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Keith Newlin

University of North Carolina at Wilmington, [newlink@uncw.edu](mailto:newlink@uncw.edu)

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# Clouted by Reviewers: The Texts of Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*

Keith Newlin

**A**lthough Hamlin Garland made his mark primarily as a writer of innovative realistic short stories in the 1890s, he also wrote some nineteen novels, almost none of which ever attained the critical acclaim of his first collection of short stories, *Main-Travelled Roads*, published in 1891. The single exception is *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*, his fifth novel and tenth book, published four years later. The novel traces the development of a motherless girl from her childhood on a small farm in a Wisconsin coulee (a "coulee" or "coolly" is the French term for the deep valleys between high ridges in southwestern Wisconsin) through her student days at the University of Wisconsin to her emergence in Chicago as an aspiring poet. It ends with her marriage to a prominent Chicago newspaperman and literary critic, who has proposed via a pointedly unromantic letter in which he lists all the reasons he would make a bad husband. Today nearly all readers praise *Rose* for its forthright depiction of a young woman's emerging sexuality and its social message about a girl's desire to become a writer equal with men rather than a mere wife subordinate to her husband's will.

At the time, Garland was at the height of his fame: he had published nine books and dozens of short stories, as well as more than two dozen articles devoted to literary topics; he had lectured widely on various Populist issues; and he had gained a reputation for being America's most vocal proponent of realism, a literary radical whose every volume prompted critical controversy in the nation's magazines. The idea for *Rose* had been fermenting since 1890. He had spent more time on its composition than he had on any other work, for in it he sought to embody the literary theories he had been advocating for years. When he finally sent off corrected proofs for publication, he expected—or at least hoped—that his years of toil would pay off in public acclaim, but when *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* was published in late 1895, it met a chorus of disapproval. Based on Garland's latest example, the *Providence*

*Sunday Journal* asserted in a fairly typical review, “the novel of the future is clearly to be ill-digested, badly written, trivial, absurd, nasty, violent, devoid of taste and wit, and in every way what the blind critics say a novel ought not to be.” “Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly’ leaves a more disagreeable taste in the mouth than ‘Jude the Obscure,’” opined the *Critic*. And the *Chicago Times-Herald* lamented, “The book almost makes one want to preach suicide to all young girls—country or city—every kind.”<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Garland had miscalculated.

Reviews do have effects on writers, and for one as sensitive as Garland, the initial reception of a work can alter the course of one’s career. The case of *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* offers lessons about the power of the press, the wisdom of letting a novel go too early, and the ability of revision to alter in any significant way the perception of one’s work.

Garland’s depiction of Rose in the early chapters of the novel is what most exercised reviewers. Rose is raised by her farmer-father to be without the false modesty usually ascribed to girls. She eats wild plants with the boys, watches them unashamed as they go skinny-dipping while longing to join them, and in general grows up pretty much as the boys do. She blossoms into a robust, tall, strong, and healthy young woman with an insatiable desire to improve herself and what today we would call a healthy curiosity in the opposite sex and in matters physical.

Given the novel’s plot, characterization; and themes, all of which conflicted with contemporary assumptions of propriety concerning women, it is not surprising that every reviewer objected to Garland’s portrayal of Rose’s emerging sexuality, precisely the quality for which readers today praise the novel. Because these scenes, and the reviewers’ response to them, determined the course of his revision, it is helpful to see Garland’s depiction of the thirteen-year-old Rose’s first crush on her playmate Carl:

She felt a terrible hunger, a desire to take his head in her arms and kiss it. Her muscles ached and quivered with something she could not fathom. As she resisted she grew calm, but mysteriously sad, as if something were passing from her forever. The leaves whispered a message to her, and the stream repeated an occult note of joy, which was mixed with sorrow.

<sup>1</sup>“Realism Run Mad,” *Providence Sunday Journal*, 29 December 1895, sec. 2, 13; “Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly,” *Critic* n.s. 25 (February 8, 1896): 89; “Literature of Today,” *Chicago Times-Herald*, 9 December 1895, 10.

