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“WHAT’S A-GOIN’ ON?” PEOPLE AND PLACE IN THE FICTION OF EDYTHE SQUIER DRAPER, 1924-1941

by

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“WHAT’S A-GOIN’ ON?” PEOPLE AND PLACE IN THE FICTION OF EDYTHE SQUIER DRAPER, 1924-1941

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University of Nebraska, 2011

Adviser: Frances W. Kaye

This essay is devoted to looking back into the life and fiction of Edythe Squier Draper, a twentieth-century writer in Oswego, Kansas. Many of Draper’s stories are set in southeastern Kansas. Through them, we gain a sense of how she attempted—and at times failed—to perceive, articulate, and adapt to her place on the Great Plains. Draper claimed the identity of a rural woman writer by writing herself into narratives of colonial, agricultural settlement, and she both complicated and perpetuated stereotypes of class and race in her fiction. By examining her and her characters’ perspective on their place in the Great Plains, we can better know the complex and problematic cultural history we have inherited. Furthermore, by considering what Draper for the most part does not do in her work—such as perceive the Native American inhabitants of her place—we can better appreciate the need for literature that challenges readers to temporally and spatially broaden their scales of perception beyond the level of an individual human character to include other human and non-human beings.

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Introduction

In the 1920s and 30s, Edythe Squier Draper (1882-1964) was a nationally known fiction writer living in Oswego, Kansas, whose work was solicited by East Coast editors.[1] Although her two novel manuscripts were rejected for publication, she published over 20 full-length stories—in such diverse venues as Prairie Schooner and Household Magazine—as well as numerous newspaper shorts, stories for young adults and decades of Kansas newspaper columns (Goudie 3). A 1994 collection of six of her stories, titled As Grass and published by the Center for Kansas Studies at Washburn University, is her only work still in print.[2]

Draper's absence from the critical conversation about Great Plains literature and studies is primarily because, due to publishers' rejection of her novel-length work, she did not succeed in reaching her intended Eastern and national audiences to the degree to which she aspired. Many of Draper's stories are set in southeastern Kansas. Through them, we gain a sense of how she attempted—and at times failed—to perceive, articulate, and adapt to her place on the Great Plains. In Draper's carefully shaped narrative and aesthetic vision, language is always socialized. Readers see the world and other humans

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[1] Letters in her archive indicate that Draper's work was solicited by editors such as Clifton P. Fadiman of Simon and Schuster, who wrote in 1928 to request a novel manuscript, and who wrote again in January 1931 to encourage Draper to submit her novel The Fruit at Singapore after reading an overview of the plot. The manuscript was rejected by Simon and Schuster on June 12, 1935. Fadiman wrote, "The material has authenticity, but there is no lighter side to the picture—nothing to set it off—so that after a while it becomes a little dull to read." Children of Liz was rejected on March 7, 1932 by Charles Scribner's Sons. Managing Editor Alfred Dashiell wrote, "you have a good idea, but it seems to me that you have carried the inarticulateness of the men to an extreme, and that in an effort to use a new technique the story has become obscure." He advised Draper to submit again, and consider the "possibilities" of the themes of "the open road and America's itinerant population."

[2] Manuscripts, clippings, letters, and other information are available at the Special Collections of Axe Library at Pittsburg State University in southeastern Kansas.

through the eyes of a main character and through a particular angle of vision. When this human viewpoint is used to perpetuate narratives of colonial settlement, violence, racism, and escapism, as it sometimes does, it obscures a realistic vision of the relationship between humans and nature. Yet in Draper's best work, this human viewpoint conversely gives a voice to some of those who have previously been silenced, and draws readers' attention to the "[s]mall, green things" that reside at the edges of their places and communities.

This essay is devoted to looking back into Draper's life and work in order to celebrate its potential and critique its failings. By examining her and her characters' perspective on their place in the Great Plains, we can better know the complex and problematic cultural history we have inherited from her. Furthermore, by considering what Draper for the most part does not (or can not) do in her work, we can better appreciate the need for literature that challenges us as readers to temporally and spatially broaden our scales of perception beyond the level of an individual human character to include other human and non-human beings. We can, like Pearl Wentz in the story "As Grass," learn to ask of this place: "What's a-goin' on?"

Chapter 1. Claiming the Identity of a Rural Woman Writer

In the late 1970s, Jeffrey Ann Goudie was the first scholar to consult Draper's archives and the members of Draper's family. Goudie is responsible for the only existing scholarship on Draper's life and work, a biocritical introduction titled "The Wrong Side of the Tapestry: Edythe Squier Draper" that was originally published in Little Balkans Review in spring 1981 and then reappeared as the introduction to the Washburn

University collection As Grass. Goudie explains that Draper's "outsider's sensibility," her "awareness of the special cares and concerns of children," and "her close acquaintance with the hypocrisy of religion" informed her literary work (8-9). In this section, I will expand on Goudie's suggestion that these biographical themes influenced Draper's writing. In fact, Draper's fiction demonstrates her own and her characters' struggles to claim their identities as settlers of a rural landscape and women writers read by non-rural audiences.

Though she wrote for Christian publications and attended church services her entire life, Draper, in her own words, "climbed the arid way from Calvinism to Unitarianism" over the years. This new religious philosophy, she wrote, is a "wider, happier plain where reason and faith shine together" ("The Courier" 338). Draper's religious philosophy was influenced by her conflicted relationship with her father, a minister who left the Methodist church and a moody disciplinarian who was fond of "harsh physical punishments" (Varvel 2). According to her daughter, Margaret Varvel, Draper was closest to her younger sister, Mabel, who died at age 21 from complications of rheumatic fever (5). Varvel's account implies an inappropriate relationship, possibly abusive, between Mabel and their father, Lee. A "pretty and vivacious" young adult, Mabel lived in Philadelphia and worked as her father's secretary: "She went to social events with him. They rode horses together in the park. He would not introduce his constant companion as his daughter" (4). Varvel explains that Draper "blamed her father bitterly" for Mabel's early death, saying, "he wouldn't leave her alone." Connie, the next youngest sister in the family, is also quoted as saying in old age, "Then he came after me,

but I wouldn't have any of that stuff, so he got one of the younger girls" (5). Draper's parents eventually separated.

Though Draper was neither a pioneer, nor the daughter of one, she did spend her formative years in small towns, beginning in northern Minnesota in the nineteenth century. She was the eldest of nine children (seven surviving), and had a large but not uncommon amount of responsibility. She chopped ice for water to wash the dishes, did housework, and cared for her siblings (Varvel 1). However, Varvel notes that her mother was first and foremost a reader and a storyteller: "All these duties cut into time for reading, a passion with Edythe. Always she had a book pulling at her to see what happened next, even if she had to hide it in her arithmetic book at school or in a basket of clothes she was folding or ironing at home. For the younger children Edythe told made-up stories, to their delight" (2). Reading as a means of escape from housework and domestic conflict is also a theme in Draper's autobiographical fiction.

In 1910 at age 28, Draper's education helped her escape. She took the 1,300 mile train trip west to "Oswego, Kansas, population 2,228," in order to teach literature and German (and a surprise course in botany) at the Oswego College for Young Ladies (Goudie 14). By 1910, Draper had already been to Japan, where she was born to missionary parents; a host of global cities, via an extended return trip to the United States as a child; various small towns in Ohio, Minnesota, and Ohio again; urban areas in the East, including New Jersey and Pennsylvania, where she attended the University of Pennsylvania; and South Carolina, where she taught at a mission school for African-Americans (Varvel 1-4). Draper would later recall "how well she herself had been treated at that school [for black children in South Carolina] and how poorly the children had

fared" (4). Varvel adds, "This distressed Edythe greatly and she could not persuade herself to return for another year" (4). This experience, along with Draper's first-hand knowledge of poverty and domestic violence, influenced her complicated and problematic fictional portrayals of African Americans (see the third section of this essay).

Though Draper later took trips to the East in 1917 and 1931, she would live for the rest of her life in Oswego, where she married the son of the local doctor, and, by 1917, had three young children (Varvel 6). Money was tight; despite Draper's husband's employment at a local agricultural loan company, "The family finances were never really secure" (Varvel 8). Draper began selling stories to earn income in 1923, with early paid publications in Christian children's papers and regional dailies, such as the Chicago Daily News and Kansas City Star. The family's financial situation declined in advance of the Great Depression, forcing them in 1927 to move from Draper's father-in-law's house in town to the Draper homeplace, ten acres at the edge of town (Varvel 9). Here Edythe Squier Draper raised chickens, with little success; after completing housework, she would write until her children got home from school (Goudie 24; Varvel 7-8). She continued to value education, but as the Draper children entered college over the course of the next decade, the family's finances became even more strained.[3] In 1932-33, Draper even lived with two of her children at school in Emporia in an attempt to save money (Varvel 10).

