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Locating the Short-Story Cycle

Jennifer Joan Smith

- 1 During the summer of 1938, Sherwood Anderson began work on a new novel, but he was unhappy with the result. In a letter to a friend, he attributes the problem to form: “I was seeking a form that would bring me a feeling of looseness and ease. In the meantime I wrote some pretty good short stories. Suddenly I decided to go back to the *Winesburg* form. That is really a novel. It is a form in which I feel at ease. I invented it. It was mine” (220). According to Anderson, when *Winesburg, Ohio* appeared in 1919 it was a wholly new form. In the 1942 edition of his *Memoirs*, Anderson links his formal innovation to an idea of US nationhood: “I have even sometimes thought that the novel form does not fit an American writer, that it is a form which had been brought in. What I wanted is a new looseness; and in *Winesburg* I had made my own form” (289). Anderson’s disparate statements on the volume’s form—that it is and is not a novel—reveal a lack of language available to describe its seemingly unique position between novel and short story collection. Anderson’s reputation as a pioneer grew in proportion to his influence on other modernists, including most famously Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and John Steinbeck, who would all go on to work in the genre, the short-story cycle. The short-story cycle—also often called the short story sequence, novel in stories, and composite novel—is, at its most basic, a collection of stories that are simultaneously interrelated and autonomous.¹ Linking the form to the United States bolstered Anderson’s sense that creating a national literature was paramount to the artistic projects of his time and circle; this sentiment repeats throughout his essays, memoirs, and letters. It is a nice story.
- 2 His claims to utter originality are, however, a bit false. Certainly, he made innovations to the form, maximizing its expressionist possibilities and engaging an appreciation for local places and quotidian events that would inspire Faulkner and the rest. Yet, *Winesburg* follows a long tradition of volumes that had exactly the kind of “new looseness” Anderson claims for his own volume. The particular device of using a common setting for a series of prose tales, as in *Winesburg*, dates to at least the mid-nineteenth century in the United States and Europe. Scholarship on Anderson, the modernist writers he influenced, and modernism more generally has tended to take

Anderson too much at his word and not connected his influential cycle to an already robust and dynamic literary form.²

- 3 This essay takes Anderson's cycle as a destination, positing that *Winesburg* emerged out of a long-standing tradition of volumes linked by limited localities. Integrating the genre's regionalist and modernist iterations extends recent critical discussions that trouble once ossified period distinctions. Critical discussions of regionalist cycles routinely center on the volumes' connections to nation-building and their deployment of nostalgia. Conversely, discussions of modernist cycles focus on the genre's reflection of modernity and its influence on formal experimentation with the novel. The long history of short-story cycles linked by locality reveals that preoccupation with the nation and nostalgia persists into modernism, as Anderson's comments intimate, and that experimentation with form as a response to modernity is present in the earliest cycles. In other words, while the critical discussions have been illuminating, they tend to divide these issues in ways that the literature itself does not.
- 4 Sandra Zagarell coined the term "narratives of community" to describe cycles that privilege a singular setting, emphasize localized language and practices, obfuscate linear/chronological development in favor of process, render the quotidian in episodic tales, and depict narrators who are "participant/observers" ("Narrative" 503). According to Zagarell, "Narrative of community thus represents a coherent response to the social, economic, cultural, and demographic changes caused by industrialism, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism" ("Narrative" 499). Zagarell deftly isolates the genre's core conventions; however, the volumes do not evince a wholly coherent, positive preindustrial ideal but instead are deeply entrenched in the alienation that accompanied urbanization and industrialization. In the conclusion to the 2007 essay collection, *Narratives of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences*, which was inspired by and extended tenants of her seminal essay, Zagarell reconsiders the wholly positive depiction of community she examined in her original essay to acknowledge the "many-valenced" treatments of community elsewhere.³
- 5 My own term for this organizing principle, limited locality, reflects the cycles' ambivalence to the promises of community. Limited locality refers to the ways in which such short-story cycles depend upon the construction of a restricted geographic terrain to contain and ground the narratives within. They are limited because they take as their focus a bounded geography and because the texts emphasize descriptions of particular, selected features of that geography. Of course, short-story cycles are not linked exclusively by setting. In *Winesburg*, for instance, recurring characters, a shared temporal setting, and the central figure of George Willard further integrate the stories. Such devices are typical and prominent throughout the genre. This essay focuses on locality because the connections between regionalist and modernist concerns are especially explicit and pronounced in these cycles. Tracing this dominant linking device reveals how crises of place and of communities—be they local, regional, or national—permeate the literature and ultimately shape its forms.
- 6 From the earliest volumes centered on locality in the 1830s to the publication of *Winesburg* in 1919, the United States underwent a massive transformation in its very shape and scope. The regions depicted in these cycles were often actually new to the nation's geography, and the localities they depicted were distanced from metropolitan centers. As Paul Giles shows, it was during this period that states such as Nebraska, the Dakotas, and California entered the union, geography became a compulsory course in

school, and the United States began to be referred to as a singular rather than a plural noun (41-44). Under these conditions, Giles argues that the literature of this period “tends not only to be saturated in locality but also to understand that locality as a guarantee of its own authenticity and its patriotic allegiance” (45). From the genre’s earliest phases writers and reviewers alike questioned whether the diversity of the United States could be expressed in the novel, and Anderson’s comments suggest that this notion persisted among modernists.⁴ The problems of coherence intrinsic to the short-story cycle—of being both singular and connected—comport with an anxiety of coherence that has been formative to US culture.⁵ The short-story cycle emerges as a central genre in understanding American literary nationalism, even as many of these same writers participated in and depicted international exchange.⁶ The ubiquity of limited localities indicates the extent to which these narratives served to particularize and integrate locales.