The struggle of wild fear and bitter-sweet hunger of desire—this vague, mysterious perception of her sex, did not last, to Rose. It was lost when she came out of the wood into the road on the way homeward. It was a formless impulse and throbbing stir far down below definite thought.<sup>2</sup>

Later, these aching and quivering muscles and throbbing impulses take on more concrete form in Rose's school, when a young coquette of a teacher unleashes "a storm of passion" among her students. Garland is circumspect in his description of what follows: "the larger boys woke to a sudden savagery of rivalry over her. . . . The older boys fought over her smile and low-voiced words of praise," until, finally, the teacher "gathered the larger girls around her as she flirted with the young men, until children like Carl and Rose became part of it all."<sup>3</sup> At school, the "older boys did not scruple to put their arms about the teacher's waist as they stood by her side," and "known libertines" fight with the town's young men for her attention.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, the town's fathers awaken to their children's danger in the nick of time and promptly send the teacher packing. Rose and Carl are gently interviewed by Rose's father, who determines that she "would outgrow" what Garland calls "the touch of thoughtless hands."<sup>5</sup>

"There can be no possible excuse for the writer who uses filth in the making of fiction," thundered the *Philadelphia Press*, referring to this scene. "It is in the power of any reckless amateur scribbler in the world to-day to make himself notorious if he so wishes. He has only to put into print a sequence of such facts of imaginings as shall tend to make pure women blush, and label the thing, *Smut, a Novel*, by Seekfame; and all the impure minds in the world will welcome it gladly. Mr. Garland . . . has written into his new story many passages which we should not dare to quote to the readers of 'The Press.'" The *Dial* objected to the novel's "wanton nastiness"; the *Chicago Daily Tribune* complained that Garland was "stubbornly and childishly nasty"; and the *Independent* charged Garland of having "chosen animal coarseness, and chosen it defiantly, as his source of appeal to his audience."<sup>6</sup>

Reviewers also castigated the novel and its author for his choice of lan-

<sup>2</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (Chicago, IL: Stone and Kimball, 1895), 31–32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>6</sup>"Hamlin Garland's Latest Fury," *Philadelphia Press*, 5 January 1896, sec. 3, 22; William Morton Payne, "Recent Fiction," *Dial* 2 (1 February 1896): 80; "Hamlin Garland's Latest," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1895, 9; "Literature," *Independent* 48 (6 February 1896): 189.

guage—in particular, his use of the phrase “sex maniac” to describe the leer of a brakeman ogling Rose on the train to Madison. And Garland also had a bit of a tic with the use of the adjective “clean” to contrast morally upright youth with those who are coarse. As the *Critic* pointed out, “Mr. Garland’s word ‘sex maniac’ is barbarous enough; but the continual dwelling on (we had almost said gloating over) the thing is far worse. Here we do not care to particularize; we content ourselves with saying distinctly that what the author is so fond of calling a ‘clean-minded’ young man or woman would be, if not simply puzzled, shocked and repelled by page after page of this book.”<sup>7</sup> Other reviewers echoed the complaint. “‘Clean’ is a favorite word of Garland’s; ‘flesh’ is another,” observed the *New York Times*. The *Bookman* elaborated: “[Garland places] great stress on the repeated effect upon his heroine of viewing the lithe, ‘clean’ limbs of her masculine adorers. I have quoted the adjective ‘clean’ because Mr. Garland seems extraordinarily fond of it. His men are all more or less ‘clean.’”<sup>8</sup>

Even William Dean Howells, friend and father-figure to Garland, in a review for *Harper’s Weekly*, gently upbraided his disciple for inadequate characterization. Garland’s circumspection concerning the nature of Rose’s improprieties with Carl leads readers to use their imagination—and therefore imagine the worst. “If fiction is to deal with things hitherto not dealt with in the evolution of character,” Howells counseled, “it must be explicit. From anything less we have the haunting sense of something unwholesome, which taints the whole after-life of the personage for the reader, and avails nothing for the author’s real purpose.” Moreover, he continued, “This purpose in the present case is to prove that a woman can live down her past as a man may. But I remain unconvinced that a woman can live down her past, for I do not believe a man can live down his past. Our past becomes part of us, whether we are women or whether we are men. . . . I do not find that Rose owned her whole past to the man who married her, and so I cannot quite accept her on the author’s terms.”<sup>9</sup>

Four years later, in 1899, Garland responded to his critics when he revised the novel for a new publisher. He altered some of the scenes and much of the language, though he did not change his fundamental conception. His primary intent was to excise some of the more overt references to

<sup>7</sup>“Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly,” 89.

<sup>8</sup>“Wisconsin Folks,” *New York Times*, 5 January 1896, 31; W. P. Trent, “Mr. Hamlin Garland’s New Novel,” *Bookman* 2 (February 1896): 513.

