unlikely expression in a one-on-one interview and belies the purported immediacy of a "dictated" narration, suggesting that from the start the concerns of the magazine (for representativeness, "typicality") will outweigh the individual's actual voice. Furthermore, inconsistencies in diction (for example, a charge that "court officials are in collusion with the proprietors or agents" followed by a description of a county "'way down in the turpentine district") strongly suggest the editor's hand (413), particularly given the peon's admitted illiteracy: Though he "can read a little," he is unable to write his own name, and he signs his contracts with his white employers by making his "mark" (410). Finally, then, the editorial note that prefaces the peon's "autobiography" unwittingly reveals an irony at the heart of the story: In putting the peon's story "in a *form* suitable for publication"—both "shaping it up," one might say, *and* shaping it into "autobiography"—the representative of the *Independent* "took the liberty" of literate expression that the narrator himself could not claim and thus could not control. Even as his story reveals his absolute lack of control over his own life, labor, wife, and child, it

reveals as well his inability to exert any authority over the authorship of his own "autobiography."

Because he gains neither freedom nor literacy, those twin essential elements of the antebellum slave narrative, the Georgia peon cannot present a story of neo-slavery that expresses a powerful, individual, autobiographical point of view. Robert Stepto writes of the antebellum slave narrator, Henry Bibb, that his lack of complete control over his text finally "relegates him to a position of partial literacy," while Frederick Douglass, in contrast, "both sophisticates and authenticates his posture as a participant-observer narrator" through his mastery of literacy and thereby "controls the presentation of his personal history" (10, 25). As a "neo-slave narrative," the life story of the Georgia peon loses force as a presentation of *his* personal history in part because of his lack of control over that presentation, his position of nearly complete illiteracy. Finally, the narrator's attempt to make his "mark" in the form of a personal narrative—not unlike his attempt to "[make] a break for liberty"—is ineffectual because of the exploitation of his position by those with greater social power, those enabled by their own social position to "take liberties" with his life-story just as others took liberties with his life.

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Eight years after the story of the "Georgia Negro peon" appeared, the *Independent* published "More Slavery at the South, by a Negro Nurse." The title given by the magazine's editors explicitly links the article to its predecessor with

the common trope of a "new" slavery; the headnote prefacing the nurse's story, moreover, suggests a more significant continuity with the peon's story both in editorial technique and in a curious sort of collaborative authorship:

> [The following thrilling story was obtained by a representative of THE INDEPENDENT specially commissioned to gather the facts. The reporting is, of course, our representative's, but the facts are those given by the nurse.—EDITOR] (196)

As with the peon's story, the extent to which "the facts" or "the reporting" are responsible for the "thrilling" quality of the story cannot be determined by even the close reader: The juxtaposition of the narrated events and the narrating voice conceals the process of composition that the magazine freely discloses in the headnote, thereby obscuring as well the specifically autobiographical nature of the text. As with the life story of the anonymous "Negro peon," then, this story of "a Negro Nurse" illustrates some of the significant limitations imposed on African-American autobiographical expression by publication in a leading American periodical at the turn of the century. However, in contrast to the peon's story, the nurse's narrative also exemplifies how the same form and forum might be exploited for its possibilities, how the expression of an autobiographical point of view might be achieved in spite of "partial literacy," limited textual control, and narrowly-defined notions of authorship and autobiography.

To be sure, "More Slavery at the South," like its predecessor, appears to present an editorial argument as much as a personal narrative in describing the deplorable conditions of life and labor of "perhaps a million" "poor colored

women wage-earners in the South" (200). The nurse who narrates the article reviews her personal history briskly and, even more than the Georgia peon, she downplays any sense of her life story as a meaningful progression of events. What she presents instead is a series of observations about the long working hours, low wages, and deceptively contrived oral contracts by which her labor is compelled, along with pointed commentary on the inhumanity and injustice of her treatment at the hands of Southern whites. At the same time, the narrator frequently subordinates her own personal experience to that of the "servant class" generally, that "vast host of poor colored people" whose condition, she concludes, is "just as bad, if not worse than, it was during slavery" (196). "Tho (sic.) today we are enjoying nominal freedom," she maintains, "we are literally slaves" (196).

Here, as in the peon's story, the trope of slavery functions as a sign of stasis, invoked to represent conditions of life and labor that remain "just as bad" as slavery itself in spite of forty-five years of "nominal freedom." Moreover, the stasis of perpetual slavery marks not only the condition of the race as a group but also the individual existence of African-American servants in the South: "I live a treadmill life," the narrator states at one point; "You might as well say that I'm on duty all the time—from sunrise to sunrise, every day in the week. I am the slave, body and soul, of this family" (196-97). But in spite of parallel uses of the trope of slavery, the "lifetime bondage" described by this narrator differs qualitatively from that of the peon. The nurse's active, impassioned engagement with her cause, for example, contrasts sharply with the passivity of the Georgia peon—who, after his

first ineffectual "break for liberty," exhibits little personal agency of any kind—and her activist, reformist vision seems to belie the inevitability and inassailability of her "treadmill life." As represented in their autobiographical narratives, the peon's life might be said to exemplify inertia of a sort, insofar as his condition remains static unless "acted upon by some external force," while the nurse embodies potential energy, that form of possibility exemplified by "a raised weight, coiled spring, or charged battery" ("Inertia"; "Potential energy").

Furthermore, while the peon at the end of his story can merely compare the horrors of his present employment to the "hell" of peonage (414), the nurse who narrates "More Slavery at the South" clearly understands her position in society in complex, dynamic ways. If, for example, the first line of her story—"I am a negro woman . . ."—parallels that of the Georgia peon's narrative in its suggestion of an editor's hand, the nurse nevertheless manages to assert throughout her narrative something of the meaning and significance of her identification as an African-American and as a woman. From this position of social cognizance, she can address specific affronts to her dignity not only by white men but also by white women and by African-American men, and she can appeal to each of these groups in turn on behalf of her class for greater "sympathy" and "a chance to breathe for once while alive as free women" (200). She interprets the "facts" of her condition, that is, in direct relation to her position in society, revealing a keen sense of the ironies of that position (as so many antebellum slave narrators did): She notes, for instance, that in spite of frequent commentary on the "unreliability,"

"untrustworthiness," and other "vices" of African-American women, Southern women continue to trust her and others like her with the most intimate care of their children and Southern men continue to take "undue liberties with their colored female servants" (198). The nurse recognizes that the law provides no protection to African-Americans in the South and that "labor unions or organizations of any kind" could do little to increase their wages (197); more personally, she sees that her perpetual service to a white family, as "handy-andy," governess, playmate, nurse, and common laborer deprives her own children of the comforts and benefits her employers enjoy (196).

Though she invokes the metaphor of a "new slavery" to suggest the stasis in her conditions of life and labor, then, the nurse-narrator counteracts that sense of stasis in her vigilant awareness of all that is withheld from her by her enforced position in Southern society. One of the striking characteristics of "More Slavery at the South," in fact, is its narrator's *knowing* tone, discernible even as she laments what she does *not* know because education has been denied to her and others of her class. When she remarks, "I don't know what it is to go to church; I don't know what it is to go to a lecture or entertainment or anything of the kind," her profession of ignorance reveals her aspiration to the solidly middle-class virtues of piety and education and challenges the injustice of denying her the opportunity to pursue them. When the narrator notes that "negro household servants" in the South "do not cook according to scientific principles because we do not know anything about scientific principles," likewise, she not only exhibits

an awareness of one of the latest topics of discussion among middle-class homemakers of the North and a corresponding desire to be trained as a "professional" in her field of work, but also indicts Southern whites for their willingness to be "perfectly satisfied" with the less-than-"efficient" servants their system produces (197). Taken together, the nurse's personal and social aspirations and her candid appraisal of Southern white society controvert the theories of racial inferiority used to justify a "new slavery" in the South.

In presenting her knowledge and experience in this fashion, the nurse makes a claim not only for just and equitable treatment in her life and her labor in the South but also for full recognition of her humanity. Yet the nurse's outspokenness on a range of issues is finally less significant than the simple fact of her speaking out at all. The nurse presents her first-hand knowledge of Southern society, notably, as the basis not only of her candid critiques but also of her right to express a point of view before the national audience of the *Independent*:

> . . . I have been able to become intimately acquainted not only with the lives of hundreds of household servants, but also with the lives of their employers. I can, therefore, speak with authority on the so-called servant question; and what I say is said out of an experience which covers many years. (196)

On the surface, this statement functions as an expression of the nurse's qualifications for speaking on the "servant question": She comes to the question, the nurse informs her readers, with certain first-hand "facts" to report. But asserting her ability to *speak with authority* implies a broader claim, one founded, moreover, on the premise of an attentive audience: An individual with no social

standing can *speak* as freely as any other, but *authority* depends upon social recognition and respect. To be sure, the nurse's social position—both in Southern society and in relation to the editors of the *Independent*—places significant limitations on her individual agency and her cultural standing. In Stepto's terms, the nurse, like the peon, can achieve only "partial literacy" insofar as the control of the *text* of her personal expression is in the hands of others. But in *stating* a claim to the authority of speaking publicly, she asserts a certain social value not only for her unappreciated labor but also for her "experience," her knowledge, her point of view.

In small but significant ways, then, the nurse's article about "More Slavery at the South" conveys something beyond "the facts" of her life and labor, something of the person behind the article's editorial voice and point of view. When the nurse refers, in the passage quoted above, to "the *so-called* servant question," she intensifies her commentary in a subtle but significant way, not unlike what Du Bois achieves in his reference to the "half-named Negro problem" (*Souls* 9). When she claims to be "intimately acquainted" with the lives of her fellow servants *and* their employers, likewise, the nurse plants a suggestion that her understanding of Southern society extends beyond "the facts" to include private, perhaps even dangerously personal, knowledge. This slight but subversive style reflects the tradition and legacy of the slave narrative and, more specifically, as Andrews describes them, those slave narrators who "resisted the fragmenting nature of objective autobiography, which demanded that a black narrator achieve

credence by objectifying himself and passivizing his voice" (*To Tell* 6-7). In a small way, the nurse achieves what Andrews finds lacking in the early, dictated slave narratives but powerfully expressed by narrators such as Douglass: She expresses, albeit implicitly and editorially, the "sense of an individual authorial personality, the sound of a distinctive authorizing voice" (98-99).

To the extent that she "speak[s] with authority" and thereby achieves that "distinctive authorizing voice," the nurse infuses what might be called an autobiographical point of view into her article on the labor conditions of "poor colored women wage-earners in the South." All writers of autobiography, according to Albert Stone, "stand *outside* as well as *within* their own experience" (*Autobiographical* 7); the most powerful slave narrators, Stepto argues similarly, occupy the "posture" of the "participant-observer," a posture that "obliterate[s]" the distinction between autobiographical and editorial "modes of narration" (65). To be sure, the brief essay "by a Negro nurse" does not approach the aesthetic magnitude of Douglass's *Narrative* or Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, the subjects of Stepto's argument, nor can the nurse claim any of the textual or editorial control enjoyed by such figures. Her voice depends on the forum of the *Independent* for editorial approval and authentication as much as for its public circulation. But through the limitations imposed by those conditions of publication, the nurse finally succeeds in presenting her "personality" as well as her point of view, belying her own report of a static life as a "new slave" in the South by speaking in an active, "free" voice.

## III

## Private Experience, Public Truth-Telling: African-American Autobiography and the Race Problem

In March 1904, three weeks after publishing the Georgia peon's story of "The New Slavery in the South," the *Independent* printed three more first-person essays on the "negro problem," essays clearly selected to represent a set of distinct points of view on the Southern problem: "The Race Problem—An Autobiography," by "a Southern Colored Woman"; "Experiences of the Race Problem," by "a Southern White Woman"; and "Observations of the Southern Race Feeling," by "a Northern [White] Woman." Notably, according to an editorial headnote that appeared several months later, the three essays "called forth more replies than any other articles . . . recently published" by the magazine (Williams 91). Responding to the obvious interest of their readers, the *Independent* published one of those replies—"A Northern Negro's Autobiography," by Fannie Barrier Williams—as a supplement to the original series and a commentary on "a phase of the negro problem not touched upon by the three anonymous women" (91). The four articles "taken together," the editorial comment noted, "picture the negro problem from the feminine standpoint in the most genuine and realistic manner shown in any articles we have seen in print" (91).

Each of the four brief essays in the *Independent*'s series might be read as a compelling narrative in its own right, revealing not only what Andrews describes

as a "sense of an individual authorial personality, the sound of a distinctive authorizing voice," but also a suggestive portrait of a time and place: Each essay presents, in Albert Stone's terms, both an "individual story" and a "cultural narrative" ("Introduction"). As essays intended to be "taken together," however, the series points to more significant questions about autobiographical writing at the turn of the century, particularly the autobiographical writing published in national magazines such as the *Independent*. What implications for reading and interpretation, for example, follow from the editorial suggestion of the *Independent* that the essays "*together* picture the negro problem"? When those essays present cultural narratives that implicitly and explicitly contest each other, furthermore, how might the reader construct a coherent "picture" of the problem under discussion? Finally, in the context of publication in a national magazine such as the *Independent*, are the four commentators on the race question to be accorded equal weight or authority, their equivalence as published essayists interpreted as a textual testament to "social equality" of a kind?

A curious essay by one of the editors of the *Independent*, written as an introduction to Holt's collection of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*, offers an intriguing clue to the resonance of such questions at the turn of the century. Attempting to explain the appeal of short, autobiographical essays such as those collected and published by the *Independent*, Edwin E. Slosson notes three primary "forces" leading to the development of such "new forms of literature": First, an impatience with "any detectable deviation from truth"; second, an interest

in "the concrete" over "the abstract" and the "individual" over the "generalized types of humanity"; and third, "the spirit of democracy, the discovery of the importance of the average man" (2-3). Slosson suggests that these forces coalesce in the form of autobiography, and he goes so far as to nominate autobiography as the primary genre of "the literature of the future" (3). All prognostication aside, however, Slosson's formula provides a useful guide to the motives of the progressive-minded *Independent* in procuring personal narratives by both white and black Americans as a means of addressing the nation's race question. More significantly, his comments illuminate the ways in which readers might have responded to the short autobiographical essays published in the magazine as well as how the writers of those essays—as readers of the *Independent* themselves—may have conceived of their private, personal experience as a source of commentary and insight on a national "problem."

Each of the four essays on the race question published by the *Independent* might be said to satisfy Slosson's assertions about the appeal of autobiographical writing at the turn of the century. Composed by "average" or "undistinguished" Americans,[6] the articles present first-hand, forthright narratives grounded in the concrete details of individual experience. Furthermore, each reflects the peculiar tension between the private and the public, and between privacy and publicity, that characterizes autobiography as a genre. Merging the details of personal experience

[6] The author of the fourth essay, Fannie Barrier Williams, is perhaps an exception to this characterization; see below for a discussion of her public reform work.

with commentary on a public debate and presenting private lives for public examination and interpretation, the articles highlight the dual nature of autobiographical writing as both individual truth-telling and social performance. First, as essays that draw from autobiographical forms such as the confession, the articles purport to present sincere, candid life stories: Picking up on this aspect of autobiography's appeal, the *Independent* praised the first three essays as "remarkable for their extraordinary frankness" and later noted the "genuine and realistic manner" of all four ("Race Problem" 586; Williams 91). Indeed, like witnesses protected from retribution after providing testimony, the names of the first three writers are withheld by the *Independent* "for reasons that will be evident to the reader and that concern their social if not personal safety" ("Race Problem" 586).[7] At the same time, an awareness of the personal risk of truth-telling is matched in each of these essays by a sense of autobiography as public performance, a regard not only for "social safety" of the narrator but also for the social relevance of the narrated experience. Each of the writers presents a story of personal experience, in other words, as a form of public gesture and social commentary, an individual story as cultural narrative.

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[7] Several other editorial headnotes in the *Independent* point to a contemporary presumption that truth-telling requires anonymity and that anonymity attests to veracity. See "Free Speech in the South" (*Independent* 55 [15 Jan. 1903]: 137-39): "The author of the following article is denied the freedom of signing her name in order that she may have the freedom of writing freely . . ." (137). See, too, "Memories of an Early Girlhood" and "Memories of an Early Boyhood" (*Independent* 55 [7 May 1903]: 1071-80): "As both autobiographies are *true* ones, the authors *naturally* did not wish to have their names printed" (1071; emphasis added).

While the four essays on the race question share certain fundamental elements and appeal to similar interests among contemporary readers, however, their bylines alone establish a clear line of separation by distinguishing the articles by the "Southern Colored Woman" and the "Northern Negro" from those by white women. In the context of turn-of-the-century America, racial identification shaped not only social relations but also textual ones: Neither all individual stories nor all cultural narratives enjoyed the same reception and respect among all American readers. To be sure, as the example of Washington's *Up from Slavery* illustrates, an individual story by an African-American might be received with praise and encouragement if its accompanying cultural narrative found favor with the majority of white Americans. But short of masking one's racial identification,[8] no African-American writer could write at the turn of the century as a truly "undistinguished" American: The particular distinction imposed by even a single "colored" grandparent or great-grandparent determined, to a considerable extent, one's position in American life as well as in American letters. More specifically, in the context of that distinction, both the personal revelation and the public gesture of autobiographical writing take on added resonance for the African-American writer. Truth-telling, in the charged atmosphere of the turn of the

[8] Chesnutt, for example, successfully published his earliest stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* without revealing his racial identification (see Sedgwick 176, 235). McElrath and Leitz argue that Chesnutt thereby "established his claim to fame as the first African-American prose fiction writer to penetrate the sanctum sanctorum of Bostonian, and thus American, high culture" (7). For a sustained analysis of "Charles

century, clearly endangered not merely the social but also the personal safety of African-American individuals—a fact neatly symbolized in repeated incidents of African-American newspaper presses being burned to the ground after the publication of editorials that challenged white supremacy.[9] Public expression, meanwhile, inevitably engaged the individual African-American writer in the role of speaking both from and for "the race." As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay have noted, African-American writers and their works have often been cast

> in the role of synecdoche, a part standing for the ethnic whole, signifying who "the Negro" was, what his or her "inherent" intellectual potential might be, and whether or not the larger group was entitled to the full range of rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. (xxxiv)

Such peculiar "extraliterary burdens" on the African-American writer, furthermore, could only have been exacerbated by the interest at the turn of the century in the concrete experience of a single individual as "representative" of a group defined by social position and ethnic or racial identification (xxxiv).

