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# Dirty Words in Deadwood

Melody Graulich

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## Dirty Words in *Deadwood*

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# DIRTY WORDS IN DEADWOOD

Literature and the Postwestern

EDITED BY MELODY GRAULICH  
*and* NICOLAS S. WITSCHI

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Set in ITC New Baskerville by  
Laura Wellington.  
Designed by A. Shahan.

We dedicate this book to David Milch; to the cast, writers, and directors of *Deadwood*; and to everyone else who helped to make for hours of viewing and intellectual pleasure.



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## INTRODUCTION

# *Deadwood's* Barbaric Yawp Sharing a Literary Heritage

*Melody Graulich*

*When discussing the genesis of Deadwood, David Milch has often declared, "I did want to do a show on the American West, but I didn't want to do a Western. I've never really understood or cared for the conventions of the Western." This does not mean, however, that the series is free of conventions. As Melody Graulich demonstrates in her literary historian's approach to Milch's writing, the series is best "read intertextually," a feat accomplished by paying specific attention to the various "conversations" with a wide array of literary and cultural histories that Milch engages in (including, in fact, those of the genre Western). By way of introduction to this collection of essays, Graulich opens for consideration a number of Milch's conventional concerns, among them the "conversations" he has about character, point of view, and narrative perspective; about the use of humor and the grotesque; and about the power of language to both obfuscate and reveal deeply held truths. More importantly, though, Graulich's opening appraisal makes clear that as "a verbal and visual construct," Deadwood is far from conventional. Ultimately, she affirms that the approaches offered by the essays that follow, while initially literary in focus, will rapidly expand to include the full range of critical insights and rewards that "close analysis and interpretation" can bring. Deadwood's literary conventions are those that come into view when an interpretive model informed by the tools of contemporary literary and cultural analysis are brought to the task, when, as Graulich concludes, the show's engagement with "imagination" is more fully accounted for.*

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,  
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

WALT WHITMAN, "Song of Myself"

Mr. Warren spread out pretty much all the literary artifacts of American culture for me to study, as part of my working for him on that his-

tory of American literature. And in that I found the refraction, the perspective that I needed, to give me access to play the cards that I'd been dealt.

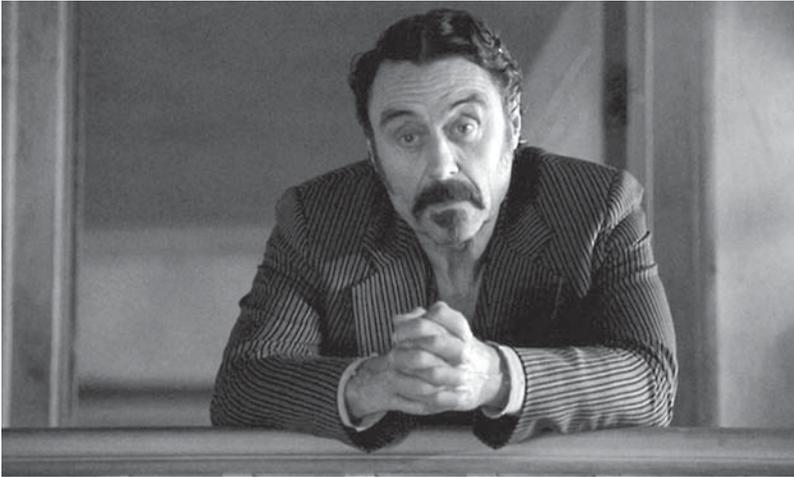
DAVID MILCH

When we rehearse, David sits down and gives his take on the scene. But he usually doesn't talk about the scene; he talks about where it sits in the larger picture. Nineteenth-century American literature is what he's steeped in, with big themes on a small level.