<sup>9</sup>William Dean Howells, “Life and Letters,” *Harper’s Weekly* 40 (7 March 1896): 223.

sexuality. The phrase that so troubled reviewers—the brakeman who “eyed her with the glare of a sex maniac”—now eyes Rose “with an insolent glare.”<sup>10</sup> Rose has lots of trouble with glares—insolent or otherwise—for her Amazonian figure is continually being ogled by men. Even her eventual fiancé, Warren Mason, has an appreciative eye for her “splendid curve of bust”; another remarks that he’d “like to see the girl in a low-necked dress”; and still another suitor simply observes, “She’s a stunner!”<sup>11</sup> While Garland did not alter these passages, he did delete some that commented more explicitly on Rose’s body. Not only does Rose not have the “personal vanity which makes so many pretty and brainless women think themselves irresistible to any man,” she makes little of “her flesh” to attract men. In the revision, Rose makes little of her “comeliness.”<sup>12</sup> Rose, too, has an appreciative eye for the body. When she contemplates a proposal from a wealthy young suitor, “She admired his splendid flesh” as well as his money. But the 1899 Rose admires his “splendid health.”<sup>13</sup>

Garland’s use of the words “naked” and “nude” troubled several reviewers. When Rose admires the “naked limbs” of circus acrobats, she reflects on her earlier experience with unclothed bodies: “She had seen naked boys, and her own companions occasionally showed themselves naked and cowering before her, but these men stood there proud and splendid.” “Naked” becomes “nude” in the revision.<sup>14</sup> When she returns from the circus, she stands before a mirror admiring her body: “In the secrecy of her room she walked up and down, feeling the splendid action of her nude limbs muscled almost like his.”<sup>15</sup> The reviewer for the *Independent* derided this scene specifically as an example of Garland’s fixation on nudity. In the 1899 revision, the word “nude” is stricken.

Apparently in response to Howells’s remark that people can’t outgrow their pasts, Garland deleted several passages that had troubled Howells and other reviewers. After the episode of Rose and Carl’s “thoughtless hands,” poppa John tells her, “If you are good and kind and true like your mother was you’ll outgrow this trouble.”<sup>16</sup> In the 1899 edition, the passage becomes

<sup>10</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 90; *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 77.

<sup>11</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 245, 246, 290.

<sup>12</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 377; *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 330.

<sup>13</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 302; *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 263.

<sup>14</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 55; *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 46.

<sup>15</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 63.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>17</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 33.

“Just be good and kind and true, like your mother was.”<sup>17</sup> Later, when Rose is about to leave home for college in Madison, she reflects on the incidents:

Rose did not hold that Carl had any claim upon her. The incidents of two years before were lived down, both by herself and Carl, for as manhood and womanhood came to them they put away all that which they had done in the thoughtlessness of childhood. To Rose it was an unpleasant memory, because associated with her father’s grief. She supposed Carl to feel in the same way about it, and so no allusion to it was ever made by anyone.<sup>18</sup>

When he revised the novel, Garland retained only a revision of the first sentence of the paragraph—“Rose was not ready to acknowledge that Carl had any claim upon her.”<sup>19</sup> The effect is to diminish Garland’s theme that sexual exploration is a natural part of childhood, albeit one that children and parents must guard against carefully.

Later, when Rose returns to the farm after graduation, she learns that Carl has become engaged. Her father remembers “the time when he had called them to his knees, the two young rogues. She was thinking of that too. It was far in the past, yet far as it was, it was still measurable, and a faint flush crept over her face.” At this point, the paragraph in the 1899 edition stops, but the 1895 edition continues and clarifies the continuing hold of the “thoughtless hands” episode on Rose’s memory: “No one in the world knew of that experience but Carl and her father. Would Carl’s wife ever know of it? That was the thought which caused the flush.”<sup>20</sup>

Garland was also attentive to reviewers’ sarcastic remarks concerning his style. The *Dial*, for example, had observed, “[The novel has] several noticeable defects, such as an obtrusive didacticism, a repulsive lack of reticence concerning those details of the sex problem that it should be the first principle of wholesome art to avoid, and a style that is often slovenly. We may illustrate the latter defect by such sentences as, ‘Rose received a note from her asking her to come over and see her,’ and ‘I would be a literary if I were not forced to be a newspaper man.’”<sup>21</sup> Garland repaired the ambiguities of both sentences.

And apparently the ridicule of his preference for the word “clean” caused

<sup>18</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 83.

<sup>19</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 71.

<sup>20</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 140; *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), 162.