Draper struggled to balance her literary ambitions and domestic duties. Keenly conscious of how her own household was supported, Draper's perception of the natural world was through an economic lens. Animals were bought and tended to make food and

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[3] In her letter to Edward J. O'Brien granting permission to reprint "The Voice of the Turtle," for instance, Draper requests the use of her full name and apologizes for the "[d]ire poverty" which has prevented her from reading O'Brien's latest work (May 9, 1930).

money for food, just as the land was farmed to provide cash income. However, Draper hoped that literature and other forms of artistic expression could have both economic and intrinsic value, satisfying the material, intellectual, and emotional needs of the writer. This is evident in her metaphorical statement of her literary intent, which was to "fence in a little of being out of chaos" ("While the Little Flags Waved" 148). Just as a farmer or rancher might fence in land as a means to help convert its value into commodities, Draper hoped her stories might organize words into sellable products. Furthermore, in this remark Draper imagines organizing "chaos," such as raw personal material or the wilderness of the world, into a fenced in "being," presumably a human form. Draper's language draws on the language, imagery, and actions of colonial settlement. She implies that writers are settlers of the wilderness.

Though Draper was not herself a first-generation settler in Oswego, she was familiar with many older members of the Oswego community. More importantly, she recognized the appeal of the story of settlement to audiences not in the Great Plains. Draper's Oswego was a tiny town in the Neosho River valley, located on the edge of the hardwood savanna and on the site of the Osage village No tse Wa spe[4]. In her work, Draper does not address the rich history of the Osages in this place, which was also called "Little Town" by the nineteenth-century Jesuit missionaries who knew it as a trading post near which whites, Osages, and Cherokees lived before the Civil War.[5]

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[4] Oswego is located near the site of an older Osage village, which the Jesuits often called "Nantze Waspe or *No tse Wa spe* (literally Quiet Heart, freely translated as Heart Stays)" (Burns 58).

[5] Native Americans are included in Draper's draft of a novel, Peter Duck, which exists only in manuscript. What roles they play in the novel's plot, and in what ways they are portrayed, would have to be determined by a more in-depth study of this archival manuscript. In addition to the displaced "Indians" in her young children's story "Nice

Draper's earlier idea of fencing in "a little of being out of chaos" seems only inadvertently ironic, with regards to this "Little Town." Yet she erases locally specific Native American history and communities in order to write herself into a generalized, conventional narrative of agricultural settlement. Her implicit local history begins with the arrival of more white settlers from the East in "Little Town" after the Civil War. (In 1870 Oswego was named after the town of the same name in the state of New York, where many settlers came from.) There are no Osages in Draper's 1929 children's story "Nice Day," which Draper sets in a Minnesota rather than Kansas prairie town. Nor are there Cherokees, Anishinaabe, or Sioux. Instead, there are only "Indians," who—disturbingly—are neither "nice" nor "people."

"Nice Day" features some of the characters named after figures in classic literature and history that Draper used repeatedly in her fiction for children. In this case, a young rural girl named "Jane Austen" reveals her dreams of cultural settlement; she relates these dreams through the story of the history of the town, which reaches back to the day of the birth of the first settler in Sweden. As she imagines it, "That day there was no town over in the valley. This house was not here on the high prairie. No house was anywhere in Minnesota. Those trees were over by the creek; flowers were here. Indians were here. But we were not here" (62). She adds, "Then people came." The earlier "we"

Day," discussed elsewhere in this essay, Draper also stereotypically invokes Native Americans in a March 16, 1961 letter to her daughter Lucy Elwood. Draper is describing her journalistic take on an adult education lecture by a woman who spoke too fast for transcription. Without notes to rely on, she creates a character who domesticates all the inhabitants of the frontier: "I said it was about a woman, vigorous, turrible [sic] strong, beautiful, ubiquitous, one big strong creagure [sic] striding over the prairies nursing Indians and settlers, teaching, hatcheting [sic] saloons, being beautiful and efficient - - Betcha the good earnest souls hearing the lecture will complain of the fool old reporter - - - -."

is revealed to mean "people," which apparently "Indians" are not. As Jane continues her story, the flickers of colonial dreams and myths roar into a violent appropriation of this place, and its spatial enclosure into domestic institutions of white cultural reproduction:

> They worked and had hope, as we have hope for—for books, many, many books for everybody to read— . . . Many books and a house for the books, a house warm in winter, open to the wind in summer, with many windows for light. A concert room—everybody singing or playing, speaking pieces, acting in plays. A schoolhouse light and warm, with room for all the children to learn everything; with pictures on the walls and maps to show the rest of the world. A pretty room in the schoolhouse for mothers to come to and have parties and study what they want to in, and for fathers to come to. A big, big stove under the floor of the church to make it warm all over; lovely windows with pictures made of colored pieces of glass; a very big organ. The most beautiful house of all—the church. Trees planted everywhere; flowers. Lights for the long winter nights. Playing places for the little children, with swings and sand. All the children having enough to eat to make them strong and happy. Every child learning to make some beautiful thing. The Indians seeing a pretty, clean, kind town. Our town—our town— (62)

Knowing what must have been Draper's own childhood desire to escape the drudgery of housework—i.e., to have a home that is permanent and always clean—and to have the time and space to relish books as avenues for escape to a wider and "higher" literary culture, Jane's dreams can be understood as both personal to Draper and unfortunately

common in the context of the historical moment in which she was writing. The intended audience of young children may also contribute to the simplification of this vision of settlement happiness, in which the wild hardwood savanna is converted into "a pretty, clean, kind town," which the Indians may observe only from a distance.

By the early twentieth century, Draper's Oswego was a college town with some cosmopolitan culture, including two libraries and residents from a variety of states (Varvel 6). Though she enthusiastically participated in Oswego cultural events, Draper recognized her potential value as a "rural" writer, an informant and yarn-spinner from the countryside. She understood how people in the urban East imagined Kansas, farms, and the American West. Many of Draper's early stories, written to appeal to the editors and readers of middlebrow publications (and thus earn Draper income for her work), therefore utilize a regional version of the pastoral. As Diane Quantic explains, in Great Plains fiction the pastoral "is not a retreat that prepares one to return to civilization as it is in classical pastoral literature: time and space intervene, so that settlers have no place and no people to return to. Instead, civilization must be established *in* the wilderness" (97). Rather than find temporary reprieve from urban life in the country, Draper's characters hope—as she did—to establish a version of urbanity in the country that they claim.

Draper's 1939 children's story "Seminar With Lena" particularizes Draper's vision of herself as a rural yet cultured writer who could appeal to a national audience. Draper's main character in this piece is Arla, a city girl visiting her settler brother, Gabe, in Kansas for the summer. Arla conflicts with the rough-and-tumble frontier neighbor woman, Lena. Lena believes Gabe needs help getting the plowing done before a storm comes, while Arla wants to leave the farm to attend a university seminar. Arla explains

that she wants to be a writer, and is surprised that the country girl Lena has the same ambition. "Seems like if I had a typewriter to spell fer me an' do the writing' I'd git me a book did in a jiffy," says Lena. "I've got some folks put in a corral—inside my own head, y' understand—an' I see 'em an' what they're doin'. I got several different kinds of folks an' I am to put down what they do short an' clear so's folks that read'll know what livin's like for other folks" (1). The imprisoning "corral" in Lena's mind parallels and intensifies Draper's own civilizing desire to "fence in a little of being out of chaos."

Also like Draper, Lena's intentions for writing are also rooted in the desire to invoke imaginative sympathy between readers and characters. Draper's identity as a writer is likewise centered in this conflict between Arla and Lena, "culture" and "country." As the story's title indicates, Lena will pose a pedagogical challenge to the good student, Arla, and solidarity will be shared. "Seminar With Lena" thus becomes one version of the story of how Draper's writer-self learns to be a rural, Kansas, Great Plains author, who is read by and who appeals to Eastern and national audiences.

Early in the story, Arla expresses her inability to conceive of staying in this wild place: "She felt—yes—superior! Might as well be honest: she didn't like talk of cattle and wheat prices; she liked talks of books, pleasant, witty observations by civilized people. She was young. She wanted to be where culture was. *Then* she could write. No, she didn't like it away out here on the prairie" (2). But thanks to Lena's trickery, provocation, and outright commands, the unwilling Arla is goaded into taking a turn on the tractor in order to help her brother. Using the little she has learned about this machine, she finds herself able to operate it. This delights her. She imagines the amazing image

visible from above, of herself, a "girl from Philadelphia gripping the wheel of a clattering machine in the middle of a vast continent" (7).

Then, she finds something "more important" to inspire wonder: "What she did see was the land, the far scattered towns, the small houses miles apart. The cities east and west and north and south she saw, people in them and their children. The people and their children must have bread and milk and meat: how?" The answer, of course, comes from the willingness of settlers to perform moralizing agricultural labor: "Why, farmers would work and endure heat and cold; they would sow, they would reap—if they 'had a crop,' they would wait, when waiting seemed hopeless and long. Farmers—her brother was a farmer" (7). For the first time, she can sympathetically understand the identity of her brother, and can know who he is in this place. It is worth noticing that Arla's seemingly authentic perception of the land here is filtered through agrarian ideology, in which rural labor feeds the needs of urban people who cannot provide for themselves. Stoicism, in this case, is not so much a philosophical choice as it is an economic necessity and a marker of identity.