IAN MCSHANE

In September 2006 I was invited to participate in “Got Yourself a Gun: Frontier Violence in American History and Culture,” a symposium on the HBO series *Deadwood* at the Lamar Center for the Study of Frontiers and Borders at Yale. The plan: the show's creator, David Milch, who had attended and later taught at Yale, would speak one night; the next day the “scholars” would comment extemporaneously on his remarks, and Milch would then respond. I was invited, I presume, because I had published in 1984 one of the first essays on violence against women in the U.S. West, in a collection called *The Women's West*, edited and widely read by western historians, who made up the rest of the panel. Along with its profane language (the number of times “cocksucker” was used per episode, as well as the average length of time between its use, had actually been tallied) and its “authenticity” in representing the frontier West, the series' shockingly vivid and repeated scenes of brutality against women had been a topic of discussion, among scholars, fans, and critics—and here I mean those who disliked the show—alike.

Although enjoined not to prepare remarks, I knew generally what I wanted to talk about—and it was not to speculate about the historical accuracy of Swerengen's stepping on Trixie's neck after slapping her around or Wolcott's murders of women at the Chez Ami. I wanted to speak as a *literary* historian, to talk about *Deadwood's* many allusions to U.S. literature to argue that the series must be read intertextually. From 1975 to 1976 I had absorbed the anthology *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, written and ed-



1. Al observes the Gem. “Sold under Sin” (*Deadwood*, 1.12).

ited by Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren, to study for my PhD-period exam, which focused on nineteenth-century U.S. literature.<sup>1</sup> I had learned from Mark Singer’s *New Yorker* profile that Milch had assisted that great trio, who end their introduction with this line: “And special gratitude is owed to David Milch for long, devoted, and invaluable assistance” ( Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1: xx). In a later essay Lewis describes their collaborative process: “The selection of the poets afforded particular pleasure and difficulty, as we read aloud to each other in the Vermont cabin from our personal favorites. . . . The texts were preceded simply by condensed biographical sketches, most of them compiled by our gifted younger colleague David Milch, who had often made a fourth figure at our meetings” (572).<sup>2</sup> (Nathaniel Lewis’s interview following this introduction explores these relationships more fully.)

I felt that *The Makers and the Making* offered me an intellectual intersection with Milch, who had majored in English at Yale, received an MFA from Iowa, and taught literature. But it had been always already clear from watching *Deadwood* that Milch, like literary historians, carries on constant conversations with Hawthorne and Melville, Twain, James, Faulkner, and Flannery O’Connor, as well as lesser knowns such as George Washington Harris’s verbally ram-

bunctious and socially defiant Sut Lovingood (1865), Thomas Bangs Thorpes's "Big Bear of Arkansas" (1841), said to be based on Davy Crockett, or Johnson Jones Hooper's confidence man, Simon Suggs, whose most famous line and "whole ethical system lies snugly in his favourite aphorism—"IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY" (1845) (12, capitals in original).<sup>3</sup> Milch's comment in the epigraph to this essay about playing the cards he had been dealt even echoes a key trope in a Western novel often, simplistically, accused of instigating the "mythic West," Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), as does the poker scene in *Deadwood* where Cy reprimands McCall for calling Wild Bill a "son of a bitch," the same insult Trampas uses in a poker game against the Virginian (1.4).<sup>4</sup> Readers of Milch's *Deadwood: Stories from the Black Hills* (2006) and interviews, as well as those who have heard him speak, in person or in audio commentaries, know he frequently refers to and directly quotes authors; I read *Stories from the Black Hills* as Milch's literary and cultural analysis of his own series. More significantly for *Deadwood*, as he pays homage to *The Virginian* without ever citing the novel, he often develops ideas in terms that rephrase works that have obviously influenced him, without directly mentioning them. Consider this passage:

When the disjunction between our own inconsequence and what we would like to feel about our vital connection to the universe gets to be too much, we try to resolve that contradiction through altered states. I always had the secret suspicion that history had tended toward my birth and would trail into tawdry inconsequence after I left. Yet the facts of the universe appear to mitigate against that conclusion. (Milch, *Deadwood* 67)

Anyone familiar with the American literary canon will recognize that Milch explains his tendencies to addiction (as well as those of *Deadwood* characters) through the words and philosophy of a writer who appears in *The Makers and the Making* as "the dominant figure" of the 1890s (2: 1625):

A man said to the universe:  
"Sir, I exist!"