That the contributions of the two African-American women to the *Independent*'s series on the race question were perceived in ways distinct from

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Chesnutt, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the Intersection of African-American Fiction and Elite Culture," see Price.

[9] Ida B. Wells-Barnett's editorials for the aptly titled newspaper, the Memphis *Free Speech*, for example, incited a mob to burn her press and issue a death threat (D. Hine 1144). Another casualty of "free speech" on the issue of lynching and white supremacy was the *Wilmington Record*, burned to the ground during the Wilmington, North Carolina race riot of 1898 (the event that inspired Chesnutt's 1901 novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*). A photo of a large group of white men posing in front of the *Record*'s burned-out press building appeared in *Collier's Weekly* soon after the riot [26 Nov. 1898: 4], accentuating the public, symbolic nature of the action.

those of the Northern and Southern white women can be inferred, first, from the titles given to the articles by the magazine's editors. In spite of the similarities among the four essays noted above, their presentation by the *Independent* implies a qualitative difference in *form*, a difference grounded in distinctions of position and point of view: The Northern white woman, one step removed from the South in spite of several visits, can offer only "Observations" on Southern race relations; the Southern woman, more intimately acquainted with the problem, can write of more personal "Experiences"; but only the two African-American women are presumed to have the kind of first-hand knowledge and experience necessary to offer commentary on "the race problem" in the form of "autobiography."

The latter assumption clearly requires examination, as it conflates—like the "unasked question" isolated by Du Bois, How does it feel to be a problem?—identity and racial identification, individual lives and a communal "problem." If, however, such an assumption threatens to reduce the meaning of an individual life to a synecdoche of a group's experience or a commentary on a social problem, the same limited conception also offers a unique opportunity to the African-American autobiographer: Sanctioned by a representative of mainstream American culture, the individual can write of his or her life in social, even national terms, claiming the agency to be found in public truth-telling as well as in the social gesture of publication. In this sense, the two African-American women who contributed to the *Independent*'s short series on the race question had an opportunity to exploit the possibilities of autobiography and publication at the turn of the century,

"authorized" by the magazine's cultural authority to speak publicly and candidly of personal experience and to personalize a national problem.

* * *

In marked contrast to both the Peon and the Nurse who told their stories for the *Independent*, the Southern Colored Woman who narrates "The Race Problem—An Autobiography" takes pains to differentiate her life-story from that of the slave, "new" or old. As if to declare immediately her relation to the legacy of slavery, she begins her narrative not with the first-person pronoun (cf. "I am a negro . . .," "I am a negro woman . . .") but with an extended narrative of her father's proud life as a slave and his subsequent rise from slavery to self-supporting and manly independence. Even before emancipation, the narrator reports, her father had become "an expert blacksmith" and a self-respecting husband and father; when the war ended and his former master offered to hire the former slave as an employee, "he refused because the wages were too small" and left the plantation with his wife and child in "a wagon he had made with his own hands" (586). This scene, dramatized by the narrator to accentuate the ex-slave's figurative escape from slavery and embrace of freedom, contrasts sharply with the story of the Georgia Peon: As if to highlight the latter's mistaken actions and assumptions, the narrator underscores her father's savvy rejection of disingenuous hospitality, his determination to work independently rather than contract with former slave-holders, and his desire to educate and support his family free from the intrusions of dominating or degenerate whites. As a child of this successful, self-

respecting entrepreneur—this larger-than-life patriarch who "was slave in name only"—the narrator aligns her own life story with the pride of independence and rejects the ignominious imagery of enslavement (586).

The narrator also casts her own life story as a continuation and a carrying-forward of her father's approach to life, identifying herself by many of the same principles of hard work, capitalistic ingenuity, thrift, and self-reliance. The narrator's pride and sense of self clearly derive in part from her success in adopting and applying these Franklinian virtues: It is because of "most frugal living and strict economy," she asserts, that she has only once "lived in a rented house," has never attended a public school, and has achieved a level of comfort and satisfaction in her living standards (587). Though at times the narrator projects certain "manly" virtues onto her husband and father in order to uphold an image of her own feminine virtue and decorum, it is clear that her portrayal of worldly success and financial security is intended as an attestation of her own selfhood and integrity. She sets out to prove her social and individual worth, in a sense, by exhibiting her economic worth, and by documenting her successful application of quintessential "American" principles.

Read as a representative of her race, synecdochically signifying the potential and worth of the larger whole, the narrator's declaration of independence and industriousness clearly works to challenge widely held assumptions about the inherent deficiency and inferiority of African-Americans as a group. Indeed, in contrast to the narratives of "new slavery" published by the *Independent*, this

narrator casts African-American existence as anything but static, while she characterizes Southern whites as insidiously clinging to the ways of the past. Her story implies, finally, that the race problem persists in American society through no fault of the African-American descendants of slaves but rather because of the enduring, even increasing hatred of those descendants by whites. "The Southern whites dislike more and more the educated colored man," the narrator asserts, even as they ignore the virtues of individuals in stereotyping the entire race: "The respectable, intelligent colored people are 'carefully unknown,'" she notes, while "the ignorant and vicious are carefully known and all of their traits cried aloud" (589). In writing "an autobiography" of "the race problem," the narrator clearly seeks to make known the "good traits and virtues" of many African-Americans.

But autobiography also serves the narrator as a powerful form of social critique, a means of personalizing the prejudice and racism that undermine not only African-American industriousness and self-reliance but also personal integrity and selfhood. Just as economic worth comes to signify and affirm personal worth in the narrator's life story, so too does the economic threat of white supremacy parallel the more profound challenge to emotional well-being that results from a system of institutionalized inequality and insult. The narrator again looks to her father's life for an example of African-American determination to resist and overcome economic intimidation: Though his small store was "burned out once" and threatened in other ways, he "finally" established "a large grocery store and feed store attached," a symbol, along with "his coveted white house with green

blinds," of success and security in the face of racial persecution and prejudice (586-87). But the narrator turns to her own experience to document the emotional trials that attend the African-American experience of "the race problem." Her narrative increasingly moves from the practical details of her "frugal living and strict economy" to the more complicated, painful, and inexpressible feelings of her life as a "Southern Colored Woman," directing her brief autobiography to that unasked question named by Du Bois: How does it feel to be a problem?

In a treatment of that question not unlike that of Du Bois, the narrator grounds her answer in the initial discovery, as a child, "that being 'colored' made a difference" (588). Du Bois's representation of the moment when the "shadow" of racial distinction first "swept across" him portrays the sudden realization of racial difference as a loss of childhood innocence, a shock that interrupts an otherwise "merry" childhood exchange of "gorgeous visiting-cards" (*Souls* 4). The narrator of "The Race Problem—An Autobiography" invokes a similar childhood variation on an adult social ritual—"play dinners"—as the setting and source of her "very first humiliation" (588). Where Du Bois recalls only a dismissive "glance" from a white classmate (4), however, this narrator reconstructs the utterance of her young playmate:

> "I like to come over to your house to play, we have such good times, and your ma has such good preserves; but don't you tell my ma I eat over here. My ma says you all are nice, clean folks . . . . I know she would whip me if I ate with you, tho, because you are colored, you know." (588)

This recollected moment of childhood disunion is noteworthy in the context of racial antagonism and violence at the turn of the century for its lack of explicit hostility or physical brutality. The searing humiliation that the narrator recalls feeling is not the explicit and intentional humiliation of the Jim Crow railroad car, which she experiences as an adult, but rather a product of the playmate's very innocence and naïveté. The childhood game of "keeping a secret" here makes the young "colored" girl the secret itself, an embarrassment and a violation of some unspoken rule, while the presumption of her inferiority appears self-evident, a secret to no one (". . . you are colored, you know"). Like the schoolroom scene that Du Bois recalls, this moment does not dissolve the bond between the two playmates but does permanently alter the grounds on which they associate: "The little girl came often to play with me after that," the narrator notes, "and we were friends again, but we never had any more play dinners" (588). Unable to make sense of the event as a child, unsatisfied with her mother's "explanation—or, rather, lack of explanation" (588), the narrator presents the scene as a nagging, irreconcilable moment in her life story, a source of continuing disillusionment and psychic distress.

But this brief, deeply personal recollection also presents, in miniature, a cultural narrative of the production and reproduction of social inequality and racial prejudice in America. Notably, the only threat of violence in the recorded scene is the whipping feared by the young white girl should her clandestine "play dinners"—those naïve childish enactments of social equality—be discovered. The

violence increasingly used to enforce white supremacy at the end of the nineteenth century, so much a part of the discussion of the race problem at the turn of the century, was unknown to the narrator as a child: Her first encounter with racial distinction came not through an experience of "the real horrible things," things that she would learn of later, but rather through her exposure to the implicit threat of violence that reinforced white supremacy among Southern whites. The inconceivable and inexplicable notion that her friend would be punished if their association were known, in other words, supports the narrator's basic assertion that the roots of racial division lie in the hatred of African-Americans by whites. At the same time, the narrator advances a particular cultural narrative through this scene to explain the generation—and the generational nature—of racial prejudice in American society.

Notably, the Southern African-American woman's treatment of the race problem by way of childhood recollections connects her narrative not only to Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* but also to the article that follows hers in the *Independent*. In "Experiences of the Race Problem," by A Southern White Woman, scenes of childhood play once again personalize the race issue even as they naturalize a particular cultural narrative. Like her "colored" counterpart, this narrator begins her narrative by describing her father, in this case not a slave but "the son of a Southern gentleman," a Confederate soldier, and a Ku Klux Klan member (590). The narrator's wide-ranging article on the race problem presents, in predictable formulae, nearly all of the prevailing stereotypes of the white South

at the turn of the century regarding the "degeneracy" and "the almost universal depravity of negroes" (593). But her recollections of childhood in particular serve a more specific function: asserting that the white Southerner's appreciation of racial distinctions (and white racial superiority) develops "naturally" during childhood.

When she was a child, the narrator reports, her only playmates were "the little black girls" on her father's plantation, and her memories of childhood center on the nature of their play together (591). Though she recalls believing as a child that her "companionship" with the girls was entirely "free from restraint," the narrator recognizes in hindsight that "it was really controlled by the instincts and customs of our respective races" (591). She recalls the kind, protective treatment she bestowed upon her playmates, but she also makes it clear that "there was no question of 'fair play' between us; for quite naturally I took all the advantages there were to be had":

> If we played "keeping house," I was the father and the mother of the family, they the children, subject to the most stringent discipline. But we never played "come to see" one another, because they were negroes, and we felt the social impropriety of such a situation as that fact involved. (591)

These recollections of simple childhood games, like the "play dinners" recalled by the African-American woman, clearly serve to advance a particular cultural narrative about the proper, "natural" relations of the races in American society. Writing at a time when childhood play "was perceived to have an important role in socialization and education" (Mergen 403), the two Southern narrators both invoke

their own childhood games—and in particular those that imitated the social rituals of the adult world—as incipient scenes in their stories of the "race problem." But the cultural narratives implied by the two articles, not surprisingly, diverge profoundly: What the African-American narrator presents as a humiliating violation of the natural affection of two children, an affront forever irreconcilable with her deepest sense of common humanity, the white narrator offers as a natural outgrowth of childhood "instincts." Furthermore, while the former presents a suggestion of violence at the heart of white society, the latter presents violence and social control as inevitable and necessary components of interracial relations, even as those are imitated by children: Physical violence against African-Americans is as natural, the narrator implies, as the "discipline" used by a parent to correct a wayward child. Finally, the white woman also implies that the "instinct" of race distinctions emerges without prompting in children of both races, suggesting that her childhood playmates unconsciously perceived, as clearly as she did, the "impropriety" of enacting social equality even in a childhood game.

One imagines that the African-American woman who narrated her story of the race problem might reply that the feelings of the white woman's childhood playmates were, in this case, "carefully unknown," both as a result of and in the interest of the South's ideological conviction of fundamental, biological difference between the races. And in fact, revealing gaps in the white woman's cultural narrative of "natural" race distinctions appear in her recollection of another childhood incident. The narrator recalls that as a child, though unaware of "why

one negro was black and another yellow," she "conceived a violent antipathy" for "a little mulatto boy" on the plantation (591). Acting on that seemingly natural abhorrence, the narrator seized the boy, "held him against the wall," and sprayed his face with ink "until it was of a uniform, legitimate blackness" (591). The boy appealed to the narrator's mother for redress, but she, "with a face that expressed no more emotion than a mask," banished the boy from the house and told his mother that "he is nearer the right color than I ever saw him before" (591). This brief narrative undermines, first, the narrator's claim that she was "never tempted to treat [her "little black companions"] unkindly"; but more significantly, the scene unwittingly offers another cultural narrative about the sexual and psychological, not "natural," sources of interracial animosity in the South. The narrator fails to disguise entirely what the mother veils behind an emotionless "mask": the implication that her own father (whom she describes at the start of her article as a typical Southern philanderer) likely fathered as well the little boy that she tormented as a child. The narrator does not explore the possibility that her "violent antipathy" for the mulatto boy arose not from any unconscious revulsion at an "unnatural" mingling, represented by his "yellow" skin, but rather from her unconscious awareness of a natural bond uniting her and the boy—and the obligation of "fair play" that such a bond would imply.

Instead, the Southern white woman maintains throughout her article that she "was not taught these race distinctions" but rather "was born with them," and she suggests, further, that "they are intensified in each succeeding generation of white

children" (213). She implies, that is, that the awareness of race distinctions is not only innate but evolving, at least among whites—African-Americans, she argues, having "no sense of race integrity" themselves, also have no strong sense of natural race distinctions (592). The contrast with the African-American woman's commentary on the race problem, once more, could not be more striking: While both women observe an exacerbation of racial antipathy on the part of whites, one advances biological and evolutionary reasons for that growth, the other social and psychological motives. Indeed, the African-American narrator draws on a similar notion of natural evolution to come to a antithetical conclusion: "In the natural order of things," she notes, "our children will be better educated than we"; should the hatred of whites for "the educated colored man" grow correspondingly, she concludes, "I shudder to think of the outcome" (589).

Finally, however, the autobiographical content of the African-American woman's article belies her stated conviction that educational achievement and economic advancement are at the root of the race problem, as her personal reactions to racial persecution undermine any such cultural narrative that seeks to justify or explain racial prejudice and violence. In contrast to the Southern white woman, who invokes her childhood self-assurance as proof of the self-evidence of race distinctions, the African-American woman presents childhood experiences and emotions that could not then—and still cannot—be "reconciled": All attempts to resolve them are, in the end, no more satisfying or sufficient than her mother's "explanation—or, rather, lack of explanation" (588).

What emerges from the African-American woman's commentary on the race problem, finally, is a sense of the profound tension in her own life between two individual stories and between two cultural narratives. Her autobiography includes, on the one hand, a life-story marked by clear aims and clean living, by faith in the success that comes of "frugal living and strict economy"; and, on the other hand, a narrative of thwarted ideals, public humiliation, inexplicable events and inexpressible feelings. The first story presumes that a life regulated by a self-imposed, "iron-bound rule" of hard work and thrift will prosper and advance (587); the second story records incidents of humiliation and insult that the narrator can "never get used to," that are "new each time," that fit into no satisfactory narrative (588). The social implications of each of these stories, likewise, reveal the disjunction of two competing cultural narratives within one autobiography: The first, a narrative of African-American progress, achieved through education, economic advancement, and the application of quintessential American virtues; the second, a disjunctive, senseless narrative that seeks in vain to explain the escalating violence and hatred directed against African-Americans at the end of the nineteenth century.

These two cultural narratives, it might also be noted, imply two distinct appeals on the part of this narrator to the audience of the *Independent*. The first form of appeal—as old as the tradition of African-American autobiography itself—asks for individual and social recognition from white America by testifying to the essential humanity, intellectual capacity, and commitment to the ideals of

American citizenship of African-Americans. In making such an appeal, this narrator portrays her acceptance and adherence to the dominant values of white America, particularly those Franklinian virtues repeatedly invoked by Washington in *Up from Slavery*; on a more elementary level, meanwhile, she reinforces her intellectual ability and her engagement in the cultural community represented by the *Independent*'s audience by including several intertextual references in her autobiography to other life stories published in the magazine. Clearly, the narrator of "The Race Problem" conceives of her story's broader social significance in presenting a portrait of African-American virtue, intellect, and ability. But her autobiography also incorporates an appeal of a very different sort, petitioning a white audience for sympathetic identification with a victim of racial injustice. In making this appeal, the narrator fulfills the role of the true autobiographical subject, rejecting the self-effacing role adopted by Washington and other African-American autobiographers at the turn of the century (Andrews, "Forgotten" 23). By refusing to limit her report on the race problem to the outlines of what might be called her social identity,[10] and by incorporating into her narrative a profoundly "problematic" sense of self, this "carefully unknown" African-American woman seizes the personal agency and enacts the public gesture of autobiographical truth-telling.