- 7 Caroline Matilda Kirkland’s cycle *A New Home, Who’ll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life* (1839) exemplifies the extent to which formal concerns intersect with anxieties of national and local integration. In 1837, the same year that Michigan attained statehood, Caroline Matilda Kirkland and her husband acquired eight hundred acres in Michigan and set out to establish a village. The village, Pinckney, became the basis for the fictional town of Montacute in Kirkland’s *A New Home*. This volume, composed of sketches and descriptive vignettes, introduced readers to the rigors and challenges of frontier life in the partially settled region. In the preface, Kirkland announces that her original impulse was to adhere to life but that fiction intervened:

I claim for these straggling and cloudy crayon-sketches of life and manners in the remoter parts of Michigan, the merit of general truth of outline. Beyond this I venture not to aspire. I felt somewhat tempted to set forth my little book as being entirely, what it is very nearly—a veritable history; an unimpeachable transcript of reality; a rough picture, in detached parts, but pentagraphed from the life; a sort of ‘Emigrant’s Guide.’ [...] But conscience prevailed, and I must honestly confess, that there be glosses, and colourings, and lights, if not shadows, for which the author is alone accountable. (1)

- 8 Kirkland maintains that the book approximates a “veritable history,” indicating the extent to which she intends for *A New Home* to be read as a guidebook to the would-be traveler. That most of her readers would never venture to Michigan is irrelevant, because the book, as the preface makes explicit, strives to introduce this place to the national imagination. Thus, she needs to impress upon her readers the veridical nature of her descriptions.⁷
- 9 *A New Home* subscribes to the belief that sustained geographic proximity fosters a sense of positive communal affiliation. In 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies theorized a vision of organic and authentic community, *gemeinschaft*, as opposed to artificial, industrial affiliation, *gesellschaft*. Characterized by “locality, which is based on a common habit,” the logic of *gemeinschaft* maintains that “The proximity of dwellings, the communal fields, and even the mere contiguity of holdings necessitate many contacts of human beings and cause inurement to and intimate knowledge of one another” (42-43).⁸ Tönnies conceptualized that shared land and interests generated genuine communal commitment. *A New Home* narrates the process by which this unsettled land becomes a community and, by extension, part of the nation. In Kirkland’s Montacute “something new is born, a pluralistic, polyphonic culture that honors the original viewpoints and practices of each constituent group and may well represent the future of America

itself" (Zagarell, "Introduction" xxix). *A New Home* models an inclusive vision of the nation, made up of such communities; this model embraces the wanderlust of moving west while maintaining an elegiac mood for a disappearing landscape. Kirkland describes the dangers of traversing "Michigan mud-holes" and the beauties of the forest's "gosling-green suit of half-opened leaves" (5). Descriptions of such geographical features render these unfamiliar places legible. Thus, these texts function not only to depict the uniqueness of place, as Kirkland suggests in her preface, but also to help constitute the nation's image of itself through descriptions of the land's physical features.

- 10 The circumstances surrounding the Kirklands' founding of Pinckney and the composition of *A New Home* indicate the function of her volume. In the first sketch, she describes "the remote and lonely regions" as being "beyond measure delicious to one 'long in populous cities pent'" (5). Quoting Milton, Kirkland attempts to persuade her reader that the Michigan landscape is worthy of the great English poets. She charges that "We must have a poet of our own" and speculates that "Shelley," "Charles Lamb," and "Bulwer" might be up to the task (6). These descriptions of the landscape and the call-to-pens essentially amount to a defense of this new territory's incorporation. *A New Home* is extraordinary in its explicit announcement of itself as an "Emigrant's Guide" and in the conditions of its production. The volume portends the fascination with community and nation that dominates nineteenth- and twentieth-century short-story cycles. Her allusions to quaintness and the tone of sentimental retrospection initiate a mode of nostalgia that celebrates the particularity of a place. This nostalgic particularity proves transferable.
- 11 A number of early cycles practice emplaced nostalgia and substantiate their seriousness through claims of realism, including Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835) and Eliza Buckminster Lee's *Sketches of a New England Village, in the Last Century* (1839). Both of these volumes followed in the wake of Washington Irving's enormously popular *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1820). Like Kirkland, Longstreet emphasizes the truth of the volume's narratives in the preface to the first edition:

They consist of nothing more than fanciful combinations of real incidents and characters; and throwing into those scenes, which would be otherwise dull and insipid, some personal incident or adventure of my own, real or imaginary, as it would best suit my purpose; usually real, but happening at different times and under different circumstances from those in which they are here represented [...] I have been importuned by persons from all quarters of the State to give them to the public in the present form. (iv-v)
- 12 In the description of his statesmen's insistence that he make his work public, claims of verisimilitude lend credibility to the desire that Georgia become more central to the nation's image of itself. Moreover, the preface intimates one hallmark of the sketch tradition: self-conscious claims that explain that the tales are experienced, heard, or collected (Zauhar 413).⁹
- 13 The insistence on veracity validates the general nostalgic depiction of these remote or vanishing locales. In a move similar to Longstreet and Kirkland, Lee too announces the truth of her descriptions in a note that precedes the text: "The following letters were really addressed, as they purport to have been, to a friend. They are substantially true. The little fiction that has been added is like the drop of honey on the rim of a cup to beguile an infant's taste" (1). That these sketches take an epistolary form reinforces their veracity. However, the analogy of honey is an intriguing one, insinuating that the

actual happenings savor of a bitterness that must be masked by fiction's nectar. The conflict between verisimilitude and invention is typical within these early volumes and serves to illustrate the sincerity of the stories. The outsider perspective of their narrators, often a figure who blurs the distinction between author and narrator, reinforces their emplaced sentimentalism through ostensible objectivity. This nostalgia connects to the cycles' representation of unified, cooperative, and autonomous communities. Lee's first letter is ripe with nostalgia and the sense that this place, and others like it, are fading from New England as "they seem to have passed in another and earlier world" and the old-fashioned houses and structures are vanishing (3). Claiming veracity and celebrating these localities support a model of citizenship that these texts depict as diminishing in the United States.

- 14 These volumes explicitly announce a belief that geographically-based community presents an antidote to the poisons of industrialization and modernization, and thereby nicely fit the model offered in Zagarell's "narrative of community." Early cycles create a composite, mostly harmonious view of a place. Claims of verisimilitude and paratextual materials distinguish this stage of the cycle, spanning from the mid- to late-nineteenth century, whereas a greater emphasis on fiction and invention mark cycles published in the last decade of the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth centuries. The emphasis remains on portraying a particular place, such as Dunnet Landing in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), the small New England town of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's *The People of Our Neighborhood* (1898), and the titular Wisconsin town of Zona Gale's *Friendship Village* (1908). Though more explicitly fictionalized and increasingly fragmented, later cycles maintain some sense of Kirkland's 'Emigrant Guide.' Even as they continue to treat place-based community, later cycles move increasingly toward disjunction, both in terms of their representation of communal affiliation and in their formal construction. Although earlier cycles celebrate the possibility of *gemeinschaft*, these short-story cycles increasingly treat geographically-based community not as an armistice to the conflicting forces of modernity but rather as another site of battle. Nostalgia becomes a weapon in that battle.
- 15 The language of nostalgia serves two purposes. First, it establishes a narrative mode that reacts to the very conditions of modernity, which, Susan Stanford Friedman argues, "involves a powerful vortex of historical conditions that coalesce to produce sharp ruptures from the past" (433). Stanford Friedman claims this rapid change produces "a gamut of sensations from displacement, despair, and nostalgia to exhilaration, hope, and embrace of the new—a range that depends in part on the configurations of power and the utopic versus dystopic directions of change" (434). The second purpose of nostalgia is to advance locality as simultaneously the site of, cause of, and solution for the ruptures that accompany modernity. This is a deeply nationalistic response to modernity, because nostalgia for localities filters these anxieties. Nostalgia represents the language in which these texts narrate national identity. Late nineteenth-century cycles deploy a self-conscious sentimentality, or what I call critical nostalgia, to signal and respond to the issues of nation and formal experimentation that pervade the genre. Critical nostalgia refers to the deployment of a kind of wistful simplification that is undercut within the stories themselves. Cycles linked by limited locality deploy nostalgia as a sincere mode of expression, an evocation in defense of a certain locality, or a mode of expression ripe for satire and

subversion. Often, and increasingly by the turn of the twentieth century, they engage these different uses of nostalgia simultaneously.