Like the crops her brother has planted for harvest, Arla—and Draper, in this story written to earn income—seek to harvest literary value from this rural landscape: "How she would like to put into words the night with its promise of rain at last, the earth she was getting ready for the planting—*she, she, she* was getting ready. Unbelievable. Glorious. *She* was having a part in this real thing" (7). Arla's gendered self-identification and interaction with the land is emphasized here, as is the idea that her participation in the (human) life of the land grants her authority and ability as a writer: "'You got to do some livin' to *know*—' Lena had said, and now she [Arla] could appreciate the meaning

of those words" (7). Arla does not understand herself to be controlling the land through her knowledge of it; she sees herself as a small but important actor in a larger economic and cultural process. In addition, the idea that knowledge is acquired through some kind of contact with the natural world—and, of course, that knowledge can be gained by women who mediate the (violent) contact between machinery and soil—hints at a few buried seeds of hope. For Draper, one way in which rural women can be culturally empowered as writers is by their physical labor and proximity to the land.

Though Arla (and by extension, Draper's implied writerly persona in this text) is not self-reflective regarding this point, Draper does build a potentially positive connection through Arla's experience in the field. Some sympathetic identification takes place between Arla and the land. In the next paragraph, for instance, Arla metaphorically perceives the land as her own thinking mind, which is being plowed and cultivated by the machine (7). She finishes the field in a thunderstorm, as sheets of rain fall and lightning streaks over the grass, the dirt, and her face, illuminating the darkness. Arla, readers are supposed to believe, is now enlightened. She climbs victorious from the machine, shouting to her brother that "Our land is ready!" as "The thunder answered with a jubilant laugh" (8). Like Jane's earlier "our town," Arla joins her brother in claiming "[o]ur land."[6] The thunder's response seems to indicate that the place in some way approves of this. The sentimental and "nice" endings to the children's stories "Seminar With Lena" and "Nice Day," however, provoke contemporary questions regarding the injustice of the colonial settlement of the prairies and justice for Native Americans; by doing so, they

[6] The characters Arla, Lena, and Gabe do all stay in Kansas, at least according to "The Little Old Leaning House," a subsequent story that also features them.

problematize their potentially positive themes of empowered women writing literature about rural characters and themes.

Chapter 2. Class, Place, and Movement

Draper's most extensive non-fiction representation of Oswego to the East is found in her draft of a 1938 letter to Webster W. Stout, the editor of the Saturday Evening Post. Writing as she would to a friend or relative (she says that she trusts Stout's secretary to "save him" if her informality is unwelcome), Draper describes the ice on the wheatfields and the dark sky, beneath which all classes of people suffer the same: in this weather, "The 'residences' of the prosperous, newly painted, are hardly gayer than the leaning black houses of men and women on relief." The town itself (founded and inhabited by lower-class migrants from the East, who planted trees) may have been forgotten by Stout and other upper-class citizens of New York, but Draper argues that Oswego is worth remembering:

> A haze of dust is over the town with its grandiloquent name, its ebbing wealth, the town that twenty years ago we called the finest in Kansas, that now rubs its hands a little ruefully, one eye cocked at the smooth white walls of its abandoned six-story Prairie Oil and Gas Company building. Some of its big houses would like this portico fastened on and some paint; but the trees are fine as New England's.

The glory of human settlement fades, but not nature in the "country," not even on such a February day as this. Draper highlights the lowlands along the river banks, where "[t]he green of the wheat-fields, the pale twisting arms of cottonwoods among hackberries,

pecans, walnuts, elms, oaks, relieve the blackness." This wildness mitigates the harshness of the climate, as well as the harsh human impact visible upon the land: "This morning the 'Deming Ranch' from the north bluff, dikes with matted grass pushing at the swollen black Neosho with its close border of willows, mists softening the geometrical severity of squares, oblongs, triangles – fields – has a beauty a fair day denies it, though it has always some." Finally, after describing a recent political gathering in the fashion of local color, Draper ends by expressing the hope that her location "down around a grass-root" enables her to provide Stout with something of interest. "I feel as if I could write about army-worms," she playfully concludes. "I seem to know something about them from having lived next to Robert Deming's alfalfa field last May when he cut it."

Draper earned her local knowledge of this physical place, as well as her knowledge of the various socioeconomic classes of its inhabitants, through time and careful attention. She was close to her father-in-law, John Draper, a doctor who served as a model for at least one of her characters and who educated her about the people of the area. John would drive Draper and her children through "the countryside he knew so well," telling stories about local people, "Edythe listening and remembering" (Varvel 7). Draper's fictional characters did not often have this luxury of physical mobility. She portrayed marginalized characters struggling to move on the edges of human society, as well as on the edges of the uplands and bottomlands of the prairie she described to Stout. In two particular literary stories told from the point of view of children, she examines the interrelationship between class, place, and movement. Families on the edges of society seek to "move up" to higher places, physically, economically, or spiritually. None

succeed, but for at least one character (the aptly-named Forrest), the experience is a lesson in beginning to perceive where he is and with whom he shares his place.

In the 1936 "Quinine and Honey," published in Kansas Magazine, Draper tells the story of a family who seeks civilized bliss by literally moving their house up from the river valley to a prairie hill. Once the escape from mosquitoes is complete, the boy Silas explains, they will be able to get rid of their quinine supply. His brother George adds: "Honey—everything 'll be— . . . —honey fr'm now on!" (92). The move is also caused, however, by the unhappiness of Mommy. The latest visit to the family from the fashionable "Aunt Julia" inspired her, it seems, to reevaluate the condition (and location) of the home her large, poor family lives in. In addition, she's irked by how her husband works hard for free to help others, but takes time off from his own income-earning work. Poppy, the narrator of the story explains, has "frog-fever," which means that he liked to go fishing "and he didn't like to plough" (94). This doesn't sit easy with Mommy, and she attempts to enforce domestic order: "Poppy came not to be in the house at all, not even to sleep. He staid in the barn nights and when it was raining. Sunny days he sat a lot on the big cottonwood the river had laid across the yard" (94).

As the young family prepares to move their house, pulled by a team of eight horses, they're excited to leave this uncivilized behavior behind: "No more quinine. No more skeeters. No more frogs. No more garden drowned out by high water. None of those pesky things. And no more of Mommy mad!" (94). They envision their new prairie home as not only a quiet, orderly domestic space, but also as a place where their very lives will be different and better. It is the old dream of America, of socioeconomic ascension through physical movement, writ small. With no trees to creak in the wind, no frogs to

"caterwaul" through the night, no bugs to bite exposed skin, and a view of the horizon—"clean to the aidge o' th' land, where th' sky sets on it"—too, the prairie upland will be "fine, fine" indeed (96-97).

The home in motion, physically and metaphorically, is quite a sight. But once the bustle of movement is past, homesickness sets in. The upland prairie is unfamiliar, even terrifying. There is too much grass and sky. The tall, thin house looks out of place. And Poppy's attempt at cheerful singing sounds "like a kyote" in the "terrible quiet" until the wind shakes the house: "It was like a big wide hand slapping a poor old bare face time and again and never going to quit" (100-101). The family has gone from slapping mosquitoes off themselves to being slapped by an invisible hand from the sky above. Even the cows, which have no trees to rub up against, are scared.

The young Demos believes he has no choice but to go back down to the bottomland, where the gentle wind "made one tree acquainted with another, carried sweet dust from flower to flower, crept softly down, and livened the dark river with wave and light and shade" (103). As he descends, the sounds of other beings return: "Oh, hear 'em. A peep, a trill, a whole song: robin, thrush, cat-bird, dove, peewee" (103). With Demos leading the way, the horses return to pull the house and its dreaming inhabitants back down where they belong. Life goes on, full of sweat and skeeters, and "the house got back on its old foundation, and the hackberry began its scratching at the weather-boarding and the other trees spread their late afternoon shadows over it. Except that it leaned over a little more to look into the river you couldn't tell it had been away" (105). In Draper's comic homecoming story, places don't get lost—people do. And to come

back to themselves they simply have to learn how to listen to the voices of their places, in this case, the "nice" sounds of a gentle breeze and bird song.

Or do they? Draper's tidy ending in fact reaffirms the upland prairie as a wild Other, in which humans and domesticated animals are threatened by the howling of the wind and coyotes through the grass and seemingly "empty" space. In addition, the story's plot implies that humans must choose between the wild prairie and the civilized, though insufferable, river bottomland. The story's moral seems to be that in order to gain class stature (if only in their own eyes) humans should learn to laugh with appreciation at pain, and to make light of the bitter quinine, pretending that it "Tas-tes like honey!" (108). However, this choice of "civilized" suffering in the river bottomland over "wild" fear on the prairie upland is not at all evident, or even necessary. It results from the imposition of a colonial narrative of agrarian settlement upon the land, a narrative that dictates homesteading and privileges stability over movement. In fact, the Osage who first lived in the Neosho and Verdigris River Valleys inhabited the bottomlands along the water, where in winter they found shelter and fuel; and the edges between the river bottomlands and uplands, where in spring they planted and harvested crops; and the uplands themselves, where in summer they found cooler winds and relief from insects (Fitzgerald 21-22).