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[10] Writing of *Up from Slavery*, Sidonie Smith argues that Washington "is ultimately imprisoned in his social identity" because he narrates "a two-dimensional tale of the facts of his education and his work, not a self-conscious or self-analytical (three-dimensional) tale. . ." (228).

* * *

The third and fourth articles in the *Independent*'s series on the race problem—a Northern white woman's "Observations of the Southern Race Feeling" and "A Northern Negro's Autobiography"—share a sense of critical distance from the race question that is lacking in the first two contributions. Insofar as the race problem was perceived at the turn of the century as primarily a Southern problem, of course, the two women address the issue from a certain geographical remove; more specifically, both women assert that they remained largely ignorant of the race question until they first visited the South as adults. The Northern white woman claims that she "hardly knew that there *was* a negro question until [she] went to the South to live" (595); Fannie Barrier Williams (author of "A Northern Negro's Autobiography"), likewise, declares that until she "became a young woman and went South to teach [she] had never been reminded that [she] belonged to an 'inferior race'" (91). Furthermore, within the context of the *Independent*'s series, the two articles by Northern women are distinguished from those by Southern women by the element of intertextuality: The northern white woman responds directly to "one of the preceding articles" (595), while Williams frames her essay as an explicit reply to the initial series. While the two essays function independently as first-person statements on the race problem, then, they lack something of the direct and unmediated quality of the initial two essays insofar as they work to rebut or "supplement" those earlier statements (Williams 91).

The Northern white woman's essay, in particular, is clearly intended (by its author and, perhaps, by the *Independent*) to function as editorial comment rather than autobiographical expression. The narrator employs childhood recollections, for example, only to disclaim any "sectional prejudice" and to position herself with regard to the race issue (595). The "Race Feeling" in the article's title is not her own, but merely the subject of her "observations"—a term whose twin meanings neatly capture the narrator's position as a direct witness of Southern ways (i.e., an observer *of*) but also as an author of deliberative commentary about what she saw (i.e., her observations *on*). As a reasoned comment from a purportedly disinterested party, the Northern woman's report on "the southern race feeling" powerfully controverts the conclusions of the Southern white woman: She asserts, in short, that "the Southerner, no less than the Northerner, has a collection of negro theories, and upon all occasions he brings them out draped in the same lurid rhetoric" in order to "conceal his relentless purpose to deny the negro every right and pleasure which resemble those of the white man" (597). Given the intertextual nature of the Northern woman's article and the force with which she challenges the ideological bases of the southern woman's narrative, it seems probable that the *Independent* deliberately sought out an individual who might offer a third point of view to complement those of the two Southern women and to advance a liberal, progressive critique of Southern ideology on the race question. Her commentary tips the scales, as it were, in favor of African-American civil rights if not complete social equality. More broadly, the Northern woman's article affirms the

progressive arguments of the day that "education naturally inclines" the "negro" to a peaceable and civilized life and that the race problem will, in a context of equitable and just treatment, "work itself out naturally to the good of both races" (599).

If the article by the Northern white woman appears to have been solicited by the *Independent* to advance a particular viewpoint, the "Autobiography" by Fannie Barrier Williams is explicitly presented as one of many "replies" that the magazine received, selected because it "discusses a phase of the negro problem not touched upon" by the others (91). That "phase" is, presumably, the influential movement for reform led by African-American women at the end of the nineteenth century, a movement to which Williams contributed in significant ways. At the start of her public career in the early 1890s, for example, Williams established an interracial hospital and training school for nurses; in 1893, she was one of the few African-American women to present a lecture to the World's Congress of Representative Women during the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where she spoke on "The Intellectual Progress and Present Status of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation." At the turn of the century, Williams contributed to a volume of essays entitled *A New Negro for a New Century* (largely credited to Booker T. Washington), in which she is introduced as "The Famous Club Woman, Writer and Author" (MacBrady 1). In her essay for that volume, Williams presented a chronicle of the influential "club movement" among African-American women, an association of women across the

United States "pledged to the serious work of a social reconstruction of the negro race" ("Club" 402). As one of the leading figures in these reform movements, Williams envisioned herself as one of "a race of women" rapidly creating "public faith" in their virtue and ability and justly earning a "place in the classification of progressive womanhood in America" (402). The *Independent*, meanwhile, surely recognized in Williams an important voice concerning this significant new "phase" of the race problem and an individual uniquely qualified and positioned to write "a Northern Negro's Autobiography."

Williams opens her article with a narrative of childhood that engages the earlier essays on the issue of the "natural" origin of racial distinctions. A child of free parents and grandparents, Williams spent her childhood and adolescence in a western New York town in which her's was for some time "the only colored family" (91). Describing her social interactions as a child with white "associates, schoolmates and companions," Williams writes that "these relationships were natural, spontaneous and free from all restraint" (91). "We went freely to each other's houses . . . and joined on equal terms in all school entertainments with perfect comradeship," she continues, all the while "liv[ing] in blissful ignorance of the fact that we were practicing the unpardonable sin of 'social equality'" (91). Echoing the words of the Southern white woman, who maintained that her childhood interracial companionship had only the appearance of being "free from restraint," Williams parodies the notion that children unconsciously heed an innate sense of race distinctions. Later, describing her return to her home town for her

wedding, Williams again notes that, though she and her husband and family "were the only persons to lend color to the occasion," "it seemed all a simple part of the natural life we lived" in which racial distinctions carried no essential significance (92). It was only in the South, Williams provocatively contends, that "for the first time" she "began life as a colored person, in all that that term implies" (91). Confronted by a society rigidly "divided into white and black lines," where all the verities and certainties and "rules of conduct" learned in her childhood had to be "discounted," Williams experiences "a shattering of cherished ideals" like that which affected Du Bois and the anonymous Southern African-American woman at an earlier age (92, 91). In presenting her own autobiographical portrait of a childhood free from racial prejudice and hatred, like the latter narrators, Williams offers an idyllic vision of racial harmony as a powerful counterpoint to her adult experiences of the "tyranny of a dark complexion" in the American South (92).

Williams writes of the lasting personal impact of racial prejudice in a manner reminiscent of the Southern African-American woman's narrative, professing, for example, that she has "never quite recovered from the shock and pain" of her "first bitter realization" of what it means to be "a colored woman" in America (92). However, as her narrative moves from childhood recollections to adult experiences, Williams modifies the tenor of her article as well, moving away from the depiction of her private, emotional reactions to the race problem and toward a description of her public, reform-minded responses to it. Williams continues to draw from personal experiences throughout the essay, but her focus

shifts from the psychological "shock" and "pain" and bitterness of her experience of racism to her social "interest in various reform work" (92). This subtle but significant modulation begins early in Williams's essay when, after expressing her horror at Southern race distinctions, she concludes: "But, in spite of all this, I tried to adapt myself to these hateful conditions" (92). Through the remainder of her brief autobiography, Williams highlights her various encounters with the "hateful conditions" of racism and her efforts to ameliorate them as a public figure, but sidesteps the more personal issue of her own feelings as an object of hatred and a victim of prejudice. Williams also frequently depicts her own small triumphs over unjust laws and prejudices, as if to highlight her self-reliant, individualistic responses to racial prejudice. At one point, for example, Williams describes a successful attempt to avoid the "Jim Crow" car by speaking in French to the conductor, a small deception that she justifies by arguing that the South's "barbarous laws did not allow a lady to be both comfortable and honest" (95). While she admits that she "carried an abiding heartache for the refined and helpless colored women who must live continuously under these repressive and unjust laws," Williams tempers her own critique of those laws by emphasizing her frequently successful evasions of them.

Notably, Williams tempers the autobiographical content of her article even as she mitigates her condemnation of racial prejudice. "It is only just to add," she notes near the close of her essay, "that I have traveled in the first-class—that is, white—cars all through the South . . . but I have never received an insult or

discourtesy from a Southern white man" (96). Williams pulls back, as it were, from depicting her most profound and personal experiences of the race problem, focusing instead on how she has "adapted" to racist environments and, equally, how she has helped other, less fortunate women adapt to even more "hateful conditions." Indeed, in light of Williams's commitment to "various reform" causes and to ameliorating the "many inequalities suffered by young colored women" in particular, it is perhaps not surprising that even in writing an autobiography she defines herself largely in terms of her engagement on behalf of others. However, her autobiographical diplomacy might also reflect an awareness of the social recognition that attends publication, something that the three anonymous writers whose essays preceded hers would not have shared to the same extent. Cognizant that her "social if not personal safety" would not be protected by anonymity and that her public image would be grounded not only in her words and her racial identification but also in her name, Williams recognized the danger of publicly expressing unguarded feelings or unrestrained emotions on the race question. To be sure, Williams presents in her recollections of childhood a powerful critique of the ideology of "natural" racial distinctions and a vision of genuine, unconstrained bonds of affection between the races. But by accentuating what might be termed "experiences" and "observations" of the race problem over personal recounting and psychological accounting, Williams writes a life-story that effaces her private sense of self in favor of an autobiography of her social identity.

* * *

In contributing to the *Independent*'s brief series on the race problem, Fannie Barrier Williams and the anonymous "Southern Colored Woman" did not seize the agency of publication or the opportunity for public truth-telling in the same fashion or to identical ends. However, the publication of their autobiographical narratives in a leading, national American magazine lends to both narratives a significance beyond their explicit content as individual stories or their implicit assertions as cultural narratives. As forceful personal responses to the unasked question, How does it feel to be a problem?, the two autobiographical essays can be read as contributions to a broader expression of "the Negro point of view" in American periodicals at the turn of the century. Appealing to a desire for human interest stories on the part of American readers even as they appeal for human rights and full social, political, and personal recognition for African-Americans, the authors of these (and other) autobiographical essays exploit the opportunities for public truth-telling that the *Independent* afforded them. Taking advantage of both the form of the personal narrative and the forum of the nationally-circulated periodical, they compose individual life stories that also advance powerful readings of American national life, cultural narratives of African-American ability and achievement, commitment and contribution.

Writing not only to express a "Negro point of view" but also "from the feminine standpoint," these African-American autobiographers inevitably fashion their personal narratives within clear social parameters limiting free expression.

Desiring not only to protect personal and "social safety" but also to be regarded as exemplars of African-American propriety, virtue, and refinement, both women recognize that they cannot be "perfectly frank" (in the sense that Du Bois intends in his challenge to S. S. McClure) in writing of their private experiences of the race problem. The African-American woman writing from the South, for instance, offers a few prurient details about the "advances" of white men of her region, but her examples—a cashier holding her hand while "utter[ing] some vile request"; a "shoe man" taking "liberties"—function as much to attest to her untainted Victorian standards of decency and virtue as to reveal the depths of Southern male depravity (587). Williams, too, as noted, considers it "only just" to clear the Southern white men that she had encountered of any impropriety or offense. Both writers, to be sure, raise the more troubling issue of the sexual assault and oppression of African-American women in the South: The Southern woman expresses "dread" about the future her daughters might face (589), while Williams notes that "the moral feature of this problem has complications that it would seem better not to dwell on" (96). But they address this aspect of the race problem obliquely, indirectly, avoiding a "perfectly frank" discussion of subjects perhaps deemed too salacious or unseemly for public commentary.

However, the "feminine standpoint" also offers these and other African-American women a powerful position from which to speak with authority and to challenge prevailing cultural narratives about the race problem. Presenting narrative representations of the personal and familial experience of the race

problem and, more specifically, of its specifically *domestic* aspects, they bring the problem both literally and figuratively "closer to home." In doing so, these narrators reverse two prominent uses of domestic imagery at the turn of the century: first, the image of the sacred domestic sphere of the Southern white womn invaded by the "black beast," a frequently invoked stereotype of African-American male criminality and savagery; and second, the image of an equally hateful invasion of the domestic sphere should "social equality" become the rule of American society. In writing personal, emotion-filled narratives such as those published by the *Independent*, these autobiographers wrench the imagery of the domestic sphere from those who use it against them and wed that imagery instead to powerful representations of African-American humanity.

These autobiographical narratives by African-American women also issue a more general but more significant claim on white American readers at the turn of the century that, once acknowledged, can not be entirely revoked. By publishing individual representations of both a "Negro point of view" and a "feminine standpoint" on the race problem, these African-American women write themselves, in effect, into the discussion of a national problem. In her account of "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America," published in 1900 in *A New Negro for a New Century*, Fannie Barrier Williams praises that movement for "helping to give respect and character to a race of women who had no place in the classification of progressive womanhood in America": For the first time, she suggests, "the terms good and bad, bright, and dull, plain and beautiful are now as

applicable to colored women as to women of other races" (402). In this curious, seemingly modest achievement Williams discerns a profound advance for African-American women at the turn of the century, a growing recognition of their fundamental humanity and a gradual but significant alteration of the very language of the discussion surrounding the race problem. That simple, profound alteration as well as that growing recognition must be credited in part to those African-American individuals, both women and men, who contributed autobiographical narratives to periodicals such as the *Independent* at the turn of the century and, in so doing, claimed the agency to be found in answering questions too long unasked by white America.

*Chapter Three*

# Childhood in (Native) America: American Indian Autobiography at the Turn of the Century

It is one of the paradoxes marking the study of Native American literature that autobiographical narratives, so significant to any reckoning of that literature, have no direct antecedent in traditional American Indian cultures. Indeed, as Arnold Krupat notes, "Strictly speaking . . . Indian autobiography is a contradiction in terms," given that the most fundamental elements of autobiography as it is typically conceived—"egocentric individualism, historicism, and writing"—simply do not have direct parallels in pre-contact native cultures (*For Those* 29-30). Nonetheless, critical interest in Native American autobiography has increased exponentially during the last decade, spurred in part by Krupat's own groundbreaking theoretical work on the subject.[1] Much of this work has focused on autobiographical texts that feature Indian subjects but are not independently "authored" by those subjects in any conventional sense. Marked by

[1] See, for example, Krupat's *For Those Who Come After* (1985), *The Voice in the Margin* (1989), "Native American Autobiography" (1991), and *Native American Autobiography* (1994). The parameters of the study of Native American autobiography in the past decade have been set, to a considerable degree, by Krupat and a handful of other scholars: See Brumble (for bibliographic and literary-historical work); Bataille and Sands (for studies of Indian women's autobiography); and Wong (for suggestive work on pre-contact "oral and pictographic autobiographical narratives" and their resonance in later Native American literature).

what Krupat terms "original bicultural composite composition," these texts reflect the "original" contribution of an Indian subject (i.e., not merely *tribal* stories or legends) as well as the work of a collaborator, in most cases white, who "translates, transcribes, compiles, edits, interprets, polishes, and ultimately determines the form of the text in writing" (*For Those* 30-31). In spite of (or perhaps because of) the complications that such texts introduce into traditional (Western) conceptions of authorship and autobiography, critics have been drawn to them as sites at which "two cultures meet," "the textual equivalent of the frontier" (31).

Such bicultural, collaborative autobiographies were produced and published with increasing frequency at the turn of the twentieth century, one result of the marked upsurge of professionalized ethnographic study of Native American cultures a century ago. But the simultaneous expansion by the U. S. government of the national campaign to educate the remaining Indian population enabled more and more Native Americans to produce written narratives in English without the aid of any translator or transcriber. Educated Indians at the turn of the century, some armed with advanced degrees from respected "white" institutions of higher learning, began not only to compose but also to publish autobiographical narratives without the aid of "editors, ghosts, and amanuenses" (Brumble, *American* 72). These narratives, as many critics have noted, are "bicultural" in their own way, representing not only textually but often thematically the experience of individuals who know two worlds, two languages, two ways of life—individuals who, in a

sense, embody both the "native informant" of the ethnographer's study and the ethnographer him- or herself.[2] If such figures can more easily be read as autobiographers in the conventional sense, having produced individual, not composite, compositions, they also point to a paradox at the heart of the bi-cultural experience. Belonging fully to neither an Indian nor a "white" world, such individuals write their personal narratives in order to represent one world to the other; they negotiate the distance and the barriers between "savage" and "civilized" within texts composed in the language of "civilization." As Indians who have submitted, voluntarily or involuntarily, to the discipline of white-run schools, to the dominance of the English language, and to the conventions of the autobiographical form, these writers produce narratives that, perhaps even more than ethnographic "composite compositions," represent "the textual equivalent of the frontier."

The painful predicament that such a cultural position created for educated Indians at the turn of the century resonates in the autobiographical writing they produced. Charles Alexander Eastman, Zitkala-Sa, and Francis La Flesche, three of the best-known Native American writers of the period, all probe this predicament in their personal narratives, though with varying degrees of regret: Eastman's enthusiastic embrace of "civilization," for example, contrasts sharply

[2] Wong makes a similar suggestion when she argues that Charles Alexander Eastman "incorporated the collaborative process into himself, combining the functions of both white editor and Indian informant" (141).

with Zitkala-Sa's articulation of psychic dislocation. But the disparity among their responses only highlights the similarity of the means of expression that each selects. Even by writing their experiences independently and in English, first of all, these three writers reveal a certain submission to the dominance of a Euro-American, text-based culture. Likewise, by choosing to write autobiography in particular, they highlight their status as individuals, isolated, by choice or by coercion, from a primary identification with their tribe and forced, as it were, into a sense of themselves framed by what Krupat terms "egocentric individualism" and "historicism." That all three autobiographers published their writing for a primarily white, eastern audience, finally, points to their similar positioning as bi-cultural mediators of a sort, engaging "civilization" without leaving behind their "savage" pasts.