“However,” replied the universe,  
“The fact has not created in me  
“A sense of obligation.”

Stephen Crane (1899) (2: 1653)

Similar echoes reverberate throughout *Deadwood*, as we will see.

While others described it as “Shakespearean,” *Deadwood*’s dialogue reminded me of the voices from *The Makers and the Making*, and I was far more interested in how it entered into cultural and literary than historical conversations, though like most literary critics influenced by the American studies tradition and by postmodern theory, I usually focus on intersections between literature and history. After all, Milch adapted Napoleon’s famous line, “History is a set of lies agreed upon,” to assert a central focus for the series: “Language is a lie agreed upon,” a comment that stresses his sense that all meaning is contextual and collaborative (*Deadwood* 26). In the remarks to which we were to respond, he helped me by extending an allusion he often repeats—“Melville said that any great poem spins against the way it drives. So does any great character” (*Deadwood* 17)—and by mentioning Ethan Brand’s “unpardonable sin.” His reference to Hawthorne gave me a literary avenue into what I knew from talking with the other speakers would be one of the more contentious topics of discussion the following day, the series’ “historical accuracy,” and I went back to my hotel room and thought about Hawthorne.

And contentious it was. The first historian mounted his high horse—his many years of scholarly research in primary documents—to point out what he considered to be the numerous historical flaws in the show. Milch, who was scheduled to speak only after the rest of us had finished and who is, unsurprisingly, as articulate as Swearngen, thundered back, referring to him as “the pompous professor.” Although I had read Singer’s description of Milch’s discourse, “intellectually daunting, digressive, arcane, wittily profane” (192), I was still stunned by his physical presence. No fools, the next two speakers demurred at discussing the show’s “authenticity,” and Milch let them be. Then it was my turn to try to quote Hawthorne from memory.

“Last night as I listened to David Milch,” I began, “I was reminded of Hawthorne’s famous injunction in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), his historical fiction about Salem, Massachusetts, that while the *Novel* ‘is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience,’ the *Romance* ‘sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—[and] has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances to a great extent, of the writer’s own choosing or creation’” (vii).<sup>5</sup> Hawthorne had much to say about what he meant by “romance,” but for our purposes today, we can substitute for novel, history, and for romance, historical fiction.

“I thought also of the preface to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), when the narrator, a ‘Hawthorne’ the author has created, rummages through the attic of the Custom House and finds a torn, ragged, and faded ‘A,’ which, for reasons he doesn’t fully understand, he places over his heart. At which point he feels a searing pain, which leads him, indeed enables him, to begin his story of a fledgling community executing its righteous sense of justice on a defiant yet deeply scarred young woman. Milch’s remarks suggest that Hawthorne and his *Scarlet Letter* were on his mind: *Deadwood*, he has said, is ‘a reenactment of the story of the founding of America, and a reenactment, too, of the story of Original Sin. I suppose I accept Hawthorne’s definition of Original Sin as the violation of the sanctity of another’s heart’ (*Deadwood* 12).

“Hawthorne’s sympathy for this young woman, this ‘sinner,’ made *The Scarlet Letter* a rather scandalous book in its time. Hawthorne’s wife, Sophia, said it ‘sent her to bed with a grievous headache,’ while an author deeply influenced by Hawthorne, Henry James, wrote that ‘Emerson, as a spiritual sun-worshipper, could have attached but a moderate value to Hawthorne’s catlike faculty of seeing in the dark’ [both qtd. in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1: 445].”