This knowledge of an alternate (and much more sensible) way of relating to the land effectively unsettles what "Quinine and Honey" attempts to settle. Similarly, in Draper's story "The Voice of the Turtle," the young Forrest is healed (though not made whole or satisfied) by what he knows about wildness, both because of its closeness to and its distance from him. "The Voice of the Turtle" is perhaps Draper's most well-known

story, because of its selection by Edward O'Brien for the collection The Best Short Stories of 1930. Here Draper also uses the perspective of a poor child to illuminate the simple joy of relationships with non-human nature. But unlike Demos, who knows only how to put himself and his family back in their "place," the young boy Forrest's perception of non-human nature contrasts with what he comes to know about the capitalist, mechanical circus that visits the nearby small town, as well as the complicated emotional and material needs of human beings. For Forrest, the field is a place of labor, while the town and home are places of hunger. There is no clear division between the goodness of these places; each is unsettling to him to a degree, and none can be truly settled. Forrest moves between them. His apparent socioeconomic status does not change. Instead, his knowledge of himself and his place does.

As the story begins, Forrest leaves his "ploughing in a small wood-bordered field by a river" to experience the circus (51). He later returns to sneak money from the family tin and finds his mother in one of her spells. In these spells, she convulses and sees the world through eyes covered with a "film of desire and dream" (55). To clear her eyes, Forrest's father, Poppy, gathers the church revival group, who weep and wail prayers for healing. The widowed Sister Kennard's fervent prayers for Poppy, though, and Poppy's embarrassed inability to say aloud Sister Kennard's name—a habit Forrest notices, but does not comment on—bring the jealous Mommy back to life. She miraculously comes out of her spell after only a short time to reclaim her husband's attention.

This theme of revitalization is alluded to in the story's title, which comes from Song of Solomon 2:12: "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing [of birds] is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." Once Mommy chooses to

wake from her spell, spring can come to the family farm. The story's opening images—"The first dandelions were blooming. Peach tree branches were red in the sun" (51)—are restored in the conclusion, when "Frogses" croak and the children are told they will no longer be required to wear shoes. They will again be in direct, pleasurable contact with the natural world: "They hugged themselves and shivered a little. Oh, barefoot! You wriggling, grass tickling, mud going up between your toes, gravel hurting, you getting used to it" (63). Of course, this direct contact is also an economic necessity, as the family will save money by not having footwear. Along the same lines, it is clear that Forrest will not be celebrating spring by playing in the grass. He will return to his responsible plowing in the field. The abstract renewing force of nature is embodied and complicated in "The Voice of the Turtle," which speaks, like the humans in the story, in sobs and sighs, inarticulate language piercing "interval[s] of stillness" (62). Forrest is driven from the fields at the story's beginning by a "certain sound," coming from "a machine going strongly to and fro in a town a mile away" (51). The mechanical ringing of the circus pulls him from his place behind the mule, and "Away the boy leaped over shining black earth-billows. His hands shut and unshut. His shoulders heaved with his sobbing breaths. Tears rolled down his thin cheeks, and while he wept he laughed, as nightly he did with the other saints. One god to the boy was as another" (51). This sacramental shifting of emotion reverberates throughout the story. Demos, Poppy, and the mosquito-plagued family of "Quinine and Honey" only laughed, but here, Forrest's shaking tears are amplified as they become the cries of the church members, in fear and ecstasy; they are the scream of Forrest's sister when she is threatened by Mommy, and they are the sniffles of Poppy hiding in the barn as the revitalized Mommy makes dinner.

Forrest runs into town to the circus by way of the river bank, which he rolls down; then he follows the rail line. Panting, weeping, laughing, "once in his life unafraid of the water grinning and greedy between the ties," he runs into a human place where he doesn't belong (51). The town marshal calls him a "blamed fool" and accuses him of being drunk, running like that; the beguiling girl from church, wants him to buy her a balloon he can't afford, calls him a "Durn tightwad!" (51, 53). So he runs home again, to fetch money. He finds that the circus has silenced everyone on the farm, which consists mainly of a "sagging unporched house" whose yard is littered with tools (54). His father stands beside the barn: "His fingers moved, and his knees. His brown eyes—like a hungry dog's—were open and fixed. He laughed aloud, once, and then he became still—listening" (54). Forrest's sisters sit around the yard, "not talking, not playing. Their mouths were open, their eyes turned toward town" (54).

The family is poor; even after Mommy is healed and the circus is forgotten, they have little to eat and less to say. Dinner is simple: "Corn-bread, not very much baked, made with water and a little milk and soda, was steaming in pieces around the table. A pail of syrup was there and another smaller pail with milk in it" (62). The family gathers in the darkness and eats their late supper in quiet, listening again for a sound, a voice from God or from the wild, or both. What comes is a small visitor:

> The door was open. The air came in from wood and field, soft, still, not cold. A brown, dusty moth appeared and flew around the little lamp, bumping the chimney now and again. Chewing, swallowing, reaching for bread, for syrup, for milk, they watched the moth. As they watched, one

> sighed, and then another of the family, without knowing, until they had all sighed, deeply. (62)

There is relief in these sighs, but there is no imagination of salvation or of an escape to heaven. Non-human nature, like the fields of labor and the coming of "Frogses" and spring, is real and near. In "The Voice of the Turtle," Draper therefore shows how life on the edges of rural society does contain more than one voice, narrative, or kind of being, as well as how these multiple, intersecting presences together exude a quiet pathos.

Two subsequent stories contain much more overt appeals to pathos, but raise intriguing questions about how "natural" lower-class people's understanding of their physical and economic place is. In Draper's story "Maybe So," a mother, Sarah Robinson, learns that her son has signed up for the wartime Navy. Sarah's husband (who thinks she is upset about a calf being sold, rather than the potential loss of her son) makes the case that what is "natural" about their place is inevitably tied to economic practicality: "It's nachrel, that's what 'tis. Look at that there wheat over in the field. We worked an' ploughed an' planted it. It growed. Come a few weeks we'll cut it down—make feed out of it, make flour, an it'll be some use. Calf there'll be some use. A thing ye raise up an' gets to be some use—that's all right" (91). Sarah does not argue; she accepts that her human children are perhaps not so different from animals and plants. It's "nachrel" that they will be put to use, and perhaps used up. "Maybe so," she says, and goes on, "stooped over, to get where she was going to work next" (91).

However, given the story's context of militarization, it is also appropriate to question just how "nachrel" the possible sacrifice of Sarah's son really is. "Nachrel" is revealed to be a rationalized consolation, a term that conflates the acknowledgement of

realities that can't be changed (human mortality, if not non-human mortality—for instance, Sarah could choose not to have the calf killed for food) as well as those that can be changed (human economic systems and warfare). Sarah's own ability to differentiate between these realities is limited by her enclosure in a domestic space and activities; she is too busy preparing the meal, for instance, to participate in a conversation about politics. Her statement of "Maybe so" reveals her recognition of her situation and own need for survival, given the place that she is located in and that she is not able to move outside of or beyond. We see a similar self-recognition (and self-relinquishment) in the characters of Draper's late (1941) work "While the Little Flags Waved," published in Kansas Magazine. This piece tells the story of class preservation and reversal through the interaction of widows in a rural graveyard. With no husbands to take care of at home, Ellen McElroy and Pamela Sinclair have each come to tend, decorate, and domesticate the resting places of their veteran husbands. Ellen has arranged various bouquets of "Red and pink peonies . . . , snowballs, and pink Dorothy Perkinses . . . , an Amaryllis bloom, geraniums, fuchsias, and leaves from her sword fern" (84). Along with the cedars, pines, poplars, elms, and yucca already in place, these brightly colored flowers and the American flags give "the air of some foreign kind of garden to the prairie cemetery." The flashy, non-native flowers are "foreign," which Ellen views as a positive and civilizing addition to the prairie landscape. Despite her contribution, Ellen marvels at the monument Pamela has erected for her late husband, which is much bigger. She observes as Pamela and her daughter then deposit an "immense wreath" of "greenhouse roses and smilax" at the monument—"Very expensive, very fine" (84).

The admiration between these two estranged acquaintances is (not surprisingly) mutual. Pamela admires Ellen's flowers, too, and the homegrown sincerity of Ellen's memorial finds its way to Pamela's husband's large monument. Ellen's husband's grave in turn receives the wreath. Friendship is rekindled, wealth is redistributed, and Eastern-influenced gardening skills bring civilized order back to the cemetery, ennobling the sisterly bonds that are formed there. As Ellen looks back "at the pretty place where the little flags were all waving," she says to herself, "Rich people are poor people an' poor people are rich people an' . . ." (86). Ellen chooses to minimize her own pain for an empty household and to make an ally by perceiving the cemetery as a safe, "pretty place," a place that, like Jane Austen's settled town in "Nice Day," can be controlled. This is in sharp contrast to the dangerous realities of militarization, armed combat, and death that her husband faced. Overlooking this, Ellen chooses to focus on the fact that in death, as well as in the making of memorials, class barriers are leveled. She can rationalize to herself (in an imaginary address to Pamela), "Flowers we used to have in our yards your John really liked, and you remembered Robert [Ellen's husband]—poor man he always was—Robert worshipped grand greenhouse flowers" (86). Significantly, at the end of the story, Ellen's deaf driver can't hear or understand what Ellen is saying to herself, and Ellen chooses not to share her thoughts with him. Instead, she "shrieked," "I say Dec'ration Day's a nice idea!" (86). She shrieks to be heard, of course, but in this word Draper has chosen we also hear her panic and terror, her desire for things to be made right and neat, for the "pretty place" to be remembered instead of the "little flags." By her choice of title (both in this story and in "Maybe So"), Draper implies that making the truth nice and acceptable is not so easy as we might wish, and even if achieved, it is

not painless. Memories are brought to bloom, gathered in bouquets, and placed to cover up the stark gravestones. Death is decorated, and the cemetery is made a second home. But though they are little, the flags still wave in the prairie wind.