But perhaps the most intriguing correspondence among these three and many other Indian autobiographers at the turn of the century is the common choice of childhood as a primary topic of their autobiographical writing. Such a choice may appear to be self-evident in light of the simple correspondence of their experience of "Indian life" and their childhood years as well as the Western preoccupation with childhood as fundamental to the shape of one's life story. But as H. David Brumble notes, this latter conception, like those outlined by Krupat, does not have a parallel in most Native American cultures, in which "the story of one's life is the story of one's deeds, one's adult deeds" (*American* 49). Conversely, then, the choice of childhood as subject might be said to reflect the

extent to which these autobiographers had "assimilated" Western cultural assumptions. This implication inspires, for example, Bernd Peyer's argument that Eastman portrays "a somewhat idealized, nostalgic childhood . . . made to correspond to values adopted in the course of his later Christian upbringing" ("Charles" 233). But this assertion, too, raises troubling questions: Why, for example, would Native American writers seek to mediate the distance between white and Indian cultures by focusing on childhood at a time when Indians as a group were widely perceived as a "child race," requiring supervision and aid as "wards" of the superior white "civilization"? One might expect, rather, portraits of Indian *adulthood*, and Indian *manhood* in particular, in all its complexity and particularity and self-sufficiency. Instead, most Native American autobiographers at the turn of the century opted to focus their narratives on the period of childhood, a choice that seems curiously limited and limiting in light of the social, political, and emotional distance separating Indian and white worlds.

However, in the autobiographical narratives of Eastman, La Flesche, and Zitkala-Sa, at least, childhood does not represent merely an occasion for "idealized, nostalgic" reveries; on the contrary, recollections and representations of childhood constitute a significant and enabling element of their bi-cultural expressions. But no arbitrary measure of their allegiance to tribal identity or their "assimilation" to "white civilization" can illuminate the artistic choices made by these autobiographers. Instead, a historically sensitive consideration of their bi-cultural position requires an attentive reading of both the autobiographical *form* of

their narratives and the *forum*—specifically, mainstream American publishing houses and periodicals—through which they reached an audience. Such attentiveness to both the production and the consumption of their texts, both the content and the context, illuminates the uses of childhood as topic and theme in so many Indian autobiographies at the turn of the century and, at the same time, uncovers the significance of leading American periodicals as another "frontier" of sorts where "two cultures meet." Beginning with Charles Eastman's earliest autobiographical narratives, published in the children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, then briefly setting Eastman's work next to that of two of his contemporaries, La Flesche's book-length story of boyhood in *The Middle Five* and Zitkala-Sa's series of personal narratives in the *Atlantic Monthly*, this chapter examines the various ways in which these Indian writers engaged American "civilization" at the turn of the century on the social and discursive "frontier" of American childhood.

# I

## "Is it right for *St. Nick*?": Charles Alexander Eastman's "Recollections of the Wild Life"

In 1916, after establishing himself not only as a medical doctor and a spokesperson for Indian affairs but also as a writer of some repute, Charles Eastman published *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*.[3] In that text, his second full-length book of autobiography, Eastman recalls the fortuitous beginning of his literary career:

> While I had plenty of leisure, I began to put upon paper some of my earliest recollections, with the thought that our children might some day like to read of that wilderness life. When my wife discovered what I had written, she insisted upon sending it to *St. Nicholas*. Much to my surprise, the sketches were immediately accepted and appeared during the following year. This was the beginning of my first book, "Indian Boyhood," which was not completed until several years later. (139)

This straightforward, conventionally modest account of early literary aspirations offers a number of clues to Eastman's self-conscious narrative persona in his autobiographical writing. (As his wife, Elaine Goodale Eastman, notes in her Foreword to the volume, "much that cannot be told may be read 'between the lines'" [xviii].) First, the account begins with all the marks of Eastman's successful transition "from the deep woods to civilization": "plenty of leisure"; the nostalgic "recollections" of middle-age; thoughts of his posterity and the legacy of

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[3] For a biography of Eastman, see Wilson. Eastman's modest but genuine reputation as a writer at the turn of the century might be suggested by his attendance, along with many of the leading literary figures of the day, at Mark Twain's seventieth birthday party in 1905 (Wilson 150).

his "wilderness life"; and the ability to "put upon paper" those reflections, to manipulate written language. Eastman documents, that is, not only his distance from the life of the "woods" but also his readiness to take on the "civilized" role of the Author, in the most conventional (even old-fashioned, by the late nineteenth century) sense of a man of leisure recording his recollections for the edification of future generations. Eastman also downplays the aid of his wife in writing and publishing his recollections; in her own autobiography, Elaine Eastman notes that she "carefully edited" what her husband had written, "placed" it with *St. Nicholas* (a magazine to which she had once contributed poetry as a young girl), and "collaborated more or less" on all of his later books (*Sister* 173). Finally, Eastman's brief account of the start of his writing career glosses over the significance of *St. Nicholas* itself as the vehicle of his initial forays into professional authorship.

Most of Eastman's readers in 1916, however, would not have missed his casual reference to the periodical that, no doubt, many of them had relished as children. Though its prominence had faded somewhat by the time of Eastman's second autobiography, at the turn of the century *St. Nicholas*, along with its only considerable rival, *Youth's Companion*, far exceeded the general circulation of all of the leading "adult" magazines—*Atlantic, Harper's, Century*, and *Scribner's*—combined. During this "golden age" of children's literature generally, periodicals such as *St. Nicholas* held enormous cultural influence, not only devoured each month by child readers but also read by parents and teachers and read *to* children

by them (Gannon). Under the commanding editorship of Mary Mapes Dodge (author of the popular children's book *Hans Brinker; or, The Silver Skates*), *St. Nicholas* flourished during the last quarter of the nineteenth century by taking advantage of new advances in printing and illustration as well as the talents of nearly all of the best-known writers of the day, including Alcott, Longfellow, Kipling, Stevenson, Tennyson, Howells, and Twain (Saler and Cady 165). *St. Nicholas* serials such as Francis Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, eventually adapted for the New York stage, kindled national interest in a single fictional character (Gannon 165-75); and the magazine's *St. Nicholas League*, founded in 1899, encouraged the juvenile literary efforts of some of the most notable writers of the next generation, including Edna St. Vincent Millay, E. B. White, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, and William Faulkner (Gannon and Thompson 22, 167n32). In short, the cultural influence of *St. Nicholas*, both in American culture at large and on the careers of individual contributors such as Eastman, can hardly be overestimated.

Eastman's reported "surprise" at the magazine's acceptance of his sketches, then, perhaps reflects more than merely self-effacing modesty. Those sketches appeared serially between December 1893 and May 1894, sharing the pages of *St. Nicholas* with contributions by several respected contemporaries, including *Tom Sawyer Abroad* by Mark Twain and several stories by Rudyard Kipling that would become *The Jungle Book* and the *Just-So Stories*. Whether or not 1894 qualifies as "the *annus mirabilis*" of *St. Nicholas*'s lengthy run, as one account suggests (Saler

and Cady 165), the magazine certainly flourished during the 1890s; Eastman's surprise was no doubt warranted, as *St. Nicholas* was in a position to be editorially selective. As editor, Dodge closely controlled all of the contributions to the magazine (she did not hesitate, for example, to take her editorial scissors even to Twain's work, albeit "with a reverent hand"), and she forthrightly responded to many submissions with the phrase, "But is it right for *St. Nick*?" (Gannon and Thompson 147, 138). Given this context, it is interesting to speculate about the particular qualities that made Eastman's autobiographical narratives, in Dodge's consideration, "right for *St. Nick*."

The title of Eastman's series of sketches, whether chosen by Eastman, his wife, or Dodge, suggests one aspect of its appeal. "Recollections of the Wild Life," like the title of its later incarnation, *Indian Boyhood*, highlights not the individual subject or "self" of the autobiographical narratives but the facts of his existence, the "life" itself rather than the one who lived it. Perhaps not unlike other turn-of-the-century accounts such as *The Autobiography of a Thief*, a considerable part of the appeal of Eastman's narrative for readers of the time stemmed not from the particular facts of his life story but from the generalizable fact of his Indian identity. For a predominantly white, Eastern American readership, Eastman's memories of "wild" life revealed first-hand knowledge of both the "vanishing" Indian tribes and the "closing" frontier. For young readers, his recollections of Indian boyhood in particular presented that knowledge from a readily accessible point of view, not unlike other *St. Nicholas* articles such as "A

Boy in the White House" or "A Boy's Recollection of the Great Chicago Fire" (Erisman 381-82). Such an approach to the subject of Indian life made Eastman's sketches "right" for *St. Nicholas* insofar as it brought together instruction and entertainment in a way that might appeal to children, satisfying Dodge's desire to provide knowledge suitable for young readers but free of the stern (and "adult") moralizing of the majority of American children's magazines before *St. Nicholas* (Kelly 4).

Additionally, Eastman's "Recollections" correspond at least broadly to much of the nonfiction selected by Dodge for publication. In a descriptive essay on *St. Nicholas*, Fred Erisman divides the magazine's nonfictional contents into five categories, including the travel or geographical article, the biographical article, the historical article, the scientific article, and, the largest group, articles concerning "practical matters" of all kinds (381-83). Erisman mentions Eastman's "Recollections" as one example of the biographical article, typically revealing "the 'human' side" of its subject; but in fact Eastman's series might also be classified as historical, geographical, practical (in its indirect relation to the national discussion of the "Indian problem"), and even scientific (in its ethnographic analysis of the "games and sports" and the "training" of Indian children).[4] In this sense, though Eastman in no way follows a formulaic model in his "Recollections," his sketches satisfy the broad requirements of the magazine's usual nonfiction contents.

In a curious way, furthermore, Eastman's life story fulfills some of the prominent themes in the largely formulaic fiction published in *St. Nicholas*. Eastman's emphasis on life in the wild and on the training of Indian children parallels the rural or schoolhouse settings of many contemporary stories; the death of his mother, "the handsomest woman of all" the tribe (129), gives his story a sentimental poignancy; the firm but gentle instruction of his grandmother and uncle, Eastman's surrogate parents, recalls the parent-child scenes in so many domestic tales; and finally, the surprise reunion of Eastman and his father, long presumed dead, forms a suitably dramatic ending to a children's story. In addition, Eastman's account of his early life can be read as conforming to prevailing conceptions of childhood as a difficult, painful, but also profoundly formative period in one's life. In the fiction of juvenile magazines such as *St. Nicholas*, as R. Gordon Kelly notes, "Experience is a school for character: a basic form of legitimation found in the stories is the definition of life as an educational process" (152). Eastman's description of his "Early Hardships," both personal and communal or tribal, clearly conveys the sense that his character has been shaped by his early "instruction," especially the instruction of "Nature—the greatest schoolmistress of all" (129). At the same time, the text itself, written in English and without apparent aid, attests to Eastman's transcendence of the "wild" life

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[4] "Games and Sports" is the title for Part III of the "Recollections"; Part IV is titled "An Indian Boy's Training" (306, 437). Further references to Eastman's text will be cited parenthetically.

under the stronger influence of his schooling in "civilization." While American Indians were to be classified in toto as "wards" of the nation by the time he composed his recollections, Eastman makes it clear that he gleaned from his boyhood "training" the very virtue heralded above all others in magazines such as *St. Nicholas*: self-reliance (Erisman 386).

Thus, while Eastman's "Recollections of the Wild Life" is no rags-to-riches story (cf. Andrew Carnegie's "How I Served My Apprenticeship," published just two years later in the rival *Youth's Companion*), it is a success story of a sort, the "savagery-to-civilization" story also popular at the turn of the century. Like "the familiar Victorian 'waif'" stories in *St. Nicholas* in which a poor, uncivilized child is rescued by a kind, civilized benefactor (Gannon 162), Eastman's story ends with his "rescue" from the wild life by his long-lost father, who had been "prompted" by "his Christian love" to pass "through the vast wilderness" in search of his son ("Recollections" 610). And just as those stories frequently include a "final hint that the assisted waif could one day become an adult empowered to help others" (Gannon 165), Eastman's sketches include such a hint in the repeated byline, "By *Dr.* Charles Alexander Eastman." Of course, the aid that Eastman had already brought to American Indians as a government physician is indisputable—a few years earlier, for example, while serving at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, Eastman led a search for survivors after the massacre at Wounded Knee—but his life story in this case corresponded neatly with the demands of certain fictional formulas prevalent in magazines such as *St. Nicholas*. Insofar as his life itself represented

an American success story, Eastman's "Recollections" would likely have appealed to Dodge as "right for *St. Nick*."

And if the moral or instructional element of Eastman's "Recollections" satisfied *St. Nicholas*'s adult readers, its entertainment value no doubt answered the demands of the magazine's younger readers. Clearly, Eastman revised (if he did not compose) his sketches for this audience in particular. Many of the scenes from his early childhood must have fascinated children living in rapidly industrializing eastern cities who would have known little of the "wild" life themselves. Eastman describes, for example, being wrapped tightly as an infant in an "Indian cradle" (helpfully illustrated by *St. Nicholas*), then hung in trees where birds and chipmunks would visit him, or pulled behind dogs in a rawhide-and-pole travois (129-30, 226). Older children might have been drawn to the Indian stories and legends that Eastman heard from his uncle and grandmother, or to the various lessons that Eastman learned "direct from Nature" rather than in a confining schoolhouse (129). Such children would surely have envied Eastman's life as "a prince of the wilderness" and a "master of his time," with few obligations but his "games and sports" (306). Eastman shapes his recollections of those activities, furthermore, with these readers in mind: He notes, for example, that the "mud-and-willow" game is played "as boys throw apples from sticks," that Indian wrestling matches are "fully equal to the American game of foot-ball," and that playing "'Medicine Dance'" was, to Indian children, "almost what 'playing church' is among white children" (307). Such cross-cultural comparisons would have

encouraged imaginative identification on the part of Eastman's young readers, lessening the distance between the "wild" and the "civilized" life even as that distance constituted much of the appeal of the "Recollections."

Though the exact nature of Eastman's composition of his "Recollections" is unknown, such examples indicate the extent to which he shaped those sketches for the audience he would reach through *St. Nicholas*. To be sure, Eastman claimed in his later autobiography that he had begun to write his stories for his own children before even considering publication.[5] But the idea of presenting his "recollections of the wild life" to perhaps one hundred thousand American children and parents would, no doubt, have altered Eastman's presentation of that life—perhaps even shaped his recollections of it.[6] A more challenging question remains, however: If Eastman consciously composed his autobiographical narratives for publication in *St. Nicholas*, to what *ends* did he do so? That is, what did Eastman hope to accomplish in reaching a wide audience of American parents and children with his "Recollections of the Wild Life"? Did he hope to instruct those readers first and foremost, or entertain? Challenge their views of Indian ways of life and Indians

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[5] Eastman probably began writing after the birth of Dora, his first child, in May 1892; he and Elaine would have five other children, including Ohiyesa II, the son to whom he dedicates *Indian Boyhood*.

[6] Any shaping of the text by Elaine Goodale Eastman as she "carefully edited" Eastman's writing remains, unfortunately, impossible to specify beyond critical conjecture—of which there is plenty (see, e.g., Miller). For an analysis of the editing that may have been done by Dodge, prior to publication of the "Recollections" in *St. Nicholas*, see below.

themselves, or cater to their expectations? Confront their misconceptions and stereotypes, or confirm their prevailing beliefs?

The answers to these questions, as suggested already, must not rest simply on an ahistorical measure of Eastman's presumed "assimilation" to prevailing ideologies about Indians. But neither is close textual analysis of the "Recollections" alone sufficient: Instead, questions regarding Eastman's aesthetic principles and ideological motives, about the form and content of his autobiographical writing, should be examined in the context of the forum through which his writing was circulated and the audience to whom it was directed. What other images of Indians and the "wild life," for example, did *St. Nicholas* choose to publish? And what were the widely held preconceptions and stereotypes of the magazine's audience that would have shaped their reception of Eastman's portrayal of Indian life? The first of these questions is more easily answered than the second: In the February 1894 issue of *St. Nicholas*, for example, the story immediately following Eastman's third installment relates the adventures of a "true scion of the brave Pilgrim stock" who, while on his way to deliver an urgent message, encounters "a band of savages who seemed to have sprung out of the earth" (Hamilton 311-12). The Indians capture the boy and brandish their knives, but, fortunately for this clever and resourceful young man, the "savages" have never encountered ice skates, and in the process of illustrating how the strange "white-face moccasin[s]" are used, he manages to escape a "shower of arrows" and complete his mission (311, 313). In this story, Indians are represented as little

more than an amalgam of stereotypes and a convenient foe for a courageous young boy, whose superior mental agility triumphs over the simple brute force of an entire "band of savages." Young readers of *St. Nicholas* are encouraged to admire and emulate the boy's bravery, but at the same time, if they are adept at both speaking and skating, the fairly ridiculous efforts of the Indians to master "pale-face talk" and "ice-moccasins" provide a bit of innocent entertainment (312-13). Challenging such simplistic and, in some sense, "empty" images of Indians certainly inspired Eastman's desire to offer a fuller, more accurate portrait by publishing his own first-hand recollections of Indian life. (Even a simple comment that "Shinny [a variation of hockey], such as is enjoyed by white boys on ice, is now played by the Western Sioux" (307), forms an interesting if unintentional contrast to the slapstick illustrations, a few pages later, of Indians on ice skates—proud braves quite literally "brought low" [312].) But Eastman's text also engages broader, far more complex discourses surrounding the Indian at the end of the nineteenth century, discourses that allied the Indian and childhood in provocative and unsettling ways.