- 16 The nostalgic celebration of bygone, frontier, or unknown localities replaces the earlier cycles' emphasis on introduction and incorporation. Produced in the context of "postwar reunion" following the Civil War, these volumes were apt vehicles for transporting a nostalgic sense of national cohesion because their settings gave "the appearance that local communities were disengaged from national politics" (Joseph 11). A desire for places untouched by national turmoil permeates these story cycles, as is the case with Stephen Crane's *Whilomville Stories*, which were published serially in *Harper's* in 1899 and posthumously as a book in 1901.¹⁰ The title draws on the term "whilom," meaning "some time before or ago," evoking the nostalgic sense of place that resonates in the stories (Brown and Hernlund 116-117).¹¹ Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century cycles capture the feeling of places rapidly being lost to industrialization. While these cycles maintain what Raymond Williams calls the "fly-in-amber quality" of regionalism, they do so in more highly self-conscious ways (61).
- 17 Such cycles maintain the connection between locality and community, but also increasingly expose the significance of the individual. For instance, in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Dunnet Landing functions as a dual metaphor for loneliness and community, which are posited as two responses to the impending changes facing the cloistered locale. The specific geography of the place further correlates to the lives of town's citizens in that the narrator begins to view the citizens of Dunnet Landing "as human analogues to the pointed firs, possessing the will to flourish with the incoming tide and the strength to stand tall at its ebb" (Dunn and Morris 39). Much like Kirkland's emphasis on mud-holes, Jewett's emphasis on specific features of the landscape introduce that distanced locale into the national imagination. Similar to earlier cycles, Jewett's cycle opens with an introduction of the place:
- 18 These houses made the most of their seaward view [...] the small-paned high windows in the peaks of their steep gables were like knowing eyes that watched the harbor and the far sea-line beyond, or looked northward all along the shore and its background of spruces and balsam firs. When one really knows a village like this and its surroundings, it is like becoming acquainted with a single person. (3)
- 19 The personification of the houses suggests both the solidarity and perceptiveness of the community. The specific geographical feature of the firs, in this passage and throughout the stories, resonates with the tenacity of the people. The sea, in its strength and brutality, symbolizes change. This passage typifies how cycles of locality use place as an ever-shifting metaphor. On one level, the town represents a certain milieu's response(s) to change happening at a national and international level and, on another level, the particularities of the landscape get inscribed with meaning to reflect localized, individualized experience of that change. Dunnet Landing suggests how persistently, if not universally, the cycle represents localities as cloistered outposts, distanced from other places or marginalized by economic conditions. The final statement that the town resembles a singular person establishes a tension between the individual and the community that the narrator's position over the course of the stories dramatizes.
- 20 The friendship between the narrator and Mrs. Todd, the interconnections and affinities amongst the townspeople, and the general affection the narrator feels toward the place and its people make Dunnet Landing seem like a communal paradise. As they relate the journey to and the events of the yearly Bowden family reunion, the highly integrated

stories “The Great Expedition,” “A Country Road,” “The Bowden Reunion,” and “The Feast’s End” depict an ostensibly idyllic rural community. According to Frances M. Zauhar, Jewett’s volume minimizes the “independence and rugged individualism” of much American fiction and instead celebrates “domesticity and friendship,” which are constituted not by courtship and marriage, hallmarks of the domestic novel, but by “a vision of mature friendship and mutually recognized affiliation” (412).¹² In her depiction of friendship and throughout the stories, Jewett effectively uses and revises common tropes and themes in American literature. For instance, in Jewett’s volume, the trope of the tourist or emigrant narrator remains. She initially acts like the narrator of Irving’s *The Sketch Book*, but the narrator in *Country* “suggest[s] that the life of the tourist is a life well-lived only if it moves out of its rambling ways and into a committed intimacy with the community” (Zauhar 414-415). As they leave the reunion, the narrator “came near to feeling like a true Bowden, and parted from certain new friends as if they were old friends; we were rich with the treasure of new remembrance” (117). The narrator’s position at the end of the book appears to be a complete and total immersion into the community. The narrator celebrates her intimacy with the place and its inhabitants, especially sharing asides with Mrs. Todd that shape and confirm their friendship.

- 21 While Mrs. Todd’s personal disclosures about the members and practices of the clan have been read largely in terms of her affinity for the narrator, the content of these disclosures often suggests the isolation omnipresent even in Dunnet Landing. Thus, Jewett depicts a limited locality that offers only a provisional community to the narrator and denies community to some of its own members. Jewett spends a long section of the reunion describing the procession of Bowdens as they make their way to the site of the picnic. Led and organized by Santin Bowden, a man bent on military service but denied the opportunity, Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Caplin discuss the nature of Santin’s proclivity for war, alcohol, and “poor gloomy spells” (109). Mrs. Todd compares Santin’s particularity to a certain “sprig of laurel” (110) that will not bloom despite a welcoming landscape. She says the laurel “‘Tis a real Sant Bowden, out of its own place” (110). The narrator adores Mrs. Todd’s botanical metaphors, which draw on her trade and familiarity with place, but Mrs. Caplin just “looked bewildered and blank” (110) before moving on to more gossip about his odd ways. She does not understand the connection between the laurel sprig and Santin—both individual objects out of place. This small moment highlights the lack of understanding available to Santin and between the two women.
- 22 As much as the narrator enjoys Mrs. Todd’s stories, there are hints that she can be domineering and dismissive. During the procession, the narrator remains almost entirely silent, taking in the scene and enjoying the insights offered. When the topic of Captain Littlepage comes up—a person with whom the narrator has enjoyed some moments of disclosure and discourse—she writes, “‘The stories are very interesting,’ I ventured to say” (111). The generality of the statement and the choice of “ventured,” as if she is testing the waters, suggest that Mrs. Todd is not exactly open to input. Indeed, Mrs. Todd immediately shuts her down, offering her take on Captain Littlepage’s stories. The narrator characterizes Mrs. Todd as knowledgeable, generous, and affectionate, but the stories reveal that those qualities are balanced by her often harsh judgment, railroading of others, and commitment to disingenuous conventions. Of a distant relative, she says, “‘I hate her just the same as I always did; but she’s got on a real pretty dress. I do try to remember that she’s Nathan’s cousin” (112). Throughout

the day, she isolates certain individuals for her disapproval, and her joy from the day comes as much from pointing to others' flaws as from seeing dear friends and the old folks.