Chapter 3. Domestic Violence and Race

Draper's strength was in compressed, tightly packed short stories, which could be written in shorter spans of time than novels. Yet her literary short stories—in contrast to her children's stories—were criticized in her own time for a variety of reasons, including both her artistic abilities and the subject matter of her stories. Some contemporary editors have praised her willingness to write from the points of view of "abused women and neglected children, poor blacks and other people at the fringes of the small towns and communities" ("Great Books of the Great Plains"), and in Draper's lifetime, the editor of the Dubuque Dial asked if she herself was "Negro" (Goudie 5). However, more frequently, rejection notices implied that her choice of content, language, and tone were not effective for her intended national and urban audiences (Goudie 27). For example, the Chicago Daily News turned down an unnamed story that was "too frankly realistic for our particular market" (Lally). Agent Jacques Chambrun in New York stated in three letters that Draper's stories were not consistently crafted and developed, and in general, their themes made them inappropriate for proper marketability. Chambrun wished that Draper would turn from writing about "drab and commonplace" characters to "more cheerful and normal subject matter," or maybe a "farm novel." Here, we see an example of how Eastern expectations for sentimental rural literature sometimes conflicted with Draper's less sentimental literary stories. Finally, in 1941, Peggy Dowst from the

Saturday Evening Post explained that Draper's sentences "lack flow," but more than that, her stories exhibit "a tendency to leave too much to your reader's imagination. I believe that once before I used the word 'impressionistic.' In reading your stories I felt a little as if I were getting pieces of a puzzle that I had to put together myself rather than being shown a complete picture."

Draper's intent was to use these brief impressions to inspire readers' attentive and imaginative participation in the inner lives of her characters, several of whom suffered the same domestic violence that she witnessed and suffered herself as a child. One explanation for her brevity may have been her desire to avoid sentimentalizing such experiences in her adult work. For example, in her 1927 short story "As It Began to Dawn," published in The Midland, Draper uses the character of a young girl to demonstrate the complexity of appropriate responses to domestic violence. The story features an elderly country doctor who tends the lower-class Getz family on the eve of Easter. The domineering father Getz abuses his wife and children, and threatens his thirteen-year-old daughter in front of the doctor. The doctor, a Christian, pulls Getz aside. Getz comes, but the doctor finds that he doesn't know what to say. In fact, the narrator admits, "There was no use saying anything" (80). In this, the allegorical narrative of hope reveals its fracture. Faced with the harsh truth of domestic abuse and suffering, Draper's narrator offers no simple comfort.

Draper knew too well the economic and familial conflicts that occurred in the home, and in her literary fiction, domestic spaces are neither blissful nor stable[7]. Though

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[7] In contrast, consider an example from her more conventional and less literary work. In "Mom Joins the Family," published in the Epworth Herald in May 1930 (and which Draper asserted was heavily edited by Herald editors), the Irish immigrant Mom wins a

they may be idealized in memories and mapped onto other places, homes are primarily sites of conflict. As shown in the previous section and the example above, white settler domestic and "wild" spaces in Draper's fiction are unsettled in the sense that they contain spiritual as well as material tensions. However, Draper also attempts to unsettle domestic spaces in at least three stories that center around the lives of African-American women. In these stories, she writes in the third person point of view but focuses upon the particular angle of vision of an abused or suffering African-American woman. Her choice of another race as a point of view character distances domestic violence from white homes, displacing it into black homes and fulfilling racist narratives of white safety and supremacy.

It is doubtful that this racism was conscious or intentional. According to Jeffrey Ann Goudie, who interviewed Draper's family members, Draper had ongoing relationships with African-Americans in Oswego which informed her work (18). However, race is often a clear point of contrast between Draper's characters, demonstrating that the insidious racial stereotypes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century perpetuated themselves in Draper's work, perhaps despite her intentions. For example, the white agrarian farmer Arla in "Seminar With Lena" (discussed in the first section of this essay) is distanced from field labor, and is unmarried without children by choice; in contrast, the black agricultural worker Mary Jane in "Li'l Boy" (which I will discuss in this section) is intimately involved in field labor, is

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magazine contest to name a new rose. Her labor in the garden and with the chickens may be overlooked, but the $500 check she wins is valued in the family, securing her authority as a good mother and wife. The story is traditional, but the hint of disbelieving sarcasm in the story's sub-headline is not: "Neither Pop nor the children dreamed that Mom, who washed, cooked, and sewed so faithfully, had ambitions and plans" (430).

unhappily married, and has suffered the loss of her children because of her husband's choices. To contextualize this difference, it is useful to remember that racism was endemic in rural cultures, particularly agrarian cultures, at the time in which Draper was writing. In A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America, Janet Galligani Casey draws on David Roediger's work to explain that

> [F]arm culture in the modernist era, often through its very absence of open discussions of race as well as its invocation of a patrician agrarian ancestry, is a highly racialized culture. Further, radical ideas of sexuality, maternity, and domestic labor in rural-centered texts highlight a particularized working female body, one that challenges feminist and Marxist ideas by problematically, and viscerally, joining production and reproduction. (15)

Draper's work is similarly problematic in that her female African-American characters not only participate in domestic and agricultural labor—reproducing and reinforcing the narratives of white colonial settlement of the prairies—but also suffer at the hands of or suffer because of the choices of male African-American characters, who are troublingly depicted as men who seek "white" validation and identification.

Draper's 1939 story "Li'l Boy" was published in The University Review (it followed the poem "Tailpiece" by William Carlos Williams). The title character of the story is a black man, Sam. Sam is cheating on his black wife, Mary Jane, with another woman, Miss Zodalene, who can pass as white. "Li'l Boy" is narrated in the third person with an emphasis on the angle of vision of Mary Jane, a working woman on the edge of poverty who struggles to support Sam. She takes others' laundry home with her to wash,

and sometimes she gets hired to help with private parties—preparing, serving, and cleaning up after the guests. In the summers, she tends her own garden, cooks for Sam, and then leaves to harvest in the fields of the local Onion King:

> The ground in the fields was dry and hard, but she knew how to push her paddle in, pull with her wire-strong fingers, tear off dry tops, shake the onions in the sieve to get dirt off, pour them into the basket, heave her body up out of the red dust, carry the basket to the boss at the stack, hide a ticket away in her dress, hurry on back and squat down in the dirt again. She knew how! (30)

This agricultural labor, unlike Arla's in "Seminar With Lena," is not mediated by the meager comforts of technology. Labor is physical, experienced through the limbs and motions of the body. Moreover, this labor in and with the natural world does not redeem Mary Jane in the eyes of others, or in her own eyes. She does gain knowledge, but it is the pejorative rather than the positive sense of "knowing her place." Unlike the white Arla, whose writing is improved because she does "some livin' to *know*," Mary Jane does not—and will not—profit from this knowledge, either economically or artistically (by translating the landscape into words), and thus her knowledge is not understood to be morally empowering.

Mary Jane is well acquainted with dirt at home, too, having been beaten into it often by Sam. "Li'l Boy" opens with Sam leaving the home (wearing the freshly-washed clothes of the town's upper-class citizens), presumably to see Zodalene, while Mary Jane lies on the floor, exhausted from begging him to stay: "she was lying in the dust, dust in her matted hair, ground into the cuts, caking the swollen bruises on every inch of her

black body. He had chased her all around the cabin, would never have enough of beating her" (29). Domestic space is neither a haven nor a refuge; instead, like the fields that have been plotted into grids, the home is an enclosed space marked with the boundaries of required labor. The painful, repetitive motions of picking onions are echoed and amplified in the constant violence inflicted upon Mary Jane by her husband. This is what she knows by living, and it is a very different kind of knowledge, indeed, than what Arla understood Lena to be referring to in the statement, "You got to do some livin' to *know*—." In the educational ideology of "Seminar With Lena," Arla had to get her hands dirty in order to gain power and identity. In "Li'l Boy," the disempowered Mary Jane's hands are always dirty, and not by her own choice; moreover, her hands are tainted with real blood.