<sup>21</sup>Payne, “Recent Fiction,” 80.

him to replace nearly every occurrence of the word. In her girlhood, Rose's "blood was sweet and clean and kept off contagion"; in 1899 her blood was "sweet and swift."<sup>22</sup> The boys court Rose "with the wholesome frankness of clean and vigorous manhood"; later they court her "with the wholesome frankness of sane and vigorous manhood."<sup>23</sup> "A fine, clean young fellow" becomes "A fine, manly young fellow";<sup>24</sup> another "clean and fine" man becomes "wholesome and fine."<sup>25</sup> Men who looked at Rose with "frank, clean eyes" later regard her with "frank, clear eyes."<sup>26</sup> There are many more similar examples, but Garland's pattern of revision here suggests he recognized the reviewers had rightly pointed out his overreliance on a vague adjective, and so he substituted more specific ones.

Garland's revisions produced a more polished style but affected the substance of the novel very little. Though the reviews in 1895 motivated some revisions, in writing five books and more than fifty periodical pieces over the ensuing four years Garland had learned much about the craft on his own. He tidied up other bumpy sentences, tightening loose expression, inserting an adjective here and there, and modifying punctuation. Like his revision of roughly-written sentences, his revision of scenes of sexual import focus largely on the level of the phrase, with the apparent intent of excising a word or phrase that had proved offensive. He left intact all scenes of thematic import: the "thoughtless hands" passage; the lengthy treatment of Rose's awakening sexuality, quoted earlier; the various times when men admire Rose's sensual body; the description of her running naked through the corn fields. All remain.

Garland did make one major substantive revision. The 1895 edition ends with Rose accepting Mason's unconventional proposal. Mason asks, "My dearest girl, do you realize what you are doing? Do you realize that you are entering on a problematical line of action—that you are inviting pain and sorrow and care. . . ." To which Rose replies, with the words that close the novel, "I realize it all, and I choose it."<sup>27</sup> In 1899, Garland added a scene, of about two pages, to follow these words to show Rose and Mason in their apartment immediately following their marriage. Some critics believe the scene was

<sup>22</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), 23; *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1899), 19.

<sup>23</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), 121; *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1899), 105.

<sup>24</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), 122; *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1899), 106.

<sup>25</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), 142; *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1899), 123.

<sup>26</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), 116; *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1899), 100.

<sup>27</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), 403.

added to clarify that the two are really married and not experimenting with a common-law marriage.<sup>28</sup> The passage is worth quoting to understand Garland's motives in adding the scene:

The janitor of the Berkley flats stood transfixed as he became aware of a young woman just behind Mason, but being natively polite he concealed his astonishment by bowing low.

"Williams," said Mason with an air of apology, "I have gone and done it. This is my wife," (Williams bowed definitely to Rose). "I promise not to do it again if you won't mind—and if you keep it from the fellows for a day or two."

"Cehtinly not, sah, of co'se not, Misto Mason."

"And send Annie up; she may be of some use to Mrs. Mason."

"All right, sah. You'll find everything in ohder, sah."

As Rose went up the stairway she heard Williams chuckle softly.

At the door Mason turned, dangling a key on his finger.

"Mistress of my heart—here is the key to my poor home. Therewith I surrender my dominion like Boabdil the Moor."

Rose took the key gently, for under Mason's playful words ran a perceptible note of sadness. He was surrendering a part of his freedom to her—the sacrifices were not all on her side. Without a word she turned the key in the lock and he threw the door open.

"Enter, my 'bread-dispenser.'"

She gave a little cry of surprise. The apartment, glowing with light and with warmth, reflected Mason's mind as in a magic mirror. Books—everywhere books, that was the first impression. Next the pictures and odd pieces of sculpture claimed her interest, and photographs of poets, actors, and musicians, and then more books and easy chairs and pipes.

After another keen glance Rose uttered her pleasure. "Oh,

<sup>28</sup>The critics are following Donald Pizer's suggestion that "Mason's proposal emphasizes personal freedom so strongly that apparently some readers believed he was proposing a trial marriage." See Donald Pizer, Introduction to *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), xxxii. For repetition of Pizer's speculation, see Robert Bray, "Hamlin Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*," *The Critical Reception of Hamlin Garland*, ed. Charles L. P. Silet, et al. (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing, 1985), 396, 406n11; and Kenneth M. Price, "Whitman's Influence on Hamlin Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*," *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street*, ed. Geoffrey M. Sill (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 200–201.

how cozy! It is ever so much more interesting and lovely than I imagined it.”

“Thanks, dreadfully,” replied Mason, gloomily. “I took years to get these things together.”

She came and put her hand in his. “And you thought I’d change all this!” she softly said in reproach.