- 23 The recurrence of such moments and the narrator's final statements on Mrs. Todd's changed demeanor reveal that Dunnet Landing is not a communal paradise:
as the feast went on, the spirits of my companion steadily rose. The excitement of an unexpectedly great occasion was a subtle stimulant to her disposition, and I could see that sometimes when Mrs. Todd had seemed limited and heavily domestic, she had simply grown sluggish for lack of proper surroundings [...] More than one face among the Bowdens showed that only opportunity and stimulus were lacking,—a narrow set of circumstances caged a fine able character and held it captive. (113-114)
- 24 The narrator recognizes that the place itself makes full, sustained communal feeling impossible. The annual Bowden reunion offers a regular but rare opportunity for the citizens of Dunnet Landing to be fully engaged with each other. The narrator hears "the words 'next summer' repeated many times, though summer was still ours and the leaves were green" (116). That they look forward to next year even in the midst of the reunion suggests that such occasions are the exception rather than the rule. Their nostalgia for the event and its people while it is still happening reveals that nostalgia can be deeply ambivalent. To say that Dunnet Landing represents a coherent, positive community prior to industrialization and urbanization captures only a part of the place Jewett maps. The locality is both limited and limiting.
- 25 Jewett's cycle depicts how nostalgia often embraces a false simplification and sentimentalism that the content of the stories contradict. In his reading of Jewett's cycle, for instance, Hsuan L. Hsu convincingly shows that *The Country of the Pointed Firs* sets forth a "theme of prior cosmopolitanism" in that the volume
represents Dunnet Landing at the point of transition between this older yet more cosmopolitan role and its new function as a vacation spot for tourists, like Jewett's narrator, who seek a quiet retreat from urban life. Ironically, the local colorist's nostalgia for a 'prelapsarian' and homogenous region that 'excludes historical change' leads her to discover the sea captain's own nostalgia for a historically prior period of cosmopolitan mobility. (39-40)
- 26 In her conversation with the sea captain, the narrator learns that Dunnet Landing was once more highly interconnected to international trade networks than it is at the time of her visit. The Captain's nostalgia centers on the halcyon days of wide and frequent travel. Jewett's inclusion of the tale pokes holes in the narrator's (and often, the readers') desire to imagine Dunnet Landing as a quaint, isolated place only now being introduced to large-scale economic practices. Dunnet Landing is emblematic of localities that are generally represented as secluded outposts, distanced from other places or marginalized by economic conditions, but nonetheless entrenched in national and international networks. As this example from Jewett's cycle suggests, a brand of critical nostalgia increasingly saturates the cycles' treatment of the eponymous settings.¹³ Jewett's cycle makes especially clear how late nineteenth-century cycles borrow from the conventions of earlier cycles, such as romantic renderings of the geographical features and the use of tourist narrators; however, they also initiate the irony, skepticism and disjunction that figure largely in *Winesburg* and later modernist texts.

- 27 Anderson's cycle, set in 1890, evokes a generalized sense that the railroad and the First World War radically changed the small town. However, the elegiac tone is undercut by the recurring depiction of characters whose lives are marked by the same qualities, such as alienation, dislocation, and frustrated expression, usually associated with the later period. Critical nostalgia allows the texts to have it both ways: they appeal to a general sense that things were better once while also showing that they are always the same. The extent to which *Winesburg* departs from the earlier cycles is evident in its opening. Whereas nearly all of the earlier cycles begin with a description of the place, *Winesburg* begins with a character sketch of one the "grotesques" who populate the town. The man's hermetical life and his perception of George as embodying possibility initiate a sense of alienation and disjunction that the stories explore. *Winesburg* employs critical nostalgia in multiple, often apparently contradictory, ways. Three of the most recurring deployments of critical nostalgia focus on George, the notion of progress, and, of course, the place itself.
- 28 The townspeople of *Winesburg* transfer onto George a sentimental sense of youth, possibility, and lost opportunities. His former schoolteacher, Kate Swift, fixates on his potential: "Kate Swift's mind was ablaze with thoughts of George Willard. In something he had written as a school boy she thought she had recognized the spark of genius and wanted to blow on the spark" (*Winesburg* 131). Kate is far from alone in this regard; his neighbors, parents, and peers all assign a kind of specialness to him that is tinged by nostalgia. The depiction of George in *Winesburg* suggests that communities rely on representative individuals for validation. To the extent that the development of George Willard creates an arc, this cycle is akin to the *Bildungsroman* or—maybe more particularly—the *Künstlerroman*. Franco Moretti theorizes that the development of the *bildungsroman* correlates to a need for a symbol of modernity; the practitioners of the genre and the public at large made "youth" that symbol and "mobility" and "interiority" its hallmark traits (3). Youth allows the culture to render modernity meaningful. In *Winesburg* we see a parallel: faced with the mutability of modernity, these outposts, perceived as outdated or marginal, rely on George to give meaning and stability to social conditions. In its emphasis on youth, *Winesburg* represents a significant departure from the earlier cycles, which focus largely, although not exclusively, on older travelers. Although George is a native of the town, his sensibilities and position as a newspaper reporter allow him to maintain the distance that Kirkland's and Jewett's narrators enjoy. The narrators' positions as participant/observer portend modernism's tendency to privilege an insider-outsider narrative voice.¹⁴
- 29 Although George figures as a central organizing figure in *Winesburg*, the cycle complicates George's primacy through the emphasis on surrogate characters. The stories obscure the distinction between major and minor characters by having the latter function as protagonists in individual stories. For instance, Helen White, Enoch Robinson, and Seth Richmond function as surrogates for George in several stories, and often explicitly comment on why George has been singled out over them. While George appears to be a powerful unifying force, Anderson displaces some of his centrality onto the populace, questioning the possibility for textual and symbolic unity through an individual. The stories critique the aggrandizement of a single individual and challenge the overt nostalgia often aligned with George. The sheer multiplicity of such alternatives intimates that this glorification is often arbitrary and violently minimizes