Mary Jane regretfully remembers her children, all of whom, she is proud to claim, were Sam's. However, "They were all dead, all, babies dead; she didn't know how many. They got dead being born or in a few days after. One had got quite sizable, but it had the misery one night and cried, and Sam picked it off the bed and shook it and whipped it and it died" (31). The memory of this pain mixes with Mary Jane's current pain as she lies on the floor; it is interrupted only as she perceives something in the night that causes her to sit up and look more closely. It is the moon: "The moon rising was red. In the red the cottonwood across the rocky path stretched up its arms, the night bent down about it. This she saw. White arms went up, blackness bent to them. But there was redness. There was blood" (31). Feeling again the pain of Sam beating her in her breasts, she imagines Sam meeting his lover, and then a "keen blade" of revenge flashing through them (31). Mary Jane "laugh[s] and clap[s] her hands" as the pain becomes "burning which was becoming joy," and then "like a spring" she rises up. Like flowing water over hard earth, she

follows the path of gravity to the woodpile, where she finds that she has picked up the axe. Her understanding of one of the few tools that she owns changes. Rather than associating it with hard labor, she now connects it to power and relief: "Sweet to her fingers the sharp blade" (31). This is a very different kind of female technological appropriation than Arla's work on the tractor.

In the moon-lit, liminal space of the doorway, Mary Jane watches and waits, an inevitability poised to act. She does not go outside of herself into the natural world—her identity remains, first and foremost, in the sensations of her own body—but she does feel a relieved connection, a kinship, to the place she finds herself in: "She waited, she, black, in the blackness of the house. She laughed with the red moon laughing. She had no more pain. Laughing joy was where pain had been" (32). When Sam comes, she is ready. But just as the moment arrives, Mary Jane cannot undertake the planned-for act of violence. The sharp edge dissolves into pity, a willingness to perceive what innocence may still be present in this painful world. This is what Mary Jane sees as she stands in the dark:

> He stood, breathing softly, deeply. He put his hand out to the big open cabbage roses on the sprawling bush beside the warped boarding. He pressed his face against the dew-wet open roses, strange and pale under the moon, murmured to them, set them nodding, to brushing his cheek and nose and lips. He chuckled at their tickling. He chuckled and talked to the roses—a little boy, a little sweet boy. (32)

Sam's language, his ability to appreciate the imported and "civilized" beauty of the rose garden, his sensory experience—all of these things re-humanize him, in the sense that they fulfill the definition of civilized humans as "nice" and white. For Mary Jane, these

characteristics bring Sam back inside the domestic realm of what Mary Jane hoped to achieve by having children: the possibility of survival and of a future. Watching him, she is also returned to a "civilized," Christian state that is yet cast as natural and purifying: "She felt a flowing and a dripping—her sweat rolling from her. So flowed away her burning, her strength, her desire" (32). Dissolved, spent, she is brought back to the floor. She hides the ax under "a pile of rags" and lies back on "her pallet on the floor beside the bed where Sam would be" (32). Is this a naturalistic ending? Should Mary Jane have no hope, now that her strength and desire have been lost? Is she now confined to the enclosures of field and home, of onion picking and piles of rags? Yes, but she retains her weapon. Draper's ambiguous ending demonstrates the emotional and material complexities of this woman's place. Like the narrator in "As It Began to Dawn," readers may only be able to respond with the idea that "There [is] no use saying anything." However, as the context of rural racism and allusions to white privilege in this story make clear, "Li'l Boy" is about much more than de-naturalizing the normative narrative of moral and agricultural progress on the prairie, which depends upon a stable, harmonious, and (re)productive family farm and domestic shelter. Mary Jane is brought low not only because she is a laboring woman, but also because she is black and "uncivilized," and her husband desires a "civilized" white woman. She is only able to achieve her desired role of motherhood by re-conceiving her abusive husband as a child. As in "Quinine and Honey," the two choices Draper gives her character Mary Jane in this story—between submissive, white, civilization and violent, black, wildness—are not at all self-evident or exclusive.

Continuing with this racialized portrayal of domestic violence, the title of Draper's haunting "As Her Father Her Mother" comes from the final line of the story: "A shout of agony, and he began to beat her as her father had beaten her mother" (274). Minnie Ramsun suffers this violence from her husband, a minister. They are both described as "brown," and color is a theme throughout the story, emphasized in descriptions of the clothing and skin tones of the members of and visitors to the congregation where Preacher Ramsun delivers his long sermon. The story, again narrated in the third person, highlights the performance of racial color as a marker of identity.

We hear little of Preacher Ramsun's sermon. The narrative voice is based in Minnie's point of view, which gives us a strong sense of her body, desires, and knowledge. When her husband preaches about the "unspeakable debauchery of our great colleges," Minnie knows without seeing that "his long soft body quivered," and she feels a "trembling of her own, the hot wild trembling of her own" (271). Minnie does as a minister's wife should, hates what a minister's wife should hate—even hates her husband for being a fool and herself for marrying him—but she wants more. She wants to be known by her husband, and not in hate: "She saved her flesh—for him. She was wild with being for him, night and day she was wild. And he gave her no attention. Always he was hating" (271). The narrator notes the smoothness and warmness of his body, which he keeps from her. "He was all held-in, a jar of string-beans gone sour . . . the inside working, hate working in him" (271). In this (in)edible domestic metaphor, the minister's body is food badly preserved. Rather than being consumed as nourishment, it is wasting and rotting into something bitter. It is the heavenly house gone wrong, tainted and

spoiled—a foreshadowing of the violent end of the story, which also takes place inside God's home, the church.

Minnie, in turn, is neither a "nice" nor "civilized" human. Like Mary Jane in "Li'l Boy," her unfulfilled desire to know and be known has made her dangerously "wild": "She was so wild last night, she was wild all yesterday, she was today. She had never known the wildness to be so strong in her" (271-72). In this wildness, she is also implicitly (and stereotypically, in Draper's historical moment) associated with the animals and physical landscape of the prairie, which white settlers sought to tame, control, and civilize into settled fields and towns. Minnie sought out Witch Chudy for a love potion as her husband prepared a sermon for the important white guests at church today. Then, he wrote on and on; now, he is speaking on and on. Minnie marvels at his abilities. She believes that not even his professor at Princeton could know how well he utilizes the "rhetorical pause," nor were "[t]hose white teachers smart enough to understand his sermons." The men here definitely don't understand, because "no white man that belonged in this town would call him the Reverend Ramsun. No matter how much money he took to the bank the men in the bank would call him *Joe* and joke about him to each other, keeping him standing there" (272). Draper demonstrates her awareness of racist rural communities by pointing out that though he stands behind the pulpit now, Joe Ramsun remains on the edges of the powerful circles of society.

He was educated at Princeton, but what Joe Ramsun knows best are the "bad things . . . white people did" (272). He has recited them to his wife in their "tall, bare, grey house," leaning on the stove, and Minnie can't help but think as he talks that "his eyes might come to know of her. Any minute he might see her, the red kimono slipping

from her shoulder. He might see he had that which made him as well off as any man, white or black" (273). Minnie offers to him her self—her body and her self-knowledge. But he doesn't accept or even see it. The sermon and Minnie's prayers continue: "Listen, Gawd: here's a yallow woman wants a child . . . he won't give me any baby" (273). Like Mary Jane, whose husband sought out the lighter-skinned Zodalene, Minnie believes that her husband hates "blackness," and loves "whiteness" (273). The charm she has prepared will only make him love whiteness more, not love her or her wildness, so after the sermon ends Minnie decides to do something unusual—to take her collection right up to Joe at the altar. The table is spread with a white cloth, and she intentionally spills the "purple-red" wine in the communion cup, making "sure the cup went all the way over" (274). She, too, falls to the floor. Joe is forced to touch her and pick her up, so that "Yes, he had some knowing of her now" (274). All would be well if this knowing was not in such anger. When they alone are left in the church, he yells at her, and she responds by biting "that smooth soft hand, set[ting] her teeth in it" (274). The desperate circle of violence—inherited from the past, aggravated by the present, and all that Minnie knows—has begun again.

The despair in these two stories of domestic violence, which portray abuse as inevitably linked to racialized conflict between African-American couples, is troubling. Draper's third story from an African-American point of view, "Miz Briggs' Son," confirms this pattern by relating how Wardell, the son of a single mother, fails to fit in with the local black community and also fails to succeed at a mission school in the north, where—as in Draper's own experience—white women are the teachers. We know that Draper was critical of religion and the mission school where she worked, and that she

was sympathetic to victims of domestic violence, to women and children struggling to achieve economic stability, and to African-American citizens within her own local community. Furthermore, she was willing to risk writing from the perspective of characters whose race and class status made them unacceptable to some readers in her time. That being said, we cannot know Draper's intent in writing narrators who try to invoke sympathetic identification with female, rural, African-American characters. Did she seek to challenge the racist stereotypes of her era, and fail? Or was she even aware of the more insidious narratives of racism and white supremacy at the heart of colonial settlement in North America, including the prairies? Whatever the case, my intent is not to vilify or judge Draper. Like all writers, she lived and worked within a cultural context of power that she may have been more or less aware of, and more or less capable of challenging through her published work. Instead, I hope that by examining Draper's depiction of domestic violence and race, we as contemporary readers can grapple with painful truths in our own time about the implications of defining humans and human nature in racial terms, and about the ways in which the racist narratives we critique in the past still exist in some forms in present society. Draper's fictional characters and her own writer-self existed in the nexus of a particular physical, cultural, and historical location in space-time, and we as contemporary critics and readers must be willing to perceive our own "place" for what it is and what it could be.