At this point Milch laughed at Sophia’s headache and made an appreciative *um-hum* at James’s light/dark image. (Only memory serves me: the Lamar Center did not tape the proceedings.) Thereafter, Milch, seated next to me as I stood at the podium, began to

chime in, dueting my quotes, commenting on what was written on authors' gravestones or what they said about each other, guffawing knowledgeably when I mentioned the too-little-known Sut Lovin-good. Soon it felt as if we were in dialogue. I went on:

"The language of the U.S. literary tradition echoes—perhaps thunders—throughout *Deadwood*. When Wild Bill offers Alma Garret a warning after her husband's murder that she should return to the East, he asks her to imagine the sound of thunder, adding, 'I told your husband to head home to avoid a dark result. But I didn't say it in thunder. Listen to the thunder' (1.4). His comment identifies one kind of sensibility—'a great power of blackness'—that informs *Deadwood*, as well as hints at Hickok's melancholy, qualities Melville describes as central to Hawthorne's fiction ("Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1: 836). Rather like James, Melville saw Emerson as one of the 'yes' men, in contrast to his famous assessment of his friend, echoed by Wild Bill: 'There is the grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne. He says No! in thunder; but the Devil himself cannot make him say *yes*. For all men who say *yes*, lie; and all men who say *no*,—why, they are in the happy condition of judicious, unincumbered travellers in Europe; they cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet-bag,—that is to say, the Ego' (review of *The House of the Seven Gables*, in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1: 444).

"Of course today Hawthorne is regarded as one of our greatest historical novelists. I wonder if he *really* found that faded 'A' in the Custom House attic. Is it in an archive somewhere? How 'authentic' is *The Scarlet Letter*? Does 'A' stand for authenticity? [My understanding of how labels of "authentic" and "inauthentic" had permeated western history and literary studies has been shaped by the work of Nathaniel Lewis and William Handley, which I discussed later in my talk and will explore later in this essay.]

"We heard David quote Hawthorne last night. In another context he's talked of Doc Cochrane as suffering from the same sense of seeing too deeply into human suffering that destroyed Hawthorne's Ethan Brand. Apparently he also quotes Hawthorne to define characters who pretend, or aspire, to be what they are not, such as E. B.

Farnum, for the actor who plays him, William Sanderson, recounts that David will ‘say Hawthorne says this and that, you know, and that we’re all imposters’ (in Milch, *Deadwood* 30). Alma Garret, of course, parades down the streets of Deadwood to meet Bullock’s wife in a bright red dress in the first episode of the second season, which is called ‘A Lie Agreed Upon.’ [Here Milch chortled loudly.] Which is another articulation of perhaps *the* key theme of the American Renaissance: appearance versus reality.” [Recall Ian McShane’s comment that Milch is interested in “big themes on a small level.” In *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, Milch often comments on this theme: “Swearengen . . . recognizes the sham and pretense and emptiness of institutions unless vitalized by behavior,” for instance (111); “What Al Swearengen is doing and what he thinks he is doing are two absolutely opposite things” (17). Al is one of those “great characters who spins against the way he drives.”]

“Milch has repeated his allusions to literature often enough that *Deadwood* actors have internalized them, as in this one that extends Melville’s line about a poem: ‘David has said that he loves Melville, and Melville said the only great scene is actually about the opposite of what it appears to be about—and when we come to work, I feel that’s exactly what happens’ (Garret Dillahunt [Wolcott], ‘Making Episode 12’). Melville emerges in season 2 when, after Wolcott arrives in town, E.B. gives Johnny and Dan a message for the ailing Al, ‘Al, if you’re not dead and already moldering, I send news to revive you. A fish to rival the fabled leviathan has swum into our waters. Get well soon and we’ll land the cocksucker together. Your friend, E.B.’ (2.3). [Part of this line introduces the episode description on the DVD.] The fishing trope continues throughout the season. Again near the end of season 3 in ‘Leviathan Smiles,’ Al sees Hearst’s men riding into town and says, ‘Fucking Leviathan Smiles’ (3.8). Unlike Ahab, Al loses a finger, not a leg. These are only a few of many references to Melville in *Deadwood*, which I see as a retelling in many ways of *The Confidence Man*.”<sup>6</sup>

“‘Let the Masquerade Begin,’” Milch broke in, quoting from memory the last line of Melville’s novel.<sup>7</sup>