## II

## The Indian as Child, the Child as Indian: Metaphor and Stereotype at the Turn of the Century

In his own autobiography of childhood years, *A Boy's Town*, serialized in *Harper's Young People* in 1890, William Dean Howells draws on a popular metaphor used to describe the American Indian in order to characterize American children:

> The Young People may have heard it said that a savage is a grown-up child, but it seems to me even more true that a child is a savage. Like the savage, he dwells on an earth round which the whole solar system revolves, and he is himself the centre of all life on the earth. It has no meaning but as it relates to him; it is for his pleasure, his use; it is for his pain and his abuse. It is full of sights, sounds, sensations, for his delight alone, for his suffering alone . . . . (714)

Howells's concern throughout *A Boy's Town* centers on the latter, inverted metaphor regarding the "savagery" of the child; he does not elaborate upon the child-likeness of the Indian except as it serves his own mock-ethnography of the American boy's savage-like "Manners and Customs" (756). The nonchalance of Howells's appeal to each of these metaphors ("[children] *may have heard it said* . . ."; "*it seems to me* . . .") corresponds to the easy-going, avuncular tone of *A Boy's Town* generally; but his blitheness belies the darker side of prevailing notions about the nature of both Indian life and childhood. Howells's linking of the two metaphors masks a more fundamental connection between two prominent issues at the end of the nineteenth century, two broad social discussions around which two separate discourses converged: the Indian and the child. Fully appreciating the

uses to which childhood was put by Native American autobiographers such as Eastman requires an examination of the connections between these two discourses and the structure of metaphor and stereotype that linked Indian identity and childhood at the turn of the century.

Howells's assumption that "The Young People" who read *Harper's Young People* magazine "may have heard it said that a savage is a grown-up child" suggests just how widespread such a notion was at the end of the nineteenth century. Grounded in Social Darwinist beliefs prevalent at the time, this view of the Indians as a "race" judged them to be not merely inferior to the white race or simply uneducated, ignorant of "civilized" manners and customs, but rather fundamentally child-like. Seen through the racial ideologies of the time, Native Americans appeared to be frozen in an early stage of development, no more advanced than the children of the "advanced" races: improvident, generous to a fault, unable to comprehend the cause-and-effect of either science or capitalism, unwilling to grasp the higher understanding of white civilization. Like infants, Indians seemed to exhibit "an absorption in sensations and perceptions," as the renowned sociologist Herbert Spencer noted (qtd. in Brumble 160); for the Indian, as Howells assented, the world "is full of sights, sounds, sensations, for his delight alone, for his suffering alone" (714). Just as a boy believes himself to be "the centre of all life on the earth," the world having "no meaning but as it relates to him," the Indian embodies this fundamental selfishness, a trait that obviously makes him unfit for participation in society as an equal, if at all. No wonder, then,

that as independent survival became increasingly unlikely toward the close of the nineteenth century, the prevailing "civilized" sentiment toward Indians conceived of them as "wards" of the nation.

To be sure, one prominent line of thought regarding the Indians imagined them as anything but helpless, emphasizing instead the need to eliminate this ferocious enemy before civilization could complete its work on the recently closed frontier. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, reviewing two studies of "Indian Warfare on the Frontier" in 1892, praised the past work of the American military in subduing the "powerful tribes of singularly warlike and bloodthirsty savages" and pushing "the frontier of civilization" westward. Without their efforts, he concluded, many areas "would still be in the possession of hostile Indians, and the work of settlement could not have reached its present point" (255). This rhetoric of the Indian as "singularly," unredeemably savage, it should be noted, might also link childhood and Indian identity, but to support quite a different argument: specifically, that because the Indian was by nature a savage, the Indian child was no less a savage than the adult. Roosevelt drew on this imagery in his multi-volume nationalistic drama about *The Winning of the West*:

> Anyone who has ever been in an encampment of wild Indians, and has had the misfortune to witness the delight the children take in torturing little animals, will admit that the Indian's love of cruelty for cruelty's sake cannot possibly be exaggerated. The young are so trained that when old they shall find their keenest pleasure in inflicting pain in its most appalling form . . .. (qtd. in Brands 323)

What is civilization to do, Roosevelt's portrayal implicitly asks, with such a race in the way of its advance? When even the children of the "wild Indians" exhibit such sadistic "delight" in their savagery, what options does civilization have but to confront this stubborn obstacle and trust in that contemporary dogma, "the survival of the fittest"?

Such a conception of the Indian child-as-savage, however, contended with the more benevolent and sympathetic (if similarly reductionistic) view of the Indian-as-child. One fascinating example of such a view appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January 1899 under the heading, "The Wild Indian." Written by George Bird Grinnell, the editor of *Forest and Stream* and a leader, with Roosevelt, of the "Boone and Crockett Club" (Hoxie 84), the essay begins with the premise that "the Indian problem remains a problem . . . because we have no sufficient knowledge of the people we are striving to teach" (Grinnell 20). Grinnell makes it clear that his own first-hand knowledge of Indian life qualifies him to address the problem: Having "lived with the plains people in their homes, engaging in their pursuits, sharing their joys and sorrows," Grinnell assures his readers that he has "thus learned to think and feel as an Indian thinks and feels, and to see things as he sees them and from his point of view" (20). This remarkably audacious statement of credentials prefaces a lengthy discussion intended to prove to the readers of the *Atlantic* that "if [the Indian] is a savage, he is also a man" (21). Throughout, Grinnell counters several popular stereotypes and offers examples of social forms and customs among the Indians that parallel those of

"civilization," noting, for example, that "the family relation among the buffalo savages of the plains . . . is essentially the same that holds good among civilized people" (27). Nevertheless, he concludes that "the Indian of to-day," like the "wild" Indian of old, "reasons like a child": "Most of the processes of civilization are as obscure to him as is the art of writing to a four-year-old child and, like a child, the Indian must have instruction—often repeated—before he can comprehend these processes, and much practice before he can perform them" (28). This analogy captures in miniature the double-bind in which Native Americans were locked in the late-nineteenth-century "scientific" discourse used to characterize them. Full humanity and equality with the "more advanced races" required the comprehension and "performance" of the "processes of civilization," including writing, but the Indian was by definition a "a man . . . in the child stage of development," to whom writing would remain "obscure" and civilization a far-off ideal (21, 28).

Howells's literary use of the metaphor of the Indian-as-child participates in the same broad set of images, beliefs, and stereotypes regarding the racial traits of Native Americans as Grinnell's "scientific," sociological application. But where Grinnell claims a remarkable affinity with the Indian, having "learned" not only to think and feel but to see as the Indian sees, Howells repeatedly asserts the impenetrable, incomprehensible quality of both the "savage" life and the child's life. While Grinnell attempts to bring Indian life closer to home, in a sense—emphasizing details of domestic arrangement and child-rearing among the Indians,

for example—Howells, looking at the "world" of the child, makes of it a far-off wilderness, a strange and alien place no adult can hope to enter:

> His world is all in and through the world of men and women, but no man or woman can get into it any more than if it were a world of invisible beings. It has its own ideals and superstitions, and these are often of a ferocity, a depravity, scarcely credible in afterlife . . . . No doubt it will be civilized in time, but it will be very slowly . . . . (757)

Howells clearly exaggerates his description of the "ferocity" and "depravity" of children for comic effect—he is describing, of course, *his own* boyhood. But just as clearly, Howells uses as the vehicle of his metaphor the portrait of Indian savagery presented by Roosevelt and others, positing a savagery "scarcely credible" to a civilized onlooker just as Roosevelt asserted that "the Indian's love of cruelty for cruelty's sake cannot possibly be exaggerated." By invoking the widely held notion that "a savage is a grown-up child," Howells reinforces that belief; by suggesting that "it seems . . . *even more true* that a child is a savage," he makes it clear that the truth of the metaphor which he modifies will not be questioned or challenged by his playful development of its inverse (714; emphasis added). Howells can hyperbolize the savagery of the child, furthermore, because of the obvious corollary that the child will inevitably *grow up*—there is, indeed, "no doubt it will be civilized in time." The Indian, by contrast, is destined to remain a "child" even as a "grown-up."

If Howells contributed in this way to the broader discourse characterizing the Indian, however, his autobiography engages even more fully in contemporary

social and cultural discussions surrounding childhood. Thomas Cooley cites Howells's *A Boy's Town* as one example of "the boy's book" of this period, a "subspecies of autobiography" that reflected a general "fascination" with children and childhood as well as new scientific theories regarding childhood development (65). Those new theories, as Cooley summarizes, held that "each period of growth in a human life constituted a distinct phase of development; infancy, childhood, and adolescence came to be seen as discrete, though connected, stages in a long process" (19). (Thus, when Grinnell notes that Indians need insistent instruction in order to comprehend the "processes" of civilization, the image is of a race fixed in an early stage of development, unable to advance "naturally" as the children of civilized peoples did.) The new science of "child-study" advanced quickly at the end of the nineteenth century, stimulated by widespread interest in psychology generally and the subjective life of the mind in particular. The belief in the existence of a "unique culture" of children, for example, became popular among middle-class Americans (Cooley 19), a fact that helps to explain the staggering circulation figures for magazines such as *Youth's Companion* and *St. Nicholas*: As parents sought to provide their children with instruction and entertainment designed to meet the particular needs of childhood, periodicals were created to cater to that desire.

Henry Mills Alden, writing in his "Editor's Study" column for *Harper's Monthly* in 1904, reveals something of this contemporary enthusiasm for scientific "child-study" at the end of the nineteenth century. Examining American

achievements in the short story by invoking an evolutionary metapor, Alden offers "the child-story" as one promising new "species" in American fiction:

> What different types of stories it has brought forth under the very eyes of our readers from month to month! It is as if *a new continent* had been discovered . . . . [S]uddenly, as the result of our growing habit of psychical research and subjective analysis, we came to an appreciation of what is going on spontaneously, beneath the surface, in a child's mind—and we watched and listened for intimations from *this newly found kingdom of the Naïve*. (316; emphasis added)

Notably, Alden's fascination with the "spontaneous" activity of the child's mind, hidden from adult view, parallels Howells's image of the child's inaccessible world of "ideals and superstitions," despite the contrast between Howells's "savage" world of childhood and Alden's "kingdom of the Naïve." Their two responses, furthermore, suggest something of the dual nature of contemporary interest in childhood. On the one hand, Americans during the late nineteenth century heralded the triumph of "civilization" over the ignorance and uncontrolled violence of the primitive and the savage, using the metaphor of the "childhood of the race" to signify all that civilization had advanced beyond in reaching "adulthood."[7] On the other hand, as T. J. Jackson Lears argues compellingly, Americans at the end of the nineteenth century also began to fear the effects of "overcivilization"—the debilitating decline of spontaneity, vitality, and vigor brought on by the rise of modernity, materialism, and luxury (4, *passim*). Unsettled by this ambivalence with regard to civilization itself, Americans sought in images of childhood a certain innocence and ease, a sense of wonder and

mystery unconcerned with the dictates of rationality, an expression and embodiment of freedom from overcivilization and repression.

This dual perspective on childhood is neatly captured in Alden's description of the world of the child as "this newly found kingdom of the Naïve." The various connotations of the latter term are, it might be noted, somewhat at odds: "Naïveté " suggests not only "an unaffected simplicity," a directness of expression unmediated by calculation or sophistry, but also credulity, ignorance of social custom, a deficiency of "worldly wisdom" ("Naïve"). Applied to the "kingdom" of childhood, the term functions, first, to reinforce an image of childhood as innocent, ingenuous, unaffected, simple. But marking the world of childhood as "naïve" also distances it from the province of "adult" American civilization, a province whose dominant characteristics at the turn of the century were craft, calculation, vigorous competition—in short, capitalistic savvy. The "naïveté" of childhood represented, thus, both a sign of the progress of civilization away from primitivism *and* an ideal against which civilization might be judged. Lears, highlighting a similar pairing of the "social uses" of childhood, explains their apparent contradiction this way: "On the one hand, an exaltation of childishness pointed to a critique of adult conventions; on the other hand, it accommodated adults to those conventions by providing a brief, imaginary escape from them" (144). In this way, childhood stood for no single ideal or idea but rather figured a

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[7] On the conception of the "childhood of the race," see Lears 92, 144-49.

variety of potentially contradictory social beliefs, images, and anxieties.

It is on this ground that conceptions of the "Naïve" and the "Native" intersect and, at times, converge. As ingenious and off-handed as Howells's inversion of the "Indian-as-child" metaphor appears, it draws from two broad social discussions and two separate discourses that already shared some common ground. Notably, the connection that Howells seems to draw merely as a starting-point for his mock-ethnography of childhood returns several times throughout *A Boy's Town*: The metaphor functions too well to ignore, it seems, as Howells can draw from so many associations already attached to the Indian in his description of children.[8] After establishing the metaphor, in fact, Howells can appeal to it without explicit reference, as when he describes the boys' "instinct of getting, of hoarding" as the "motive for all their foraging; they had no other idea of property than the bounty of nature; and this was well enough as far as it went, but their impulse was not to share this bounty with others, but to keep it each for himself . . ." (855). Here one veiled reference to the Indian piles atop another, without any mention of a parallel between the children Howells describes and the (stereotypical) Indians who provide the details of his description. Howells continues by noting the strange systems of exchange that operate among boys, their curious hoarding (then wasting) of "nuts and acorns," the peculiar value they attach to marbles and tops and mussel-shells, and the absolute lack of a "sense of

[8] For examples of Howells's use of the Indian-child analogy, see pp. 714-15, 757, 812-15, and 856.

profit or saving" among boys "too wildly improvident for anything of the kind" (856). Only after this litany of primitive ways does Howells again make explicit his metaphor, noting, "They were savages in this as in many other things, but noble savages . . ." (856).

If Howells attempts in *A Boy's Town* to reconstruct imaginatively the actual "manners and customs" of the boy "natives" of his town (856), he does so in part by drawing from a stock set of images of the Indian, using stereotype as the vehicle for his recurring metaphor. He does not base his ideas about the Indian on any first-hand knowledge of Native American life, as Grinnell so proudly claims; in fact, on one of the rare occasions during Howells's narrative of childhood when "genuine Indians" appear in his Boy's Town, they are portrayed shooting their arrows "at cents and bits and quarters that anybody could stick in the ground"—performing, that is, in the role of Indians. But both Grinnell and Howells finally agree on the nature of the relation of Indians to civilization: Grinnell's depiction of the remarkable honesty and generosity of the Indians, however well-informed or well-intentioned, finally amounts to the same conclusion as Howells's description (by way of metaphor) of the "wildly improvident" ways of the Indian. Indians are, in a word, *naïve*: too simple, innocent, ingenuous, too *childlike*, to ever compete with the "adult" races in the highly advanced, civilized, capitalist economy of America.

This conclusion—portrayed by both Grinnell and Howells as more or less incontrovertible, a foregone conclusion—forms a part of the intersecting

discourses surrounding the child and the Indian at the turn of the century to which many Native American writers responded. Autobiographers such as Eastman, Zitkala-Sa, and La Flesche composed their writing in a second language, the language of American civilization, the language in which figures such as Grinnell and Howells held respected and culturally powerful roles as writers and editors. They also engaged, from a peculiarly bi-cultural position, the two discourses of the Indian and the child as they intersected within their own lives: In writing personal narratives, in contrast to fiction or poetry or even Indian legends, each of these writers confronted the beliefs, images, and stereotypes embedded in the very language of American "civilization" with the evidence of their own life stories.

## III

## The Problem and Possibilities of Indian Childhood: Publication and Charles Eastman's Early Autobiographical Writing

In a theoretical review of the "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," Georges Gusdorf notes that the autobiographer

> commences, in a manner of speaking, with the problem [i.e., of the self, the life, the text] already solved. Moreover, the illusion begins from the moment that the narrative *confers a meaning* on the event which, when it actually occurred, no doubt had several meanings or perhaps none. (42)

The shape of an autobiography, its specific inclusions and exclusions, Gusdorf continues, reflects the particular imperatives of "the writer who remembers and wants to gain acceptance for this or that revised and corrected version of his past, his private reality" (42). Gusdorf's characterization of the autobiographical

narrator unwittingly points to both the potential and the difficulties that autobiography entailed for turn-of-the-century Native American writers such as Charles Eastman. On the one hand, Eastman indeed sought to "gain acceptance" for a certain "revised and corrected version" of the past, a version that recognized, even valorized, the admirable traits and virtues of Indian tribal life. On the other hand, Eastman did not have the option of writing solely about "*his* past, his *private reality.*" He could not, that is, write an autobiography with the "problem" of his existence already solved, because the particular problem of his "self" was bound up—for himself and certainly for his American audience—with the larger, societal "problem" of the Indian. Likewise, any textual version of the self that he crafted would be most readily understood by his audience through the discourse already formulated around America's "Indian problem."

Furthermore, by writing about his recollections of an Indian childhood and by publishing those recollections in *St. Nicholas*, Eastman again achieved certain possibilities of expression and circulation at the expense of definite limitations on that expression and on its reception. Eastman's earliest attempts at writing about his life as a child were edited, perhaps considerably, both by Elaine Eastman, his wife, and by Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of *St. Nicholas*—each of whom no doubt recognized potential uses of the "Recollections" that differed somewhat

from Eastman's own intentions.[9] Furthermore, Eastman recognized that his audience would likely read his writing through several frames of reference, bringing to the text certain expectations and preconceptions about the "wild life" of the Indian as well as about the nature of childhood. (Indeed, whether the audience of *St. Nicholas* would be willing to apply what they believed about childhood generally to the particular childhood of an Indian is certainly one of the underlying questions of Eastman's "Recollections.") In seeking to craft his personal sketches in such a way that they appealed to children as well as adult readers and, at the same time, informed them about the actual conditions of Indian life as he had known it, Eastman had to accept the peculiar limitations imposed by the language in which he wrote, the forum through which he published his writing, and the preconceptions of his audience. An examination of these constraints illuminates the ways in which Eastman chose to negotiate in his writing the possibilities and liabilities of an autobiographical account of an Indian childhood.