Chapter 4. Escape and Embodiment

Did any of Draper's fictional female characters directly acknowledge or perceive their own "place," in the sense of their embededness in both human culture and non-

human nature? Yes, although such a perception is always filtered through these characters' bodies (including their ages), expectations of femininity, artistic ideals, and experiences of life on the edges of small town society. First, in two autobiographical stories about a girl, Lillian, becoming a woman, Draper demonstrates how the confining physical spaces of the home are opened to new possibilities by literary and musical experiences. Quantic explains, "On the prairies and plains, where men and women have had to create the smaller spaces that define them, physical space becomes significant. The most persistent image of refuge is a physical place that symbolizes not only emotional and psychological escape but also physical contact with the land" (102). In these stories, the physical settings of small town Minnesota and Ohio provide a real and imaginary counterpoint to the familiar, bittersweet melody of a young girl growing up. Places in non-human nature incite the girl's embodiment and maturing physical experience of place, as well as reaffirm the girl's desire for spiritual or artistic escape from such a place.

In "The Fruit at Singapore," published in The Midland in 1928, Draper's main character is Lillian, who (like Draper) had lived with her family in Japan before returning to the States. Like any young girl who is trying to fit in to a new place, Lillian wants to speak and act the way that others do in small town Minnesota. This requires her to hide and forget certain aspects of herself and her knowledge. "You must not say things, know things, the others didn't," she thinks. "You must be like the girls in any town you were in, if you wanted not to be alone all the time" (274). Like Draper, Lillian is a reader. Her father takes novels away from her and replaces them with acceptable books like Pilgrim's Progress. Today, though, he commands her to go to the store and buy twenty cents worth of bananas. On the way she sees "her bush," the perfect spot in neighborhood games of

hide and seek. This is the place in which Lillian has taken cover and known the earth as a refuge: "Angelina, [the girl who was] *it*, couldn't find her. She lay snug and quiet. She felt the ground under her, not snow, black ground and brown wet smelly grass. The sun came between two branches, touched her back, her neck. Everything was still, the others far away" (276). This pleasant experience, however, soon becomes more emotionally and physically complex: "A rooster crowed clearly, softly, gladly, sadly, off across the frozen river. She must laugh. She must cry. She trembled. She was hurt, awfully hurt by something and terribly glad. She went out of herself. She was the music of crowing. She was the ground, sun, sky, stars, all" (276). Like Forrest in "The Voice of the Turtle," Lillian registers the non-human world by first feeling it in her body, and then surrendering her body to it, expanding her definition of herself. She finds physical connection through an emotional escape.

This is a pivotal moment in the development of Lillian's contradictory sense of place, which includes both direct sensual experience and imagined spiritual transcendence. After Lillian is "cheated" on the price of the bananas, her father sends her to her room, where she waits in the enclosed cold. She does not cry because "The pain that was in her no crying could help" (279). Instead, she must go "out of herself" again, outside of her body in escape of the sensations within it. She looks out the window. Her imagination moves and her eyes see

> A long smooth-edged cloud, purple-black above the Northern Minnesota trees in April. She was looking at this. She found herself looking at this cloud. And then it was not cloud, but, long and beautiful and black, land, on the line where the sky came and bent itself around the green ocean.

> Land. And a coiled rope, a smell of tar and paint, black, huge, tipped-back funnels, ladders, black iron rails with moving white-flecked blue hills of water between. Sliding down a wave-side, running up another, a boat with a striped awning, sailors rowing. A heavenly smell, a cool sweet deliciousness causing the mouth to fill with happy water. Something spiny, something round and smooth, blood-red, yellow. Something long and yellow, black specked. Deliciousness, deliciousness . . . (279-80)

Lillian reclaims what she knows, coming back to her body. She remembers the fruit at Singapore. When she tells her mother this, "They [are] like two women speaking together" (280). As will be demonstrated in "Fourteen," Draper's autobiographical crisis of identity and location in girlhood is resolved through her characters' membership in a community of women who share and value self-knowledge and imaginative artistic experience. Though women are joined in community because of their common female bodies (which, in this historical context, determine their cultural role), they also come together because of their ability to transcend their physical bodies and location through qualities of imagination and art.

The same Lillian in "Fourteen" (published in 1930 in The Midland) imagines that her life is as melodramatic as the title character's in Capitola the Madcap, the novel she gets in trouble for reading but desperately wants to finish, just as soon as she can find the second half. Her escapist reading is interrupted by a situation the young Draper knew all too well: dishes to do and siblings to tend to in her family's home in Ohio. The water must be put on to boil and a sliver of soap stolen from the neighbors. Lillian's body must grow up and into these chores and her womanhood, but she is oblivious to that. She cares

only for words on pages. Immersed in her book, her present location dissolves around her: "She kept on standing beside the table, reading. Since dinner-time she had been standing there. But she did not know that. She did not know where she had been standing" (129). Through imagination, she frees herself from this domestic reality.

Lillian does know, when she bothers to look up, that she misses Minnesota and its white winter. Ohio is "deep yellow mud," depressing "blackness and brownness" (130). But she does not look up very often. Lillian goes to school but is self-taught and self-motivated in her reading, and she does not dwell much on the place surrounding her while she reads, be it inside or outside of the house: "Lillian did not think of liking or not liking things. She put off dishes as long as she could and then she did them . . . But she did not think about dishes. She read in whatever book seemed to have something to read in it, and then she did dishes and found something to read, and read" (130). Lillian works and she does not think of or feel her labor. She even knows of her mother's labor in childbirth, but she does not contemplate or connect it to her own future body: "Lillian did not forget about this [her mother's cries in childbirth]. It meant something, something she didn't know about. She did not think about it often" (132). In fact, "She did not think about anything. She did not feel anything" (132). She feels no shame in denying the theft of the neighbors' soap, and then going with the neighbor girl to the local revival. She knows she looks different, and is of a different class, but she feels nothing about that either.

At the revival, Lillian simply enjoys the singing until the preacher begins to call for testimonies and young men come forward. The women then follow, "walking down the aisle. Women with plain wrinkled faces and blackish crooked hats. They looked at

people, begging them" (137). It is at this pitifully mundane sight that suddenly Lillian *feels* something inside of her body: "Her throat ached. Something was beating, beating, beating, in her body, tearing it, hurting it, warming it, giving it pain that was sweeter than any joy. . . . Tears came pouring from her eyes. Sobs tore their way out of her" (138). The feelings she had in Minnesota, hiding on the ground, return. Here, though, an elderly woman maneuvers her down the aisle to be saved. Lillian comes home in the dark, not sure whether she is changed. She navigates up the stairs, "being careful about the holes in dead Grandmamma's worn out carpet" (139). Lillian walks in the same well-trod path of her female ancestors.

When Lillian comes home from school the next day, the preacher and his wife are on "the porch of dead Grandmamma's house" (141), waiting for her to arrive so as to properly register her soul. But the house they enter is anything but civilized. Lillian's siblings are building a fort in the basement, busy "being pirates": "The cellar had water in it. Some of dead Grandmamma's fruit jars with no fruit in them went bobbing around on the water, were whales and sharks. Rotten apples, brown and squashy, floating, were buoys warning of rocks and reefs. The fruit-cupboard was Yokohama, the steps were New York, a table Calcutta" (142). Underneath and undermining the stable floor of this adult domestic scene is another world, full of adventure. The "wild," unstable basement disrupts the "nice" visit from the preacher. The preacher's wife falls from her chair to the floor, taking the preacher with her into a mess of holy books. The preacher comes up with an apple core in his hair and a red face, as "Shrieking and bumping and laughing and screaming came from the Pacific Ocean under the floor" (144). They leave. Lillian's mother returns her novel to her, and then—trying to hold the infant between them—they

laugh and laugh: "They both clutched at the poor baby, their bodies touching, the baby between them while they laughed, hard, till they were weak, looking into each other's eyes" (145). Draper ensures that Lillian's books and body are restored to her, along with her outlet for artistic (rather than spiritual) expression. The story closes with Lillian playing "The Gloria from Mozart's Twelfth Mass," a celebration of the kind that Draper, also a musician, likely played on the organ. By taking her place in both local and cultural traditions of beauty, it seems, Lillian escapes from domestic work and adulthood, and laughingly affirms her imaginative play as a child. Yet ironically, she celebrates her youthfulness by performing a mature, civilized (rather than wild) song on the piano.

The wildness of the main character of "As Grass," however, allows her to affirm her relationship to her physical place. "As Grass" appeared in the summer 1930 issue of Prairie Schooner, and is one of Draper's best stories. Here, Draper focuses on an older woman who has suffered but who has no means of artistic expression; she is not able to escape her physical place through the reading of books. Instead, this woman is able to imaginatively and sympathetically identify her body with those of other beings in her place, both human and non-human, and the mechanisms of nature. In this way, she acknowledges and perceives her own identity as embedded within her place, though her situation is neither pleasant nor idealized.