the potential of other promising figures, many of whom are artists (for instance, Enoch paints). Making George carry the burden of the localities' dreams parallels the burden of making him the center of the story; the cycle suggests the caprice inherent in both. While *Winesburg* ultimately devotes more textual attention to George's acts of writing, it nonetheless shows the tenacity and choices made by those that stay and continue, often writing or painting for no audience. One effect of making minor characters the equal of the protagonist is to offer multiple answers to the contradictory impulses of modern, industrialized, and capitalistic society: a glorification of the autonomy of self and the romanticization of communal obligation and spirit.¹⁵

- 30 *Winesburg* is ostensibly teleological; however, *Winesburg* engages critical nostalgia to simultaneously enact and dismantle the logic of teleology and progress. *Winesburg* modifies the conventions of the bildungsroman by implying maturity rather than depicting it in George's departure. In Anderson's cycle, the exact nature of George's maturity remains vague. Unlike the classical bildungsroman, marriage does not represent a viable solution for demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility. The stories present and reject many suitors for George, showing the inadequacy of this resolution. Rather than marking maturity and social commitment through an event, this cycle leads the reader to infer that maturity has taken place outside of the stories from the moments where the narrative voice most resembles George's retrospection. This extra-textual maturation represents a substantial "gap" within the stories and solidifies how intrinsic the events that happen between stories are. *Winesburg* represents a turning-point in the cycle because it sets forth a model followed by later modernist cycles, which increasingly gain meaning through their open-endedness. Such cycles cement the characters' liberty by making them free of the last thing that binds them: the locality. The characters exorcise the idea of the place that still haunts them through physically leaving it and, more importantly, through returning to it in stories.
- 31 The act of returning to the locality through stories mimics the inherent teleology of nostalgia. Nostalgia relies on a belief that there exists a point in the past that is pure or superior to the present. Nostalgia reverses the direction of progress but fundamentally subscribes to its sequential logic. The stories' setting in the 1890s and the retrospective tone that slips into the narratives model this nostalgia, as does the characters' sense of a pure or superior past moment that is now tainted. *Winesburg* enacts nostalgia as a way of replicating and then undercutting the expectation of a narrative teleology that culminates in formal unity. As much as the locality, the focus on George Willard, and the recurring characters link the stories, the cycle does not ultimately generate absolute coherence. The narrative gaps, the divisions between the stories, the placement of seemingly paired stories apart from one another, and the jarring juxtaposition of dissimilar stories all serve to break up any sense of perfect unity. This disjunction reinforces the notion that misunderstanding and distance are inherent to human relations. The representation of this attitude as longstanding—and not the exclusive product of a later modernist moment—critiques the idea that there exists a pure past to which return is desirable.
- 32 The fissures and gaps between the stories suggest that short-story cycles ostensibly linked by community often rewrite the very notion of the term itself. Anderson's depiction of *Winesburg*'s geography as ambiguous reinforces the stories' skepticism about the town generating a sense of *gemeinschaft*. Specific locations, such as Winney's

Dry Goods Store, recur but are not universally or consistently featured. The stories list street names, but their proximity to one another remains unclear. In the case of Winesburg, “Anderson’s Ohio village remains indistinct. In fact, the town map included in the 1960 edition of *Winesburg* reveals that only eight specific locations are identified” (Dunn and Morris 53). On the map itself, the illustrators completed the landscape with anonymous houses, churches, storefronts, and streets, mitigating the appearance of the cycle’s intentional ambiguity. The uncertainty of the geographical markers within Winesburg is so extreme that Garland Mann argues that “one is never able to visualize the town’s geography” despite the mapmaker’s intention to stabilize the town’s dimensions (52). The resistance to easily recognizable, legible mapping reflects a concern with disrupting any sense of geographically-based *gemeinschaft*.¹⁶ *Winesburg* engages the tropes and sentiments of its regional forebearers and simultaneously establishes a new paradigm for the genre. Anderson’s cycle revises locality as an organizing principle in that it moves away from formal integration toward disjunction. Its disjointed unity upsets expectations of narrative harmony in the volume and communal coherence in the place it represents.