I had more to say, some of which I will explore later, as did

Milch—notably and not surprisingly that he reads Cormac McCarthy, another author whose historical authenticity has been challenged but whose work, like *Deadwood*, is about the power of language and the imagination to create a world. But this is a fitting place to end this dramatic dialogue, which I hope demonstrates that Milch, without preparation but with an amazing memory, entered into my intertextual reading of *Deadwood*, happily channeling the voices included in *The Makers and the Making*. Afterward audience members asked me if we had worked together, rehearsed together, what was a spontaneous demonstration of the power of our shared literary heritage.<sup>8</sup>

I am obviously suggesting that I find *Deadwood* compelling and convincing as historical fiction. I follow the lead of William Handley, whose methodology was praised in an essay by Stephen Tatum:

Handley's intertextual methodology combining formalist and historicist techniques purposefully blurs the boundaries between literary and historical discourse, and between popular or formula westerns and so-called "serious" western literature, so as to trouble the binary structures (for example, myth/reality; dominant/resistant; authentic/false) too often employed by western critics and historians in search of some authentic, "real" West or regional difference. (465)

The scholars writing in this volume, all literary or film critics, explore *Deadwood* as they would a novel by Hawthorne or a play by O'Neill (each one-day episode could, in fact, be read as a "long day's journey into night," echoing many of the themes of the play: fathers and sons, theatricality, drug abuse). They read it as an imaginative text, using the techniques of literary and cultural criticism, with close analyses of individual scenes or episodes, having moved beyond the "American literary studies of the West [that] have often been as resistant to theoretical matters, even to formal aesthetics, as the field of western history has been resistant to literary concerns" (Handley 1). Milch certainly read widely in historical documents, as he did while working with the authors of *The Makers and the Making* in order to understand literary texts within their histor-

ical contexts. Suggesting that intersection between research and historical fiction, he excerpts some of these primary sources in *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*. But despite its grisly subject matter, *Deadwood* fits Hawthorne's definition of the "romance," far more concerned with "the truths of the human heart" than with fidelity to facts. (Later in this volume several authors will look at how other literary genres are at play in *Deadwood*.) I believe Milch became embroiled in defending the series' "authenticity" when the language he used to express those fundamental truths was attacked.<sup>9</sup> He makes his position clear when he says, "The truths of storytelling have to do with something other than verifiable fact" ("Imaginative Reality"). Many, in fact most, aspects of the series demand a literary reading of the series' aesthetic dimensions, conventions, and echoes of literary traditions.

For instance, while the series' costume designers carefully dressed Wild Bill in historically appropriate clothes and while he really was shot by Jack McCall in *Deadwood*, the reverberating significance of his death can only be fully understood symbolically, using the tools and insights of literary understanding, as Milch himself has suggested, focusing on character development (literal and symbolic), themes, cultural meaning, and viewer response. Because "Hickok fathered Bullock," "the death of Wild Bill allows Bullock to grow into manhood," Milch argues (*Deadwood* 197, 179). "Bullock is left with Utter and Jane. They're his foster parents" (201). Although a character such as the coward McCall sees Hickok only as a public figure, viewers come to understand the meaning of his death through the dramatized private responses of characters such as Jane, Charlie Utter, and Bullock, for whom there are no historical documents, only the knowledge of the human heart. "Death allows Doc Cochran and Jane to realize the fullness of their humanity and become part of the town," says Milch (179). Wild Bill's death "allows *Deadwood* to exist outside the shadow of Western myth," his death weaning "the viewer . . . from any preconception of what the West had been or what the experience of watching the show was going to be like" (179). "I wanted viewers to invest in Hickok the old idea of what the hero was and then deprive them of the hero.