"As Grass," like nearly all of Draper's literary short fiction, is told in a third-person, stream of consciousness style from the point of view of the main character, Pearl Wentz. It is not until the mailman arrives that we learn the name of "Miz Wentz," however. The story opens by examining a curious scene, first at a distance and then in closer proximity:

> It was only February, but the woman was in her garden. She was kneeling on the ground, her small body crouched low over it. To a casual eye she might have seemed to be working, but she was not pulling up the bent, black stalks of last year's vegetation; she was not planting anything; merely in contact with the ground were her hands. She peered closely at the earth beneath and about her, only raising her face a moment now and again to glance at the sky, at the leafless, conical pear trees beside the garden, or up into the maples embracing the steep roof of her small, brown house. But always her eyes came back to the ground, and her mouth moved in whispered question. (162)

She is asking: "What's a-goin' on? What is it a-goin' on?" (162). It is this question that drives the emotional arc of the story. In contrast, the arrival of a letter from the mailman and the answer it contains regarding the question of Pearl's lost son—a runaway son, who was maltreated by the late Mr. Wentz—drives the literal plot of the story. Pearl deliberately hides the letter, and her reaction to it, from her nosy neighbor, Mrs. Cook, who comes calling at the kitchen door in the front of the house. Pearl, in the barn out back, moves to answer Mrs. Cook. As she moves, the narrator describes her mind moving through her body, into the earth: "Her hands, as she crawled under the fence, felt the tough, lank grass and her fingers clung among the roots, not bearing to leave them. If you could only stay against the ground—if you could with all of you stay against the ground . . ." (164). Here, the second person address invites the reader to experience Pearl's belonging to this place as well as her conflicted feelings towards it. She does not belong here because she has chosen to commit to or has fallen into love with this place, or

because she has imaginatively merged with it. Instead, Pearl's sense of place is based in her need for safety and shelter, for belonging somewhere. This ground is what she knows and where she is.

Through knowledge of her place, Pearl is able to know aspects of her own nature. Stuck inside her home by the inquiring Mrs. Cook, Pearl feels kinship with her chickens. She looks for a means of escape, her eyes darting like "the beady eyes of a chicken trapped in a corner search for a way to dodge hands and ax and pot" (166). Like her chickens, Pearl is understood to be in touch with her survival instincts, her animal intuitions. Hands in the soil, nose close to the dirt—not to plant, harvest, or work, but simply to see—Pearl also knows the world from a different perspective. She has an intimate relationship with it. She is dressed in the colors of the soil, black and brown; she has blue eyes like the sky; and her deeply wrinkled face changes shade with the season, from tree-trunk dark to cloudy pale. Like the earth, and like the cows and chickens in the barn she tends, she knows what she needs to survive. She knows how to walk, "[h]ead down, a little ahead of her body, eyes on the ground," so that she can see what is important: "Small, green things that made no difference in the look of the ground from above, so small were they. But if you killed and cleaned a chicken for some one, didn't you find its craw full of small, green leaves and thick, short pieces of grass? In February, even?" (167). If you are like Pearl, or can imagine being like her, the only answer is yes. You know that small, green things can be found.

Mrs. Cook insists on taking Pearl to the funeral of a wealthy woman in town, one of their neighbors. There, in the carpeted room full of greenhouse flowers and overdressed people, Pearl's body secretly closes into itself, her mind moving back in

time, “away from the singing, the reading, from Gawd’s will, and the plan of salvation,” remembering past events here on earth (169). She remembers she did not want to marry Mr. Wentz, the owner of two farms; she remembers Mr. Wentz whipping the children, whipping their son Jim, who ran away at fourteen; she remembers Jim, younger and happier, calling to her from the “white pear blossoms,” then his climb “up on the chicken-house roof, then to the barn, along the ridge,” until “there he was, in the sun, blue sky above him, bees humming, a meadow-lark calling, pigeons cooing” (170). His laughter brings Mr. Wentz, who brings screams. Pearl chooses not to hear the screams again; instead, she and the narrator shift attention to a falling white pear blossom slowly drifting and settling. “What happens to it? Ground takes it, works on it” (170). And so with the fruit, too, she reminds herself—whether it is ripe or green. “How’s that, now, old woman? Well, the ground’ll look out for it. Ground’ll look out for petal, ripe fruit, cankered fruit. . .” (170). Pearl’s real understanding of the ground and its mechanism of decay provides the link (both symbolic and physical) between her own living body and the distant body of her lost son. She is comforted to know that old and young, close and far-away, parent and child are bonded through inevitable, natural processes on earth, not through supernatural reunion beyond this world.

Pearl pushes her way out of the house and down the street. The words of the funeral and of the letter about her son fade. Images and sensations begin to register again in her body and mind: “Sun shining. West wind. Warm. Cool. Robins calling from fence post and brown grass; cocks crowing far, near; hens singing the egg-song; a horn; a man’s giddap; a child’s high laugh” (171). There is comfort in the here and now-ness of this short human life, which comes from and returns to the non-human ground. What is

not human is made into a home. Pearl's original questions—"What's a-goin' on? What is it a-goin' on?" (162)—are shown to be the basis for a new generational cycle of survival, one which requires not the repetition of violence but rather a return to the present moment of observation. Pearl's questions are asked not to other humans and maybe not even to herself. Instead, they are asked in reverence to the place itself, to the mysterious but familiar ground from which grass and small green things come and return. The story ends with Pearl's statement, "I've a mind to plant me some taters" (171). Draper's use of the colloquial phrase "I've a mind" here reverberates with the rest of "As Grass," in which it is made clear that Pearl's embodied and self-defining mind is what allows her to participate in rather than escape relationships with natural processes and non-human beings. By planting food that she will harvest and eat, Pearl acknowledges that she and her body belong to this place. She is neither separate nor above—she is with and from it, as small and as important as blades of grass.

Chapter 5. Resonances and Implications

When she was nearly sixty years old, in order to increase her income, Draper shifted her focus from writing fiction to writing journalism (though she continued to work on her novel manuscripts for the rest of her life). She authored the Oswego County News column for the Parsons Sun six days a week until her death in 1964 (Goudie 1-2). In over twenty years of columns as "Grandma, the girl reporter," Draper expanded her local knowledge, writing about the landscape, social events, education, domestic life, and most of all, the community members. In her first column, writing in the third person, she placed herself within the laboring class of the community: "She used to sit out on the

edge of town beside an alfalfa field, look out over the pleasant Kansas land and see men and women working. She heard from the town the sounds of work. Now she has work. It could be important, done right. She is not sure she can do it right. She'll try" ("Oswego County News" 10).

In her fiction, Draper also tried to accomplish important artistic work by crafting stories of rural people on the Great Plains to share with wider audiences, particularly in the East. She claimed the identity of a rural, woman writer, and wrote for money as well as for her own expressive needs. This contradiction between her physical (often domestic and agricultural) experience of her place and her imaginative vision of it (including who else was present in it) was mediated by her cultural and historical location within narratives of white colonial settlement. Draper perpetuated the rightness of narratives of pastoral settlement of the American West and Great Plains, including the attempted "erasure" of Native Americans from the contemporary landscape, and did not successfully challenge stereotypes of race and class. Yet by taking her readers into unsettled houses and the minds of women and children who struggle to define themselves, she also reminds us of the need that all beings, both human and non-human, have to survive.

Ecocritic Jenny Kerber has pointed out that the ecological question of "Who are we here?" is "as much a call to consider the future . . . as it is a hearkening to the past" (219). Draper's Pearl Wentz repeats this question when she asks of herself and of her contemporary readers, "What's a-goin' on? What is it a-goin' on?" (162). What's going on in the small scale of Draper's fiction is very much what's going on in the larger scale of Great Plains communities and locations. Draper's work, in what it does and in what it

fails to do, draws our attention to dynamics of power and place that are still being contested. Who is allowed to know the land? Those who own it, who labor on it, or who listen to it? What kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing are culturally accepted and sanctioned? What kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing are becoming less available, because of the destruction of our bioregion? Which humans and beings are placed with civilization, and which are placed on the edges or outside of it? What do those in power define as a "natural" relationship to this place, and what alternate ways of relating to our place do those in power attempt to silence, suppress, or forget? How can humans, as one species among many in this ecosphere, remember, learn, perceive, and adapt to where and who we are?

These are the kinds of questions that must be at the heart of our continuing work to create ecologically resilient and socially just communities everywhere, and especially on the Great Plains, from the shortgrass prairies to the hardwood savannas. We must ask these questions of the stories that we read, as well as of ourselves. Euro-American settlement on the North American prairies is brief, yet "Most Great Plains writers focus not on [the] complex interplay of the deep past and present surfaces but on the transformation of the historical past, the experienced raw material, into a usable present, stripped of clichés" (Quantic 129). Draper's attempt to transform the past in order to create a viable present for herself is only a first step. By critiquing and understanding her work, we may begin to broaden our own ability to know and to live within our places in the Great Plains.

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