33 Anderson’s *Winesburg* typifies the modernist blockbusters that we have come to associate with the short-story cycle. The sheer abundance of place-centered cycles in US modernism testifies to the influence of limited locality. The three narratives of Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* (1909) are all set in Bridgeport. Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County serves as the setting for several of his short-story cycles, including *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942), as well as many of his works that straddle the line between novel and cycle. The small Mississippi town of Morgana provides the setting for Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples* (1947). Steinbeck returns again and again to Californian towns in his four short-story cycles: *Pastures of Heaven* (1932), *The Red Pony* (1933), *Tortilla Flat* (1935), and *Cannery Row* (1945). In addition to these, there are also those works that employ some level of limited locality while bordering between the cycle and the short story collection, such as Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923) and Langston Hughes’s *The Ways of White Folks* (1934). Short-story cycles set in urban centers tend to focus on a single area, as in Waldo Frank’s *City Block* (1922). Although such cycles are set in urban spaces, they stake out a similarly limited geography within the cities, and the characteristics common to village narratives remain. Additionally, most of the authors listed above poach from the loose linking techniques of short-story cycles in their novels. The short-story cycle has been a wildly generative genre in that it inspired and shaped the new narrative techniques that characterize so much of modern American literary production.

34 Susan Hegeman observes that a preoccupation with place denotes a particularly national form of US modernism. Given

the geographic context of the cultural great divide, we may now turn to the ‘high’ culture of the period, and see how often its interesting producers addressed, in similarly geographic terms, the paradoxes and unevenness of America’s progress toward modernization. Willa Cather, W.E.B. Du Bois, William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, William Carlos Williams, and many others may be said to have followed Pound’s injunction to ‘make it new’ *within* the context of what might be described as the provincial, and the geographically and culturally marginal. (Hegeman 23)

35 Of the authors Hegeman lists, the works that concern the aforementioned geographic locales tend to be in cyclical forms, if not short-story cycles exactly.¹⁷ Composed of a mix of prose, poetry, history, and drama, the cyclical texts to which Hegeman refers

contain distinct parts, which, when taken together, constitute a whorl with place at the center.

- 36 While these texts vary widely in terms of style and subject, the persistent use of cyclical forms and of localities reflects common concerns and questions. The sense of alienation that characterizes *Winesburg* and its modernist cohorts parallels the earliest cycles' depiction of the wrought struggle between the narrator and his or her community. The emphasis on place and shared experiences evoke questions about the possibilities for sympathy, solidarity, and community. The stories emphasize the promise of being on the inside in such localities even as they treat how much more keenly felt and dramatic exclusion can be in such tight settings. These questions are not unique to either regionalism or modernism but are indeed central to both. A recent special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, edited by Scott Herring, engages the term "Regional Modernism" to acknowledge the connections between the two terms. Herring argues that "when scholars consider the role of regionalism in modern twentieth-century literatures" they "stereotypically relegate it to singular case studies" (3). This emphasis on singularity results from a general debasement of regionalism, often advocated by the modernists themselves. This brand of modernism "likes to think that it has uprooted itself from provincialism as a way of life and the provincial as a geographic entity when it leaves any pretty how town behind" (Herring 2-3). The preponderance of locality among modernist cycles makes clear that far from leaving the province, these "any pretty how town[s]" are central to their modernist practices. Although some modernist texts positioned their innovation as a revolt from such places, they did so in the very terms and preoccupations of the earlier period. The genre of the short-story cycle supports Herring's claim that "regionalism and modernism have always been compeers in terms of spatialization and in terms of periodization" (5). This issue, as well as recent scholarship by Hsu, Kate McCullough, and Philip Joseph, among others, shows the ways in which modernity shapes regionalist writing.¹⁸ Moreover, the critics and literature alike show regionalism's influence on modernism.
- 37 Limited localities provide the language, form, and framework for regionalism's and modernism's treatment of anxieties of affiliation, alienation, urbanization, industrialization, and the past and present. The genre's particular preoccupations reveal that the introduction of the modern onto the frontier upset a desire to believe that change is meaningful and progressive. The stories within a cycle are open-ended, return back on each other, evade concrete meaning, and do not present a resolved, complete protagonist. Thus, the very form of the short-story cycle thwarts any sense of progress. The short-story cycle's persistent and increasingly complicated ambivalence about unity and fragmentation, the challenge it presents to teleological thinking, its entrenched rendering of the individual, and the cycle's constant struggle with textual and communal coherence make the genre vital to a fuller understanding of regionalism and modernism as literary, cultural, and historical movements.

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NOTES

1. J. Gerald Kennedy advocates for "short story sequences," while Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris lobby for "composite novel." Often, the volumes will include the subtitle "a novel in stories." Forrest Ingram's foundational study employs the term "short story cycle" or "short-story cycle" as do studies by Susan Garland Mann, James Nagel, Rocío Davis, and Mark Whalan. I prefer short-story cycle, because it most accurately captures the recursiveness central to the genre and privileges the short story as its formative element.

2. The particular formation and adoption of the short-story cycle represents a modern revision of a very old form. Story cycles date back to the earliest written narratives, and their origins span the globe: Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (and many other Italian story cycles from the period), Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Indian *Panchatantra*, the Arabian *A Thousand and One Nights*, Malory's *Morte d' Arthur*, and the Icelandic sagas, which were originally independent but interconnected oral tales. I am indebted to Ingram, Nagel, and Rolf Lundén, among others, for their discussions of the history of story cycles.

3. Zagarell writes that of these communities "Some are sustaining, some destructive; all are contingent on the specific history, racial and ethnic circumstances, gender relations, sexual norms, and other factors which inform them" ("Reflections" 434). Thus, "narrative of community" does not fully encompass the "many-valenced" treatments of geographically-produced affiliation and alienation.