As Eastman notes in his 1916 autobiography, the sketches published in *St. Nicholas* constituted "the beginning" of his first full-length book, *Indian Boyhood*, "not completed until several years later" (139). The exact nature of Eastman's composition of both the "Recollections" and *Indian Boyhood* is, of course, impossible to ascertain from the published texts alone; however, a close

[9] Wilson notes that, according to one of Eastman's grandsons, Eastman "deeply resented the way Elaine would rewrite and change the meaning of his manuscripts" (164).

comparison of the two texts reveals clues about the editing that may have occurred before Eastman's "Recollections" was printed in *St. Nicholas*. While such analysis remains speculative, patterns of internal evidence combined with a record of considerable textual editing by Dodge suggest that at least a few significant alterations were made to Eastman's text before publication. Because Eastman retained most of what he wrote for *St. Nicholas* in its original form when he included it in the considerably longer *Indian Boyhood*, the points at which the two texts diverge raise questions about the origin of the changes. Some of the variation between the two texts suggests that Eastman did not merely expand or elaborate on his earlier "Recollections" to create *Indian Boyhood* but may also have *restored* parts of his original composition that were altered by Dodge's exercise of editorial license.

That Dodge considered it her duty to exercise that privilege is well-recorded. Susan Gannon and Ruth Anne Thompson report, for example, that in addition to editing contributions for objectionable language, scenes, or behavior, "Dodge turned down for publication anything that in her view was overly didactic, sectarian, lachrymose, politically divisive, or morally dubious" (139).[10] She also did not hesitate to shape contributions to resemble more closely the dignified and genteel tone of *St. Nicholas*'s parent magazine, *Scribner's Monthly* (145). Hints of

[10] Gannon and Thompson base their assertions on contemporary comments of *St. Nicholas* contributors as well as "a close examination of Dodge's editorial correspondence and a comparative study of corrected manuscripts and their published versions" (138).

such shaping of Eastman's texts emerge from a comparison of "Recollections" and *Indian Boyhood*. Minor syntactical and grammatical variations, for example, such as the use of far more exclamation points in "Recollections," suggest an editorial approach (and perhaps a house style) that sought to cultivate interest and enthusiasm on the part of young readers. Another minor alteration seems to have been made to the language used by Eastman's uncle in his role as educator in "An Indian Boy's Training": His instruction in *Indian Boyhood*, "Hakadah, look closely to everything you see" (44), for example, appears in "Recollections" as "Hakada, watch everything closely and observe its characteristics" (438).[11] It seems unlikely that Eastman would have altered the latter, more genteel phrasing into the former; Dodge, on the other hand, worked hard to avoid printing not only vulgarisms but any "models of less-than-standard speech that young readers might imitate" (Gannon and Thompson 144).[12] Particularly because Eastman's uncle was speaking in the role of an educator, offering lessons that might fruitfully be followed by the child readers of *St. Nicholas* as well as by an Indian boy, Dodge no doubt wished to satisfy the stringent demands of parents and teachers for

[11] Eastman explains in his first installment that his name as a child was Hakada, meaning "the pitiful last," given to him when his mother died soon after his birth. He was given the name Ohiyesa, meaning "the winner," after his band of Sioux defeated another in a lacrosse-like game at the tribe's Midsummer Feast (*Indian Boyhood* 37).

[12] This editorial precaution does not seem to apply, it might be noted, to the speech of the "band of savages" in "A Skater's Stratagem," the story noted above: In such cases, the adulterated English of the Indians works to reinforce their distance from "civilization" as well as their comic ignorance.

strictly grammatical expression even at the expense of a certain local-color realism.

A much more significant variation between "Recollections" and *Indian Boyhood* also seems to reflect Dodge's editorial imperatives, specifically her antipathy to anything that appeared to be "morally dubious." In his description of the "Games and Sports" of Indian children, Eastman notes, "Sometimes we played 'Medicine Dance,'" an activity he compares to "what 'playing church' is among white children" (307). Two paragraphs in "Recollections" describe the children's "sacrilegious" mimicry of the "real dances" performed by adults; but several more paragraphs of description, printed in *Indian Boyhood*, appear to have been excised. While Eastman may have expanded his description of the games for the later publication, it seems more likely that Dodge found the section "morally dubious," at best, and "sacrilegious" indeed, at worst: As depicted by Eastman, the mock-ceremony involves not only the killing of several birds, but also the feigned ritual slaying, burial, and resurrection of several Indian children (59-60). If Dodge expressed editorial concern over nonstandard English usage, she would certainly have disapproved of the graphically "heathen" quality of this scene—not to mention the possibility of impressionable young readers attempting the ritual slaughter of neighborhood sparrows for their mock-Indian "games."

Along with the "morally dubious," commentary of a "politically divisive" nature also appears to have been altered by the editorial pen (and scissors) of *St. Nicholas*. In describing his "Early Hardships" in *Indian Boyhood*, for example,

Eastman writes of his tribe's flight to Canada after the "Minnesota massacre"—an event that led to the imprisonment of Eastman's father, later spared from execution along with several hundred other Sioux by the intervention of Abraham Lincoln (see Wilson 15-16). Eastman's version of these events in *Indian Boyhood* highlights the desperation of the Indians of his tribe, deprived of food, water, and sleep and relentlessly pursued to the border of Canada by "great numbers" of heavily armed "Wasechu (white men)" (12). In *St. Nicholas*, Eastman's account only briefly describes that journey, highlighting his "first experience with a civilized vehicle," a stolen "white-man's team" and wagon (226). Clearly, Eastman's longer account represents a more coherent narrative and more fully explains the title applied to both versions, "Early Hardships." But it also represents a more "politically divisive" outlook on the conflict between the United States military and the Indians in the 1860s and after; and, though Eastman makes no direct or intemperate accusations of any kind in the longer account, it seems evident that the material was deemed too contentious for *St. Nicholas*.

Ironically, apparently excised along with this scene is a comment that suggests Eastman's generally (and sometimes remarkably) accommodating stance throughout his early autobiographical writing: "I was now an exile as well as motherless; yet I was not unhappy. . ." (13-14). It is almost as if the personal details of Eastman's experience intersect too clearly at this moment with the details of the violence between the Sioux (and Indian tribes, generally) and the American military, and thus become as inflammatory as overtly political rhetoric:

"Exile" carries all of the emotional weight that Eastman downplays in documenting a "journey [that] *is still vividly recollected by all our family*" (326; emphasis added). A similar slighting of personal expression as it relates to the historically specific events of Eastman's life recurs, if on a smaller scale, in his final installment, "First Impressions of Civilization." That sketch begins, "I was scarcely old enough to know anything definite about the 'Big Knives,' as we called the white men, when the terrible Minnesota massacre occurred, and I was carried into British Columbia" (607). When the passage appears in *Indian Boyhood*, however, the sentence concludes, ". . . when the terrible Minnesota massacre *broke up our home*, and I was carried into *exile*" (239; emphasis added). Again, it seems unlikely, given the repetition of the term "exile" as well as other internal evidence, that Eastman altered this text when preparing *Indian Boyhood.* Rather, the avowed interest of Dodge and *St. Nicholas* in avoiding any suggestion of political partisanship offers a more plausible explanation of the textual variations between the two versions, between the emotionally laden language of *Indian Boyhood* and the far more neutral description in "Recollections."

If Dodge indeed edited Eastman's text as suggested, it should be clear that precisely in the excision of that which is historically specific in Eastman's original text, she diminished that which is autobiographical. In downplaying the reasons for the tribe's movement, for example, but maintaining Eastman's lighter description of "the mode of traveling" or the "innocent fun" of the Indian boys along the way (226), Dodge subtly but substantially altered the balance that

Eastman had crafted between the personal and the tribal and historical, the autobiographical and the more-broadly documentary. To be sure, both the "Recollections" and *Indian Boyhood* downplay Eastman's "autobiography" in any conventional sense, perhaps because Eastman recognized, as noted above, that the primary appeal of his Indian childhood derived from his Indian-ness, not his unique, personal history. But even brief hints, suggestive descriptions of "home" and "exile," ground his description of the games, sports, training, and hunting of Indian boys in a broader social and historical context. Lifting the descriptive and documentary parts of Eastman's text from a concrete historical setting, slightly drawn as it is, alters the impact and meaning of his "recollections" of the "wild life."

Highlighting the apparent editorial limitations on Eastman's expression, however, only points to the broader, more significant limitations imposed by the expectations and preconceptions of the readers of *St. Nicholas*. While the myriad choices made by a magazine editor may express his or her deeply held personal vision, the editor's primary role always remains that of catering to the needs and desires of a reading public. Dodge, even as the powerful "Conductor" of *St. Nicholas* (Gannon and Thompson 104), always understood that the "moral mission" of her magazine should never be pursued at the expense of affirming and entertaining her readers: In short, whatever *needs* she may have perceived among her youthful readers, Dodge never neglected their *desires*. By all accounts, Dodge exhibited from the inception of *St. Nicholas* a keen sense for the tastes and

expectations of her readership, both children and their parents, and her editorial choices need to be understood in the context of her attempt to satisfy what those readers wanted to find in a children's magazine.[13]

In the case of the representation of the Indian, what those readers wanted to find (and what *St. Nicholas* supplied) included both documentary and imaginary portrayals of Indian life but excluded the politically charged, historically specific aspects of the Indian's existence. In the children's "pleasure-ground" that *St. Nicholas* sought to create (Dodge 29), the Indian would appear only in isolation from suggestions of the "problem" that attended discussions of the Indian in "adult" publications.[14] Documentary information about tribal ways and customs, reflecting the increasing interest among anthropologists and sociologists in the "vanishing" Indian tribes, offered young readers a purportedly "neutral," "scientific" picture of Indian life, not altogether unlike natural-history studies of the animal life of America. (One of Eastman's installments appeared in the same issue as a study of "Our Wolves and Foxes" in which the author remarks, "It is really wonderful the way the Red Fox *clings to civilization, and utterly refuses to be exterminated*, even in the most populous portions of the United States . . ." [488; emphasis added].) At the same time, imaginative representations of Indian

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[13] See Dodge's 1873 essay, "Children's Magazines," for an early statement of her principles regarding the proper form and content of the juvenile periodical. This essay, generally considered Dodge's prospectus for the creation of *St. Nicholas*, contains her often-quoted assertion that "the ideal child's magazine. . . is a pleasure-ground" (29).

life, largely empty of any historically specific reference, offered readers an opportunity to experience that life vicariously or enter it as imaginary participants. Both the documentary and the imaginary portrayals of Indian life, moreover, worked together to encourage this sort of imaginative engagement—a response sanctioned in American society at large by a curious and widespread association of the Indian and childhood play.

## IV

## "Playing Indian," Playing "White Man": Charles Eastman's "Recollections of the [Real] Wild Life"

The imaginative identification with the Indian that *St. Nicholas* offered its readers corresponded to a broader cultural fascination at the turn of the century, neatly captured in a popular phrase of the time: "Playing Indian." In the *Ladies' Home Journal* during the summer of 1902, for example, Ernest Thompson Seton (also a contributor to *St. Nicholas*) informs his boy readers of all the secrets of "Playing 'Injun'":

> I suppose that every boy in America loves to 'play Injun.' It was one of my greatest pleasures and I often wished for some one who could teach me about it. That does not mean I wanted to be a cruel savage, but rather that I wanted to know how to live in the woods as he does . . . . These papers are being written to teach every boy to do this and to get the most pleasure possible out of playing Red Man. (15)

Clearly, by 1902 "playing Injun" constituted a popular pastime among American

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[14] For representative examples of forty years of editorials on the "Indian Problem" from the *New York Times*, see Hays.

boys; Seton's lessons in how to find or assemble "a tribe of the right kind of boys, woods, one or more teepees, bows and arrows, [and] a head-dress or war-bonnet for each" simply expand the range of activities and outfit the boys in the proper attire (15). Seton also reassures the mothers reading *Ladies' Home Journal* that "We do not wish our boys playing 'Injun' to do any of the dreadful things that might win a feather for the ferocious Sioux brave," and he suggests eleven alternate activities—including running, rowing, paddling, jumping, and swimming—for which the boys might be awarded "grand coups" (17). "Playing Injun" does not imply, as Seton makes clear, that one wants "to *be* a cruel savage," but rather simply "to *know how to live* . . . as he does" (15; emphasis added).

Seton was not alone in advocating such games for children as a way of building strength and confidence, maintaining health and vigor, and learning about the environment. Interest in the relation between play and education generally, in fact, was widespread at the end of the nineteenth century. The rise of scientific "child-study," in particular, inspired scholarly publications on topics such as *Games and Songs of American Children*, *Self Education Through Play*, and *Aspects of Child Life and Education* (Mergen 401, 402, 408). These examples suggest that, as Bernard Mergen contends, "Play was perceived to have an important role in socialization and education" at the end of the nineteenth century (403). Furthermore, while the educational benefits of play in general were widely heralded, the particular virtues of "playing Indian" also received considerable attention. A study by the president of the National Recreation Association, entitled

*Play in Education*, went so far as to isolate a "Big Injun" stage of childhood development during which "impersonation . . . survives, not as an accessory of some other form of play but as a primary object" (qtd. in Mergen 414). Interest in "playing Indian," like the interest in childhood itself during this period, found expression in a variety of scientific as well as popular contexts in the late nineteenth century as a subject of interest to academics and "Seton's Boys" alike.

A fascinating example of the ways in which this interest in the educative value of "playing Indian" found application by white Americans appears in *The Outlook* of October 1906. Entitled "An Indian Summer," the essay relates the efforts made by one father to satisfy the "raging fever" of his young boy for all things Indian (L. Hine 503). Written as a lighthearted but well-intentioned plea for "a more intelligent use of our children's vacations," the essay recounts a summer of entertaining activities, "physical building up," and school work (continued during vacation "to keep the mind in wholesome condition not attained by the usual desultory vacation activities")—all designed around the imaginative notion of "playing Indian" (503). This imaginative contrivance, that is, supported the hard work as well as the "real play" of his son during the summer: "It was not all play, this Indian summer," the author notes with some pride. Instead, as his essay suggests, education and play were properly regulated to function perfectly together, with the various branches of knowledge and the various "instincts" of the child coming into productive play through the process of pretending to live as an Indian.

It is difficult to determine just how "playing Indian" came to be conceived of as a useful pedagogical stratagem, a clever and entertaining means of teaching healthy and virtuous living. To a certain extent, this fascination with "playing Indian" clearly derived from (and contributed to) a broader contemporary recasting of the Indian in American society, what Alan Trachtenberg describes as "a fabric of fantasy, nostalgia, and idealization" created as "a kind of shroud for the 'vanishing American.'"[15] A photograph from 1899, for example, portrays a group of Washington, D.C., school boys playing a game called "Indian club relay" (Mergen 409): Such a game, one imagines, could only have been devised after the actual "Indian club" and other weapons of war had been effectively taken out of the hands of Indian warriors, and a certain nostalgia had been cast over both those warriors and their weapons. But this association of children's games with Indian ways also stems from the prevailing notions about childhood examined above. Childhood games based on Indian life, as the studies connecting education and play imply, had less to do with the actualities of Indian life than they did with the "processes" of civilization. Imitation of "savage" ways, that is, prepared children to be "civilized," to fulfill the demands of the world of work and of adulthood. In this sense, "playing Indian" had a function similar to that which Lears identifies in

[15] See Trachtenberg, *Incorporation* 37. In a more recent essay, Trachtenberg traces this recasting of the "vanishing Indian" into the first decades of the twentieth century, in particular through the "educational" projects of the famed Wanamaker department stores. Trachtenberg quotes a letter of appreciation from one young boy who, after seeing a movie version of Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha" in

the period's general fascination with images of childhood: It offered "a brief, imaginary escape" from the world of "adult conventions," but "accommodated" children to those conventions in the process (144). The father who provided "An Indian Summer" for his son makes this aspect of Indian play clear near the end of his essay, when he describes his son's gradual appreciation of the need to "take more responsibility upon his own shoulders, and thus to feel that he was in charge of himself": Though the boy neglected his "duties" initially, "soon he learned to do business upon a business basis, and realized that laws are to be obeyed" (L. Hine 506).

Eastman's "Recollections of the Wild Life," published in *St. Nicholas* during the last decade of the nineteenth century, inevitably intersects in myriad ways with these broad cultural ideas. Far from reflecting merely nostalgic reminiscing or a simple wish to tell stories to children, Eastman's writing *about* his childhood and *for* a primarily juvenile audience grounds his text in the widespread interest of American society in childhood as a discrete period of development, in the Indian as a vanishing "child-race," and in the potential of "playing Indian" for the socialization of "civilized" children. As noted earlier, Eastman clearly composed or at least edited his sketches with the audience of *St. Nicholas* in mind, and much of what he writes might be interpreted as catering to the preconceptions of an audience with little direct exposure to the real lives of American Indians. To

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Wanamaker's two-thousand-seat auditorium, bought "Indian suits" in the store for "playing Indians in the little park before our house" ("Wanamaker Indians" 7).

what extent Eastman wrote to conform his expression to those expectations, and to what extent he merely confirmed ideas that he fully accepted, remain the most difficult questions for readers and critics of Eastman's work. Certainly, writing after almost seventeen years in American schools and universities beyond his fifteen years in the "wild" (Wilson 37), Eastman might be expected to have felt some conviction about both the virtue and the necessity of the Indian's transition "from the deep woods to civilization." But a close analysis of his initial efforts to write of his early life and to reach a wide audience through publication illuminates the ways in which Eastman also sought to negotiate between those two worlds, maintaining a peculiarly bi-cultural position and attempting to mediate between his "civilized" readers and the world they deemed "savage."