The audience gets angry if you deprive them of their hero. . . . Then they discover in themselves the emotional resources to adapt to that environment and recommit” (Milch, audio commentary, 2.3).<sup>10</sup>

As critics will argue later in the volume, using various current critical approaches, the trajectory of Jane’s story has far less to do with what is known, or not known, represented, or misrepresented, about Martha Jane Canary’s life history than it does with the series’ key themes. The actress who plays Jane, Robin Weigert, was “floored” one day when Milch said before filming a scene, “‘What Jane is, essentially, is a wife and mother.’ And I said, ‘What? How do we get from this bullwhacker of the Old West to being the wife and the mother’” (in Milch, *Deadwood* 70). Like Hickok, Jane is initially a recasting of the legendary figure. However, her care of and for Sofia in season 1 foreshadows her interest in Deadwood’s schoolchildren and her leadership of them, with Joanie, in the parade to their new schoolhouse in season 3, which represents her gradual—and partial—movement from outsider to insider. Like her concern for children, her nursing during the plague complicates viewers’ understanding of her gender identification and, again, foreshadows her increasing participation in community activities. Despite her appearance, language, and behavior, Jane is initially—and conventionally—defined by her relationship to a man as she moons after the unavailable Hickok. By season 3, her gradual acceptance of Joanie’s affections and caring represents the (limited) female empowerment that takes place throughout the series and also the value of shared emotional commitment, which we see expressed in numerous unions.<sup>11</sup> Jane’s evolution, for which there is no evidence in the historical record, parallels the series’ major theme of the movement from primitivism and individualism to community and mutual dependence. (Linda Mizejewski examines the differences between Canary’s “real” life and Jane’s plotline more fully later in this volume.)

With his background as a literary critic, Milch also understands how the series will be “read.” He repeatedly acknowledges that *Deadwood*’s meaning will be a collaboration between many. The characters are a result of the actors “fleshing out” the role, as well as Milch

adapting the role to fit the actors (Milch, *Deadwood* 12, 27–28), but repeatedly he emphasizes the readers' part in the process: "The viewer collaborates in Ian's creation of Swearengen" (27). He sees *Deadwood's* meaning not as fixed but as a conversation between its creators and viewers. In passages like the following, he addresses the fallacy of intentionality: "I never thought of the name Swearengen as connected to his profane language, any more than I thought of Bullock as bull-headed, or Farnum as Barnum, or anything of the sort. It is the life of this fiction, of the world of *Deadwood*, that generates these similarities. Symbols generate their meaning out of the closed system of a fiction" (35). Discussing the meaning of Hickok's death, he concludes, "These are understandings that have come to me after the fact" (197).

Milch does not resist those who, in our students' jargon, go fishing for "deep hidden meanings." Within the series itself, characters, notably Swearengen, repeatedly try to "decipher" what things mean, what they symbolize, whether Wu's drawings, Hearst's notes, just about anyone's actions, or what people are trying to say. Swearengen is always happy when he can "identify a pattern in these events" (3.3). As Dority says to the recovering Al, "You'll have to gather all your fucking wiles, Al. There's developments that need interpreting at every front" (2.5). E.B. comes to Al and announces: "Something strange has transpired. I need you to construe" (2.9). Typically, Cy purposefully deceives, saying to Lila, "I ain't answerable for misinterpretations." (2.3). (Brian McCuskey will have more to say about the difficulties of "reading" meanings later in this volume.)

*Deadwood* also declares its literariness through its attention to the poetry and ambiguity of language.<sup>12</sup> Describing *Leaves of Grass* as a "language experiment," Walt Whitman wrote, "The subject of language interests me—interests me: I never quite get it out of my mind" (qtd. in Traubel viii). Nor does Milch, who describes "a world you create simply by the way people talk" (Milch and Carradine). In this sense *Deadwood* is also a "language experiment," not only creating a world by the way people talk but also self-conscious about language. Like all great literature, *Deadwood* is wonderfully quot-

able. Every viewer will remember favorite lines; for months colleagues in my (English) department chanted *Deadwoodisms* as we passed each other in the hall. My favorite: Al to Trixie, before inviting her back to his bed: “Take half a day off if you feel like it. Go see that child. Well, venture out. Sally fuckin’ forth” [1.11]; we also reenacted the “Wu/who/ cocksucker” “conversation” between Al and Wu, in the rhythm of “Who’s [Wu’s?] on First?” [1.10]. Certainly Milch’s coinage for Barnum’s suckers, “hoople-heads,” already all over the web, will one day make Webster’s.