4. Book reviews and popular essays of the nineteenth century often debated the suitability of the novel to the United States. As a tastemaker, William Dean Howells's comments are illustrative: "In most American novels, vivid and graphic as the best of them are, the people are segregated if not sequestered, and the scene is sparsely populated... we excel in small pieces with three or four figures, or in studies of rustic communities, where there is propinquity if not society" (253). He continues: "I am not sure that the Americans have not brought the short story nearer perfection in the all-round sense that almost any other people" (254). He attributes this refinement to a national temperament of "hurry and impatience" and a robust magazine industry (254).

5. The short-story cycle is far from unique to American literature. James Joyce's *Dubliners*, first published in 1914, typifies the conventions of a cycle set in a single location. This volume, along with volumes by Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and Ivan Turgenev, among others, influenced US cycles.

6. The very notion of a national literature has become so contested that Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell make a case for the continued use of the national category. See "Introduction: Planet and America, Set and Subset."

7. Kirkland acknowledges that her work is indebted to Mary Russell Mitford, whose chronicles of life in a small English hamlet, *Our Village* (1832), "suggested the form of my rude attempt" (2). This self-effacement reveals not just the popularity of an international sketch tradition but also the extent to which this American author saw herself in conversation with it. For Kirkland, this reliance on an English model did not detract from the American-ness of her own volume.

8. For a more complete history of the use of community, see Jessica Berman's "Cosmopolitan Communities."

9. There exists a significant overlap between sketch volumes and short-story cycles. I distinguish the sketch from the short story by the extent to which the latter narrative hinges on and develops plot. This distinction is slippery, however, as Anderson's cycle was and is celebrated for its lack of plot in favor of characterization. As indicated in many of the volumes' titles, sketch as a term held a generic power, especially following Irving's works. Ultimately, I understand the terms not exactly as synonymous but deeply imbricated with many volumes engaging both sketches and stories. In the aggregation of both short forms, cyclicity and recursiveness generate meaning for the volumes as a whole.

10. The serialization of stories often suggests the economic conditions under which many were produced. The publication of the Whilomville tales helped to alleviate Crane's financial crisis and medical expenses. Similarly, following her parents' deaths, Freeman's

stories appeared in *Harper's* and initiated her financial autonomy. The stories in *The People of Our Neighborhood* first appeared in *The Ladies Home Journal* between December of 1895 and December of 1897.

11. For more on the meaning of the title, see Ellen A. Brown and Patricia Hernlund's "The Source for the Title of Stephen Crane's *Whilomville Stories*."

12. Zauhar convincingly reads Jewett's volume as being in dialogue with and revising the conventions of three major genres of American literature in the period: the travel adventure novel, the seduction novel, and the domestic novel (411). In reading Jewett's deployment of their principles, Zauhar shows how Jewett exposes these genres' "shortcomings as sufficient tales of community" (426).

13. Set in the Upper Midwest, Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) is perhaps the most obvious example of this mode.

14. The cycle's emphasis on George's particular development also provides an organizing principle that influences later cycles, such as Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, Hemingway's *In our time* (1923), and—more recently—Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984). Like George, the narrators of these volumes occupy a liminal space as they are members of and set apart from their communities.

15. For more on the dueling pulls of individual and communal obligation, see Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (24).

16. Previous critics' reliance on New Critical approaches necessitates a conclusion of unity, both in terms of form and of place. See the studies of Ingram, Dunn and Morris, and Garland Mann.

17. For instance, Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918), although more highly integrated than a short-story cycle, consists of a framed narrative and five stories that create a composite view of the Nebraska frontier. In blending of essay, history, anthropology, and story, Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) descends from the sketch tradition. Likewise, Hurston's *Eatonville Anthology* (1926) consists of anecdotes and character descriptions of the small Florida town. Williams's poetic cycle, *Paterson*, stands as one of the most prominent locality-based modernist texts.

18. For more on the interconnections between regionalist and modernist literature, see Kate McCullough's *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction, 1885-1914*; Hsuan L. Hsu's "Literature and Regional Production"; and Philip Joseph's *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age*.

ABSTRACTS

Cet article s'intéresse au rôle joué par l'émergence et le développement du cycle de nouvelles modernistes (en tout premier plan *Winesburg Ohio* de Sherwood Anderson) dans la propagation et le recyclage des cycles de nouvelles régionalistes traditionnels. Le cycle de nouvelles modernistes se nourrit des récits de village du XIXe siècle, qui ont permis d'instaurer dans l'imaginaire national des villes éloignées des centres culturels. Les récits modernistes ont continué à faire connaître des endroits économiquement marginalisés, même après la fin de la frontière. Ils prennent ancrage dans des lieux géographiques restreints, autrement dit dans de très petites

localités. Du fait de leur intérêt prononcé pour la question du lieu, ces cycles interrogent celle de l'interaction entre proximité géographique et esprit communautaire, cet esprit communautaire étant souvent vu comme l'antidote au poison de l'industrialisation. Aussi bien les cycles régionalistes que les cycles modernistes jouent sur le sentimentalisme assumé, ou sur ce que j'appelle la nostalgie critique, pour comprendre et répondre aux problématiques liées à l'expérimentation de la nation et de la forme qui ont caractérisé le genre à travers son histoire.

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