* * *

Eastman's direct appeal to young readers, and to young boys in particular, emerges much more clearly in the opening paragraph of *Indian Boyhood* than in "Recollections," though the same appeal characterizes both texts: "What boy," he writes, "would not be an Indian for a while when he thinks of the freest life in the world? This life was mine . . ." (3). Here Eastman engages his readers immediately on the level of imaginative identification, suggesting the position that they ought to take with regard to all that will follow. His question is rhetorical, of course, since "*every* boy," at least according to Ernest Thompson Seton, "loves to 'play Injun'" (15; emphasis added). But the question hinges, it should be noted, on the small phrase "for a while": Actually *being* an Indian, as Seton also noted, does

not appeal to a young boy at all. Instead, knowing how they live, finding someone to "teach . . . all about" their lives, allows a boy "to get the most pleasure possible out of playing Red Man" (15). Eastman playfully engages here the notion of white boys "playing Indian," humorously suggesting that the laws of nature might be momentarily suspended and Indian identity might be interchangeable with white. At the same time, the opening sentence is implicitly political—given that the life Eastman describes as "the freest life in the world" no longer exists in any form—as well as autobiographical, given that the Indian life "was" his, in fact, only "for a while" (even as he, of course, remains an "Indian" by "blood").

The opening paragraph of *Indian Boyhood* continues this way:

> Every day there was a real hunt. There was real game. Occasionally there was a medicine dance away off in the woods where no one could disturb us, in which the boys impersonated their elders . . . . They painted and imitated their fathers and grandfathers to the minutest detail, and accurately, too, because they had seen the real thing all their lives.
>
> We were not only good mimics but we were close students of nature. We studied the habits of animals just as you study your books. We watched the men of our people and represented them in our play; then learned to emulate them in our lives. (3)

The explicit appeal of this passage for Eastman's boy readers rests in the romance of the world of Indian boys, their proximity to that which was so distant to "civilized" boys who had to study the natural world in "books" (and read about Indian chiefs in dime novels). But the passage is also remarkable for the balance Eastman creates between the "real" and the "imitation": He depicts, on the one hand, the "real hunt," "real game," and the Indian boys' unmediated access to

nature and to their elders, "the real thing"; and, on the other hand, he names the boys "good mimics" and describes how they "impersonated," "represented" and "imitated their fathers and grandfathers." He depicts the life of the Indian boy, that is, as a life of *play*—or more specifically, perhaps, a life of "playing Indian." The boys dress up as Indians, paint themselves to resemble "the real thing," stage mock-medicine dances—indeed, even the "real hunt" for "real game," as Eastman reveals later, refers mostly to the hunting of small game such as chipmunks in training for the "real" hunting done as adults. If Eastman begins by asking, "what boy would not *be* an Indian for a while," he goes on to suggest that Indian boys themselves are, in a certain sense, merely "playing Indian." In this way, Eastman encourages and reinforces the imaginative identification that the first line invites: "Civilized" boys—those who, perhaps, "love to play 'Injun'" by following Seton's directions on making a war-bonnet out of painted turkey feathers—can more easily identify with Eastman's "real" Indian boyhood because the boys he depicts are themselves first seen dressing up and painting their faces.

At the same time, of course, Eastman makes it clear that those boys will eventually *be* "the real thing." When he notes finally that the boys "learned to emulate" the men of the tribe through their "play," the subtle shift from imitation to emulation points to the importance of this boyhood play in shaping the boys into adults. As Eastman writes in the "Recollections," the Indian boys' "games and sports" were "molded by the life and customs of our people—indeed, we practised only what we expected to do when grown" (306). But the suggestion that play and

instruction work hand-in-hand to form the character of Indian boys would not have been an alien idea to the readers of *St. Nicholas*, particularly to adult readers. Indeed, as noted above, much of the era's psychological and anthropological study of children's habits of play asserted that childhood play represented perhaps the best means of education for adulthood. Eastman's portrayal of Indian childhood negotiates, it seems, between the desires of boy readers for imaginative identification and the desires of their parents and teachers for profitable lessons in socialization. At the same time, that portrayal reflects Eastman's own desire to draw Indian life in terms that would validate, even endorse, that life: Even as he stands apart at times to observe Indian existence with a condescending "civilized" eye, his general attitude is one of admiration and affirmation. Eastman does not *merely* appeal to the expectations of his dual audience of adults and children, then, but does so in order to revise those expectations with unexpected images of Indian childhood.

Eastman's depiction certainly contradicts the image of Indian children as "witnessed" by Roosevelt, "so trained" that they take "delight . . . in torturing little animals." In "The Boy Hunter" (in *Indian Boyhood*), for instance, Eastman describes an incident in which he and four friends capture a young deer, then bring their pets—including a dog, a fox, and a bear—to "see what they will do" with the fawn (81). When the animal drops dead from fright, the boys gather around with "repentance and regret," ashamed of their cruel intentions, and then quietly part, embarrassed by their tears. The slight scene neatly illustrates Eastman's varied

appeal to his readers: What begins as a description of the colorful exploits of Indian boy hunters ends with a touching illustration of "universal" boyhood humanity. Just as Roosevelt portrays the sadistic glee of Indian children only to alienate white readers from any identification with the "wild Indians" blocking frontier settlement, Eastman uses the ground of childhood to draw his readers closer, to encourage cross-cultural identification. To be sure, the scene draws what force it has from sentimental appeal, asking readers to recognize the boys' humanity insofar as they sympathize with the boys' emotional response to the situation; but even such a modest entreaty challenges much of the contemporary discourse surrounding the Indian.

Eastman again appeals to the American fascination with "playing Indian" in his description of the Indian child's "Games and Sports," in which, as noted above, he draws several connections between the games of white children and those of Indian children. But the chapter also includes a brief description of a game that Eastman's readers might have been surprised to discover as a part of the "wild life":

> Occasionally we also played "white man." Our knowledge of the pale-face was limited, but we had learned that he brought goods whenever he came, and that our people exchanged furs for his merchandise. We also knew, somehow, that his complexion was white, that he wore short hair on his head and long hair on his face, and that he had coat, trousers, and hat, and did not patronize blankets in the daytime. This was the picture we had formed of the white man . . . . ("Recollections" 308)

Eastman and his friends simulate the white man's appearance by painting faces with white clay, constructing birchen hats, attaching "a piece of fur" for beards, and using white birchbark in place of white shirts; once they are outfitted, the trading begins:

> Their merchandise consisted of sand for sugar, wild beans for coffee, dried leaves for tea, pulverized earth for gunpowder, pebbles for bullets, and clear water for dangerous "fire-water." We traded for these goods with skins of squirrels, rabbits, and small birds. (308)

This curious counterpoint to the white children's game of "playing Indian" is the subject of no additional commentary by Eastman, but it offers a compelling instance of the kind of apparently neutral description in Eastman's writing that in fact resonates on a number of levels. Most notably, the passage functions as a moment in Eastman's sketches when the "savage" object of the "civilized" gaze turns that gaze back upon civilization: While the text's primary motive, here as elsewhere, appears to be to depict Indian life for a white audience, in this case that audience gets a "picture of the white man" from the Indian's point of view. That the picture is woefully inadequate as a characterization of "the white man" might be read as a humorous illustration of the Indians' ignorance of the real meaning and significance of "white civilization," but might also be read as a comment on the equally absurd representation of Indian ways in the popular pastime of "playing Indian." Eastman's admission that "knowledge of the pale-face" among Indian boys was "limited" to external details such as complexion and clothing implies the same limitation in the cooptation of Indian customs by white

"civilization" for use in childhood games. By describing what amounts to a mirror-image of white boys "playing Indian," Eastman quietly poses a challenge to those who, like Seton, not only advocated those games but also claimed a basis for their suggestions about how to "get the most pleasure possible out of playing Red Man" in purported first-hand experience of Indian life (Seton 17).

At the same time, this brief passage also illustrates the way in which Eastman attempts to skirt the ground of political or cultural critique in order to establish, instead, *common* ground between Indian and "American" worlds. Notably, while Eastman's "Recollections" includes at least occasional references to the armed conflict between Indian tribes and the American military, Eastman recalls his childhood exploits playing "white man" only in terms of material, not military, "exchange." Indeed, bullets and gunpowder become, in the boys' play, mere pebbles and pulverized earth (and the "dangerous 'fire-water,'" clear water); and the munitions constitute "goods," not the materiel of warfare. Eastman's simple description of the Indian boys' playful substitutions functions, in a sense, to neutralize even imaginary conflict between whites and Indians. Furthermore, in contrast to Howells's description of the "hoarding" and improvident wasting of "the bounty of nature" by boys and Indians alike, Eastman portrays Indian boys engaged in an earnest imitation of real trading. Where Howells expresses surprise at the apparently random values that children attach to shells and marbles and other trinkets, and portrays children (and Indians, by metaphorical extension) as incapable of actual, profit-driven trade, Eastman and his fellow Indian boys appear

to understand perfectly the real-life equivalents of their imaginary "merchandise." Eastman reverses not only the game of "playing Indian," it seems, but also the common images of conflict between whites and Indians: Howells's boys, it might be noted, play games of warfare between "settlers" and "Indians" (814).

In this unlikely passage and others like it, then, Eastman not only disputes the common image of the Indian (and the Indian child) as irredeemably savage, irrational in trade and incapable of civilized existence, but also suggests that the "wild life" of the Indian is pursued on much the same plane of existence as the "civilized" life. Indian boys play "white man" just as white boys "play Indian"; Indian children feel the same range of emotions, whether mourning the death of family members or friends or delighting in the freedom of childhood life, as white children do; and Indian parents, at least "the true and loving parents," are "as ambitious and hopeful for their children as any civilized and educated parents could be" (437). Eastman uses the common ground of childhood to mark off a broader common ground between Indian and white worlds, two worlds that are brought together in his narrative by mutual curiosity and (at least imaginatively) in fair exchange, not in war or exploitation. Regardless of the fact that white boys "playing Indian" and Indian boys playing "white man" fail equally at realistic representation, the games illuminate Eastman's attempt to bring "savage" and "civilized" children together on the ground of cross-cultural imaginative identification.

This is not to suggest that Eastman believed the two worlds he had occupied to be equivalent, in historical or cultural terms, or that he imagined a future in which the two worlds might in fact share common ground in America. Nor, indeed, can one conclude that Eastman wished to dispute the widely held ideas about Indian improvidence that Howells had drawn from in *A Boy's Town*: One need only read Eastman's description of Indians as "children of Nature," "forgetful and careless," and his assertion that "much of their suffering might have been prevented by a little calculation" (227), to upset the conclusion that Eastman envisioned Indian ways as equal to "civilized" ways. It is clear, on the contrary, that Eastman shared many of the ideas of his day regarding the status and traits of the Indian "races," including a belief in the inevitable decline and eventual disappearance of the Indian peoples in America. As Brumble argues compellingly, Eastman's account in *Indian Boyhood* reflects throughout the "Romantic Racialist and Social Darwinist assumptions" of the turn of the century (148), assumptions most clearly evident in his prefatory note to *Indian Boyhood*:

> The North American Indian was the highest type of pagan and uncivilized man. He possessed not only a superb physique but a remarkable mind. But the Indian no longer exists as a natural and free man. Those remnants which now dwell upon the reservations present only a sort of tableau—a fictitious copy of the past. (iv)

This is, as Brumble observes, "a rather remarkable passage" (147), particularly to readers trained in the late-twentieth-century pieties of ethnic pride and cultural relativism. Eastman's use of the past tense alone points to his distance from the life that he will describe in *Indian Boyhood*, a life he characterizes as both "natural and

free" and "pagan and uncivilized." His simultaneous responses of praise and censure reflect his deeply felt memories of childhood life ("the freest life in the world") as well as his deeply held belief, acquired through two decades of education in civilization, that the passing of that "natural and free" Indian life was as inevitable as the development of a child into an adult (Brumble 164).

Another interesting disjunction in this prefatory note offers a final clue to Eastman's representation of Indian childhood in his earliest autobiographical writings. In the first half of his note, quoted above, Eastman speaks of reservation life at the turn of the century as "only a sort of tableau—a fictitious copy of the past," highlighting the authenticity of his own experience of Indian life even as he expresses his disapproval of the reservation system as a means of incorporating Indians into American civilization.[16] But the conclusion of Eastman's note depicts his own Indian childhood as another *tableau vivant* of sorts: "I have put together these fragmentary recollections of my thrilling wild life," Eastman writes, "expressly for the little son who came too late to *behold* for himself the *drama* of savage existence" (iv; emphasis added). In a curious way, Eastman's characterization of reservation life as merely a "fictitious copy of the past" and his own past life as a "drama of savage existence" foreshadows his description, at the start of *Indian*

[16] Eastman's comment reflects his support of the 1887 Dawes Act and its guiding premise that if Indians were to survive and flourish in American civilization, they must survive not as communal "remnants" on reservations but individually and within the bounds of civilization, as independent home-owners, land-owners, and laborers. On Eastman's support for the Dawes Act and its underlying principles, see Wilson 33-36, 139; Brumble 150.

*Boyhood*, of the Indian boys' "imitation" of the "real thing." For his young son, for his white readers, even for himself after his successful transition to civilization, the free, natural "wild life" of his youth is transformed in his recollections into a "thrilling" drama, a "living picture" for interested onlookers to "behold." To the extent that Eastman believes that "the Indian no longer exists as a natural and free man," he can hold up his own childhood experience of Indian life as an autobiographical window on the "real thing." And insofar as he offers his "recollections of the wild life" as a "dramatic" subject for the entertainment of juvenile and adult audiences of *St. Nicholas*, Eastman participates in and contributes to the cultural fascination of the day for all things Indian.

While it is too reductive to conclude that Eastman merely depicted "a somewhat idealized, nostalgic childhood . . . made to correspond to values adopted in the course of his later Christian upbringing" (Peyer, "Charles" 233), it is clear that Eastman did in fact craft his recollections to "correspond" to certain expectations and attitudes on the part of his audience. Eastman's avoidance of any suggestion of military conflict in the Indian boys' "white man" games, for example, suggests his participation in the same evasion of historical specificity that Dodge appears to have enforced in editing Eastman's "Recollections" for publication. (Of course, had Eastman not assented to prevailing expectations to some degree, it is unlikely that his first autobiographical writings would have been accepted by *St. Nicholas* or any other leading periodical of the time.) But Eastman's early autobiographical writing might also be read as an attempt to mediate between two

distinct worlds, to explore the possibilities for cross-cultural understanding and identification that might exist on the common ground of childhood, that "newly found kingdom of the Naïve." Eastman is clearly less interested in expressing a singular, autobiographical vision or a "version of his past, his private reality" than in using the familiar Western form of autobiography and the current fascination with childhood to celebrate the compatibility of Indian life and American civilization (Gusdorf 42). Childhood—characterized in part by its distance from the adult concerns of politics, broken treaties, bloodshed, allotment, citizenship, rights—allows Eastman the neutral ground he needs to act as bi-cultural mediator, representative Indian and civilized American embodied in one spokesperson, offering his recollections of the wild life as entertaining opportunities for imaginative identification even as he offers alternative, positive images of Indian life.

It is worth noting that several years after the publication of *Indian Boyhood*, Eastman began a long association with the Boy Scouts of America, a group founded by Ernest Thompson Seton and based, not surprisingly, on a back-to-nature program not unlike the earlier "playing Indian" craze that Seton had contributed to with his *Ladies' Home Journal* articles (Wilson 151). According to Eastman's biographer, Raymond Wilson, Seton "held Eastman and his works in high esteem" and "was extremely happy at having a national figure like Eastman participating in the movement" (151). In addition, after several years of involvement with the Boy Scouts as a spokesperson, camp director, and National Councilman, Eastman and his

wife Elaine founded their own camp (tellingly named "the School of the Woods"), advertising the fact that their camp's Indian activities were taught by a "Real Indian" (Wilson 151). In this institutionalization of the turn-of-the-century fascination with "playing Indian," Eastman again expressed his conviction in the value of Indian ways for the edification of the children of "civilized" Americans, even as he saw no viable future for the Indian "as a natural and free man." His continued efforts to represent the ways of the "Real Indian" to children in spite of his own successful transition to "civilization" point to his abiding faith in the common ground to be found in childhood, where Indian and civilized worlds might be brought together in imaginative identification, education, and enrichment.

## V

## The Problem of the Self, the Problem of the Indian: Charles Eastman, Francis La Flesche, and Zitkala-Sa

Charles Eastman was not alone at the turn of the century in composing autobiographical narratives of childhood Indian life without the aid of a translator or transcriber or in seeking publication for that writing. Self-written narratives by Indian students in white-run schools, to give just one example, proliferated during this period, many published in promotional school newsletters or magazines.[17] But

[17] Many of the Indian schools at the turn of the century published institutional periodicals, including Carlisle (*The Red Man*), Haskell (*Indian Leader*), Chilocco (*Indian School Journal*), and Chemewa (*Chemewa American*) (see Peyer, *Tutor'd Mind* 287). One intriguing example of the Indian "education" narrative is "Angel DeCora—An Autobiography," published in *The Red Man* in 1911. DeCora was educated at Hampton after she was essentially kidnapped from her reservation by "a strange white man" (DeCora 280); she continued her education by choice and became

fewer Indian writers achieved the national circulation that publication by a leading American periodical or publishing house might provide. Two contemporaries of Eastman in particular, Francis La Flesche and Zitkala-Sa, successfully published autobiographical narratives that offer compelling counterpoints to Eastman's early writings. All three writers chose to center their autobiographical writing on Indian childhood; all three published their work for a national, largely white readership. But the uses to which each writer put the topic and theme of childhood varied considerably, just as the opportunities of publication differed for each. Together, the autobiographical narratives published by Eastman, La Flesche, and Zitkala-Sa point to the range of possible responses of Native American writers to both the cultural fascination with childhood and the conditions of publication at the turn of the century.