The characters repeatedly comment about language, particularly focusing on the many difficulties of communication. Here Milch again echoes one of the central concerns of the American Renaissance writers: ambiguity of meaning. The conversations of the two “allies,” Al and Wu, ridiculous yet successful—in communicating information, helping a relationship evolve, and ultimately conveying affection—are only the most exaggerated expressions of this theme. Ellsworth gives voice to one of the series’ key themes—the difficulties of finding language to convey feelings, or the inner reality—when he says to Alma, “Forgiving me my language; I ask you to consider my meaning” (3.1). Responding to speakers who favor indirection and sarcasm, characters frequently ask, “What did that mean?” or “What just happened?” (Adams 2.10). “What’s the import of that expression [amalgamation and capital]?” asks Seth. Angry with Wolcott asking him if he’s a “student of Hume,” Charlie answers, “Do I look like I fucking know?” (1.9). “I ain’t got one fucking scintilla what it means,” says Dan to Al (2.10). Mildly threatened by Al, Merrick says, “I can imagine bleeding if first I’ve been made to understand” (3.1). Characters frequently feel called upon to rephrase their “point.” Generally, though certainly not always, Al responds to his cohorts’ lack of comprehension with bemused but biting sarcasm, while Cy conveys his characteristic aggression and contempt: to Lila, “Don’t mistake me. I *want* to take the time to explain myself to you” (2.9).

Al has faith in his verbal abilities; miscomprehension results from the stunted understanding of his auditors. He provides evidence for Milch’s assertion that language “was the only social force before



2. Al and Wu discuss “the San Francisco cocksucker.” “Something Very Expensive” (*Deadwood* 2.6).

government. Those who could speak well became the leaders” (Milch and Carradine). Al’s loquaciousness, exaggeration, and wordplay might exert power and control, but his insults to characters for whom we know he has affection (Trixie, Dan, Jewel, Doc, Silas, Wu, Bullock, even “the Jew”) are a defensive way of sustaining relationships. For instance, while he is still suffering from her attraction to Sol, he uses this obscene and aggressive metonymy when he looks down on Trixie from the inside balcony in the Gem and says, “Why aren’t you among the circumcised?” yet by this time he has facilitated her movement from whore to bookkeeper, from the Gem to Sol’s bed (2.10). Milch says, “When Swearengen is talking his tone often works against the content of what he says” (*Deadwood* 25). His meaning exceeds his words, and as Milch says about his father in a quotation later in this essay, there is often “hospitality” in Swearengen’s words, quite unlike Cy’s. The pent-up Bullock is capable of direct and contrite apologies to Sol and Martha for saying the wrong things, but he doesn’t have faith that his community will understand him. He says to Martha, “Words do the wrong jobs, piling on too heavy, at odds over meanings,” before speaking only a few words in his campaign speech (3.1). For Hearst, who would

“rather be off by [him]self,” language is never a social act, only a means to intimidate and control (3.3).

Like Swearengen, Bullock, and Hearst, each *Deadwood* character speaks with his or her own inflection. “The language,” says McShane, “is a way of saying who you are” (audio commentary 1.12). Joanie acknowledges her place in the camp in the following interchange: after using “fucking,” Al says, “Pardon my French.” Joanie: “Oh, I speak French” (1.3). But later she speaks in various emotionally vulnerable discourses, to Charlie, to Alma, to Jane (1.3). Ultimately the women, whom Paula Malcomson (Trixie) described as “really grasping to be heard” during the first season, find their voices (in Milch, *Deadwood* 88). While romantic Sol would “settle for a vigorous handholding” (2.2), Trixie integrates her past life with her current one in repeated sexual innuendos: punning on being his bookkeeper, she says, “Let me work on your column,” their very relationship measuring the distance from her initial promise to Al: “I’ll be good” (2.5; 1.1). Ellsworth delivers the series’ first burst of inspired profanity to Al in “Deadwood,” but by his death he, like Charlie Utter (befitting his name), is one of the characters most capable of expressing directly his caring for others.