As they took seats before the fire Mason settled down into his favorite arm-chair with a sigh of content; “Home once more!” Then he looked up at Rose and replied to her question. “Well, as we faced Judge Wilson I had that fear, but as I sit here it seems as if neither my life nor this room could ever change; it seems as if you were merely a visitor. Now that is honest, but let me tell you something further, my lady.” He took her hand between his strong smooth palms. “I used to be lonely here, but when I look at you I know I shall never be lonely again.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1895, however, reviewers saw no ambiguity in Rose and Mason’s relationship, only the implausibility of Mason’s proposal. “The letter is one of the shallowest, vulgarest, and most contemptible communications of man to woman ever imagined by an author of fiction,” the *New York Times* complained, referring to Mason’s formal letter of proposal. Rose’s preference for “a god-like Chicago editor” rather than “a beautiful young man, the son of a millionaire, who had elegant manners” bothered the *Providence Sunday Journal*. Indeed, Rose’s preference for “an old, bald-headed, cynical newspaper man” irritated the *Independent* as well, and the *Philadelphia Press* argued that Rose’s marriage to “a languid specimen of the newspaper man—our familiar friend, the cynic, whom we encounter so often in novels and never meet in life,” violated the very realism for which Garland had campaigned so vociferously.<sup>30</sup> Garland was likely just trying to warm up the cold and reclusive Mason by offering a snapshot of domestic bliss. He also used the scene to reaffirm that a marriage of equals does not mean the loss of individuality, for Rose finds Mason’s apartment perfectly “cozy” and vows not to alter it. The four-year period between composition and revision did not prove conducive to Garland’s imagination, however, for the added scene remains stiff and anticlimactic.

Garland’s revision of *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* is not without its ironies. If he

<sup>29</sup>Garland, *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1899), 353–54.

<sup>30</sup>“Wisconsin Folks,” 31; “Realism Run Mad,” 13; “Literature,” 189; “Hamlin Garland’s Latest Story,” 22.

wanted to earn the respect of reviewers, he failed, for they ignored the new edition completely. By and large, reputations are formed by the initial publication of one's novel, not by later editions. Perhaps the case of Theodore Dreiser, who encountered more than his share of editorial interference and critical hostility, best illustrates this contention. Despite the appearance in 1981 of a new edition of *Sister Carrie*, one that its editors argue best reflects the novel Dreiser wanted people to read, it is the 1900 edition that is most frequently written about and taught—and for good reasons. This edition formed Dreiser's public reputation and affected readers and writers; it is part of literary history in a way that the 1981 edition is not.

Garland probably revised *Rose*, not because he was kowtowing to public taste but because he had grown as a writer and was embarrassed by his less seasoned prose. In a 1934 letter to a man who wanted to use excerpts from *Rose* in a "prose clinic," Garland noted, "I would rather have you use the second edition of ROSE for the first edition is filled with little blunders, and is badly punctuated."<sup>31</sup>

Despite its "little blunders" and bad punctuation, the 1895 edition is the one that has endured. It not only shaped Garland's public reputation in his own time, but was reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press in 1969 in the only paperback edition to ever appear as well as the only reprinting since the revised novel's inclusion in the 1922 Border Edition of Garland's works. The 1895 text is, therefore, the edition that nearly all modern scholars cite.

Moreover, the universal panning of his novel and vitriolic personal attacks deeply affected Garland, who was acutely sensitive to criticism. As Macmillan editor Harold Latham wrote after Garland's death, he was "sensitive to a high degree, easily hurt, . . . easily discouraged, and his publishing friends tried ever to stress the recognition which his work had aroused throughout the world."<sup>32</sup> By the time *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* was published in December 1895, Garland had grown tired of the invective his radical work had encountered and began to cast about for other projects. In January 1896 he accepted a commission from publisher Samuel S. McClure to write a biography of Ulysses S. Grant, complete with a generous weekly stipend and expense account. By the time he completed the project, in late 1897, he had determined to write no more controversial work and instead redirected his

<sup>31</sup>Garland to George Steele Seymour, 29 October 1934, Knox College Archives.

<sup>32</sup>Harold Latham, *Hamlin Garland: Centennial Tributes and a Checklist of the Hamlin Garland Papers in the University of Southern California Library*, ed. and comp. Lloyd Arvidson (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1962), 13.

energies to romantic novels of the west and to life-writing.

The case of the two texts of *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* offers a cautionary tale about what happens when one hurries a novel into print before it may be ready and whether a revision of a published work can measurably affect subsequent critical response. It also leads us to question why scholars tend to reprint the first edition, even when later editions are measurably improved—as in the case of *Rose*, better written, better punctuated—and despite the explicit wishes of the author, who himself chose the 1899 edition to be included in the two collected editions of his work. Writers need to consider carefully what they publish and when they publish it, for as *Rose* shows, writers tend to have very little effect on what happens afterwards.