Francis La Flesche's literary career in the years just before and after the turn of the century parallels Eastman's in a few telling ways. In 1900, La Flesche submitted his full-length manuscript, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, to Doubleday and McClure Company, two years before McClure, Phillips and Company (an offshoot of the former house) published Eastman's *Indian Boyhood*. La Flesche also submitted at least one short story to the *Youth's Companion*, the only children's periodical that far exceeded *St. Nicholas* in circulation. But the "surprise" that Eastman felt upon acceptance of his first

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an artist and an art teacher at Carlisle. As a professional artist, DeCora illustrated Zitkala-Sa's *Old Indian Legends* in 1901.

submission was not enjoyed by La Flesche: *Youth's Companion* did not publish his story, and Doubleday and McClure rejected *The Middle Five*, believing the book to lack a strong market appeal (Parins and Littlefield xii, xvi). Doubleday's editor H. W. Lanier suggested to La Flesche, in fact, that the book's focus on Indian boys at school ought to be downplayed, that "the burden should be thrown upon the other *wilder* existence" in order to reveal to "the outside world what the life of the Indians actually was and is" (qtd. in Parins and Littlefield xii). In the same letter, Lanier suggested to La Flesche "that it is just in the *difference* between the life of the Indian boys and the life of other boys that you could make your work so superior to that of any one else, from your better knowledge" (xiii; emphasis added). When another publisher accepted La Flesche's book, Lanier reiterated that Doubleday was holding out for a book about the "wild life" that "would make a stir" (qtd. in Parins and Littlefield xiii).

This brief scene from La Flesche's literary career illustrates the problematic nature of the access to print that was available to Indian writers at the turn of the century and points to the real limitations on what those writers were free to explore in their writing—even in autobiographical writing—if they wished to reach a mainstream American audience. Shortly after La Flesche's exchange with Lanier, an editor at the Macmillan publishing house responded to a story submission by La Flesche by noting that her company was especially interested in "'legends' that were 'simply told' as someone by a fireside might tell to children," stories, that is, like the "'lovely legends of the darkies'" in the Uncle Remus stories (Parins and

Littlefield xv). This telling comment might help to explain the publication of *Old Indian Legends* by Zitkala-Sa in 1901 and *Wigwam Evenings* by Eastman and his wife Elaine in 1909—the latter complete with aged storyteller, simple and entertaining legends, and even "a generous fire of logs" (4). What these examples suggest is not merely that Indian writers catered, willingly or unwillingly, to the prevailing expectations of readers and publishers, but that they (like all writers of the time, to varying degrees) wrote and sought publication of their writing within the particular limits and liabilities of the literary marketplace. The fact that Eastman succeeded throughout his career in finding a forum for his writing while La Flesche turned from literary to anthropological work soon after his first book was published reveals less, finally, about distinctions in the two writers's literary abilities than it does about differences in the ways each negotiated the channels of publication at the turn of the century.

It is clear from a reading of *The Middle Five* why Lanier was unsure of its appeal to readers interested in the "*wilder* existence" of Indians and in "the difference between the life of the Indian boys and the life of other boys." In his portrayal of a band of five Indian boys at a Presbyterian boarding school in Nebraska, based largely on his own childhood experience, La Flesche accents the similarity of Indian boys and other boys in his depiction of the emotional ties of boyhood friendship, the stirring of romantic affection, the pain of separation, loneliness, and loss. He dedicates his autobiographical narrative "To the Universal Boy," and—though his Preface notes that "the object of this book is to reveal the

true nature and character of the Indian boy"—La Flesche makes it clear that his portrayal will not accentuate the "wilder existence" that Lanier hoped to find in it (xv). La Flesche is not interested in catering to a desire on the part of white readers for vivid portrayals of the uncivilized and pagan "wild life." On the contrary, he takes aim at "the misconception of Indian life and character so common among the white people" by which "every aspect of the Indian and his manner of life has always been strange to the white man" (xviii-xix). This "strangeness," La Flesche contends, "has been magnified by the mists of prejudice and the conflict of interests between the two races" (xix), as well as by "an ignorance of the Indian's language, of his mode of thought, his beliefs, his ideals, and his native institutions" (xviii). As his Preface makes abundantly clear, La Flesche does not evade commentary that might cause discomfort to his white readers, ascribing in part or wholly to white Americans the "misconception[s]," "ignorance," "prejudice," and "conflict of interests" responsible for discord between Indian and white peoples.

At the same time, *The Middle Five* as a whole dwells far less on indictment of white civilization than on endorsement and affirmation of the Indian's language, mode of thought, beliefs, ideals, and native institutions. In the Preface, La Flesche makes his homage explicit, noting with pride that Indian children (specifically, those of the Omaha tribe of his childhood) are "taught respect and courtesy toward our elders," etiquette in manners and speech, and "grammatical use of [our] native tongue" (xvi). He praises the "beauty and picturesqueness, and euphonious

playfulness" of the Omaha language as uttered by native speakers, then notes the pain of the "native American" who must hear "the utterances of his father . . . constantly belittled when put into English," their thoughts "travestied and their native dignity obscured" (xix). Notably, La Flesche highlights not only the aesthetic value of native language and expression but also the difficulty and frequent insufficiency of cross-cultural expression, the "belittlement" of both the content and the form of native expression. When he notes that some elements of native speech and diction "are all but impossible to be given literally in English," the inadequacy clearly rests with the English-language interpreter and with the English language itself.

When La Flesche turns to his memories of boyhood schooldays, then, he does so not with Eastman's interest in finding common ground between Indian and white worlds but with a desire to illuminate the nobility and integrity of native cultures against the baseness and corruption of white society. The representatives of white "civilization" in *The Middle Five* show little appreciation for the aesthetic qualities or the dignity of the "savage" ways that they seek to eradicate by way of education. When visiting supervisors ask the Indian students to sing "an Indian song," for example, the boys first hesitate, then join in singing the "Victory song":

> We understood the song, and knew the emotion of which it was the expression. We felt, as we sang, the patriotic thrill of a victorious people who had vanquished their enemies; but the men shook their heads, and one of them said, "That's savage, that's savage! They must be taught music."
>
> So it came about that every afternoon after this visit we spent an hour on a singing lesson . . . . (100)

In this scene and others, La Flesche inspires in his readers both imaginative identification with the children and corresponding condemnation of the white men's deafness to their artistic and emotional expression. It is worth noting, however, that La Flesche does not attempt to inspire such recognition by translating what the boys sang, instead emphasizing "the emotion of which it was the expression." By contrast, when Eastman represents an Indian "lullaby" in his "Recollections," he transcribes the song into that Western formal pattern, complete with rhyme and poetic repetition (130), as if to insure figurative cross-cultural identification on the part of his readers by ensuring that they will be able to *identify*, literally, the Indian language and expression he wishes to portray.

In his effort to elevate Indian language, customs, and beliefs above and beyond those of white "civilization," furthermore, La Flesche draws strength from his portrayal of the world of childhood, accenting a nobility and integrity that appear to be lost to the adult world. In contrast both to Howells's portrayal of the "savage" world of childhood and to Roosevelt's depiction of Indian children as sadistically cruel, La Flesche portrays his boyhood friends as fundamentally pure in heart. His best friend Brush, who makes Bible stories real to young Frank and whose death marks the end of the "middle five," represents the nobility and purity of youth most clearly. In a brief but significant scene in *The Middle Five*, in which the five boys are appalled by the cruelty of the headmaster, "Gray-beard," towards a helpless Indian child, Brush reports the incident to the superintendent and gains

an apology from Gray-beard (140). The scene is clearly intended to indict white civilization through its most visible representative, the headmaster of the Indian school. More specifically, the scene exposes the physical advantage and violence that operates beneath the expressedly benevolent efforts of white civilization to educate the Indian children. (The infamous educational philosophy of the founder of Carlisle, General Richard Henry Pratt—"Kill the Indian and save the man!"—makes explicit what La Flesche dramatizes here [qtd. in Hertzberg 16].)

Finally, La Flesche does not attempt, as Eastman does, to find compatibility between Indian and white worlds but rather to defend the value and integrity of one while indicting the hollowness and violence at the heart of the other. To be sure, La Flesche rests his appeal to white readers in the widespread cultural fascination with childhood and builds his defense of Indian ways on the ideals and virtues of "civilization," as his emphasis on the proper speech and polite manners of Indian children signals. But if he writes to communicate the "true nature" of Indian life to white readers in terms that they can understand, he does so with a fundamental belief in the value and dignity of Indian life on its own terms, not merely as a rich source of education or entertainment for white children. La Flesche's failure to reach the same wide audience reached by Eastman over several decades may finally reflect the unfortunate incompatibility of his vision of the beauty and integrity of Indian life and the preconceived vision of the "strangeness" of that life, "magnified through the mists of prejudice," on the part of many white editors and readers.

*  *  *

If La Flesche used his autobiographical sketches of childhood to reconstruct an imagined wholeness and integrity in Indian life even under the influence of the white-run mission school, Zitkala-Sa composed her "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" to point toward a wholeness forever lost through her education in "civilization." In a series of three autobiographical essays published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900, Zitkala-Sa writes of her early years on a Sioux reservation, her traumatic move to and her years of schooling at a Quaker missionary school in Indiana, her continuing education at Earlham College, and a brief stint as "An Indian Teacher Among Indians" at the Carlisle Indian Training School.[18] Like Eastman and La Flesche, Zitkala-Sa appeals to her predominantly white, middle-class audience by grounding her autobiographical sketches in an examination of childhood and in a pseudo-ethnographic representation of Indian life. But Zitkala-Sa's use of childhood as topic and theme differs markedly from that of her contemporaries, just as the publication of her sketches in the prestigious (and by no means juvenile) *Atlantic Monthly* distinguishes her literary efforts from those of Eastman and La Flesche. In her interrogation of what she has lost by becoming "civilized" and the psychic damage that she has suffered in that

[18] Zitkala-Sa's three autobiographical essays, entitled "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," and "An Indian Teacher among Indians," were published between January and March of 1900 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The essays were reprinted in Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories* in 1921; all further references are to the latter text, and will be cited parenthetically.

transition, furthermore, Zitkala-Sa invokes her Indian childhood in far more personal, explicitly autobiographical terms than either Eastman or La Flesche.

Two brief comments at the end of Eastman's "Recollections" offer a telling illustration of the distinct ways in which Eastman and Zitkala-Sa make use of both the matter of childhood memories and the mode of autobiography. After Eastman's father arrives to bring him out of the "wild life" and into civilization, Eastman describes his experience of that journey this way:

> I felt as if I were dead, and traveling to the Spirit land; for now all my old ideas were to give way to new ones, and my life was to be entirely different from that of my past. Still, I was eager to see some of the wonderful inventions of the white people . . . . (610)

After relating a humorous anecdote about his terrified reaction upon first seeing a train, Eastman turns to a description of his father's morning devotions, which he witnesses with incomprehension until his father explains "the word *Jesus*":

> . . . my father then told me that Jesus was the Son of God who came on earth to save sinners, and that it was because of him that he had sought me. This conversation made a deep impression on my mind. (611)

These scenes are characteristic of Eastman's autobiographical writing throughout his "Recollections" insofar as they paint his inner, emotional life only in broad strokes, glossing over the precise nature of the "deep impression" left by significant childhood experiences. Eastman frequently accentuates the positive virtues of activity and self-reliance at the expense of personal reflection; even on the realization that "*all* my old ideas were to give way to new ones, and my life was to be *entirely* different from that of my past" (emphasis added), Eastman

quickly turns his attention to the wonders of the white world, embracing with optimism the "new" ideas that it offers him. The "deep impression" made by both the story of Jesus and the story of his father's motivation to seek out his son receives no clarification or elaboration, perhaps considered too individual, too personal, to fit within Eastman's limited autobiographical design in "Recollections."

Zitkala-Sa grounds her "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," on the other hand, in precisely those individual, psychological "deep impressions" that Eastman evades. Her narrative begins, like Eastman's "Recollections," by depicting the "wild freedom" of the Indian child's existence (8); but in carrying her narrative through the transition to civilization and in probing the resulting ambivalence and dislocation, Zitkala-Sa does not isolate that life of freedom in a world apart from her life as an adult. Her narrative persona, like Eastman's, combines the naïvete of the child with the wisdom and judgment of the adult; but Zitkala-Sa represents her childhood life as wholly tied up with her adult identity, in no way discrete or isolated from her experience of adult life. Significantly, while Eastman records how he "gazed" with "lively interest" upon first reaching an outpost of white civilization (610), Zitkala-Sa recalls the experience of first feeling the gaze of that civilization upon her, during her journey to the Eastern school, as white women "scrutinized" her, "large men . . . riveted their glassy blue eyes" on her, and children turned "their bold white faces toward [her]" (47-48). And while Eastman highlights his own (sometimes humorous) lack of comprehension of white culture,

Zitkala-Sa, like La Flesche, accents the vulgar curiosity of white Americans about Indian life and their utter lack of sympathetic or intelligent understanding of that life.

Like La Flesche, too, Zitkala-Sa expresses an awareness in her autobiographical writing of the limits and liabilities of cross-cultural expression. When she was sick as a child at the Indian school, Zitkala-Sa did not report her illness because "it was inbred in [her] to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see [her] pain" (66). Likewise, "however tempestuous" her memory of childhood was to her as she composed her narratives, she remarks, "it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it" (68). Both a commentary on the deafness too often met by Indian writers and a meta-textual appeal to the readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* to bend their ears "with compassion" to her "low voice," this powerful image is also just one of many that Zitkala-Sa draws to signify her sense of self, the embodied self behind the speaking voice of the text. She fills her narratives of childhood with sensory details and vivid images not only to intensify her portrait of Indian life in general but also to represent in concrete equivalents the metaphorical "impressions" made upon her body by the process of civilization. Thus harsh lights and sounds accompany bewildering or humiliating events in her narration; and, when the process seems complete, Zitkala-Sa imagines herself "a slender tree," "uprooted" and "shorn of [her] branches," stripped of "the natural coat of bark" and left "a

cold bare pole . . . planted in a strange earth" (97). Eastman imagines his transition from the wilderness to civilization in terms of death and resurrection, the body renewed, it seems, along with the acquisition of a new way of life; Zitkala-Sa suggests, on the contrary, that the body that survives that transition wears all of the scars and "impressions" of the process.

In the penultimate section of "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," Zitkala-Sa portrays her mother's mute "curse" upon the neighboring white settlers, holding "her outstretched fingers toward the settler's lodge, as if an invisible power passed from them to the evil at which she aimed" (94). In a curiously parallel image, Zitkala-Sa writes in the closing section of the same essay of her hope that "a day would come when [her own] mute aching head, reared upward to the sky, would flash a zig-zag lightning across the heavens" (97). This latter "dream of vent for a long-pent consciousness" neatly draws together the voiceless protest of the "primitive" Indian mother and the literate expression of the "civilized" Indian daughter, whose autobiographical essays perfectly combine both pointed social critique and poignant personal narrative. Indeed, Zitkala-Sa's life story appears to culminate in a merging of the personal and the political. At the end of her third essay, she recalls "one weary day in the schoolroom" when "a new idea presented itself to me," "a new way of solving the problem of my inner self" (97). The countours of that solution remain hidden to her readers; she goes on, instead, to recollect the "many specimens of civilized peoples" who visited her classroom at Carlisle, "gazing upon the Indian girls and boys" at their studies, "afterward to

boast of their charity to the North American Indian" (98-99). Zitkala-Sa's concluding comment—"But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization" (99)—represents an unlikely summation to an explicitly autobiographical narrative, but in fact points to her new-found solution to "the problem of [her] inner self." By composing her impressions of an Indian childhood and presenting them through the forum of leading national periodical, Zitkala-Sa herself stretches out her fingers toward white Americans both to invite a compassionate response and to vent "a long-pent consciousness" of the wrongs done to her and to other Native Americans. Writing of her own Indian childhood for anyone compassionate enough to listen, she explores both the "real life" and the "long-lasting death" that are the painful products, for the Native American child, of the processes of civilization itself.

* * *

Zitkala-Sa's reaching toward "a new way of solving the problem of [her] inner self" in the form of autobiographical writing recalls the assertion by Georges Gusdorf, quoted above, that every autobiographer "commences, in a manner of speaking, with the problem already solved" and writes in order to "gain acceptance for this or that revised and corrected version of his past, his private reality" (42). What the literary careers and the autobiographical writings of Eastman, La Flesche, and Zitkala-Sa illustrate is something more complicated, a difficult and

compromising negotiation of the preconceptions and desires of readers, the editorial demands of periodicals and publishing houses, and the writer's own interest in revealing the "true nature" of Indian life as well as his or her true self. That all three writers chose autobiography as a form in which to engage in this complex negotiation, leading periodicals and publishing houses as their forum, and childhood as a prevalent topic and theme unites their literary efforts at the turn of the century. That each favored a different response to both the "problem" of the inner self and the broader "problem of the Indian" in American society points to the depth of the challenge of confronting those problems in autobiographical narratives of Indian childhood.

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