As intriguing are the characters’ comments on one another’s ways of speaking. Swearengen to Merrick: “Ever wonder if you expressed yourself more directly, you would weigh less” (1.6). More nastily, Adams to Jarry: “You talk like you take it up the fucking ass” (3.1). Other comments are more indirect. Worried about protecting the camp against the plague, Al refuses to put up with E.B.’s usual flowery diction: “Don’t play that shit where you make me drag your words out of you. Declare, or shut the fuck up” (1.6). Alma frequently puts Farnum in his place by trumping his highfalutin discourse with her own, then speaking the language of the camp: “Shit or get off the chamber pot” (2.4). Wanting Al back after his bout with the kidney stone, Johnny says, “Boss, talk any way you want as long as you’re miserable and mean” (2.5). The drunken Merrick inarticulately compliments Dan: “I often find you the source of the many well put and witty things that you say” (1.6).

Rather ironically given *Deadwood*’s grandiloquent speech and the

way Al talks over his subordinates' heads, in the tradition of the tall tale Milch mocks ostentatious language, used by characters and institutions who suffer from what Twain calls in *Life upon the Mississippi* (1883) "the Sir Walter Scott disease." This time a character is the exaggerated embodiment of the theme, E. B. Farnum, though Merrick also comes in for ridicule. When Merrick posts an announcement about the plague using the word "gratis," Al comments, "Is your intention to inform your fucking readership or make them feel like a dunce?" (1.6). Yet Merrick also serves as a critic of governmental discourse. When Jarry brings the camp a statement about claims, Merrick says, "Uh, if I discern this correctly, sir, this statement could be taken to mean, uh, nothing," adding, "What exactly will or won't qualify or mitigate the presumption of ownership eludes me" (2.5). When he puts up the notice, a group of indignant hoople-heads cluster round, asking, "What in fuck's that word *sposta* mean?" Merrick's definition only leads to threats, while Steve's is more satisfying: "New county commissioner give Merrick a statement mitigating us into an ass fucking" (2.5). (As befits an institutional setting, my department colleagues "mitigated" each other for a few weeks.) In *Deadwood* the relationship between politics and the English language is suspect.

*Deadwood's* language deserves an old-fashioned close reading, something essayists in this volume have begun to do. I have space for only one more point. In the series and in his comments, Milch repeatedly insists on language's fluidity, another topic important to both the yay- and the naysayers of the American Renaissance. With its changeable multiple meanings, Milch sees it as sustaining theme: "Which is to say language always generates meaning from context and what begins as seeming an unremitting and profane environment is just seeking a new way to organize itself. At the level of language I was trying to prefigure the theme of improvisation of society" (audio commentary 2.3). Here Milch, like Whitman, connects language to democracy and to a shared attempt to make meaning, always shifting, and to understand: "Language has no intrinsic meaning and no intrinsic value. It depends upon a consensus, as does the value of gold, and it is constantly redefining itself"

(*Deadwood* 19). The reference to gold's lack of intrinsic meaning recalls the debated meanings of literary symbols—the Scarlet A, Moby Dick, James's golden bowl—and the comparison emphasizes Milch's view of language as a social construct.

Not surprisingly Milch expresses no evidence of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence." (In his interview with Lewis in this volume, he indicates a preference for literary history over theory.) When I asked him how all those years of working on *The Makers and the Making* influence his imaginative vision, he answered, "I think it's so fundamentally and pervasively that it's almost impossible to speak of, to articulate."<sup>13</sup> Yet he gave it a try, describing how a community of scholars discussed how their work entered into a conversation with a literary tradition:

DM: The method was that we all sat and read. . . . And then talked about it and then sort of split things up and so on. So there were the materials. But then there was the experience of the sitting and talking about the materials, and that process was so predominately without any kind of ego attachment that the example of the humility and the tenacity and the perseverance, and the assumption of a good in the enterprise and a worthiness in the enterprise—that was what was most precious to me. You know there's a Santayana comment in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" about the intrinsic suspicion in America of the life of the mind. . . .

Certainly I came to the idea of being an artist with all of those ambivalences and uneasinesses, and here in particular was Mr. Warren who . . . was an extraordinary poet and unapologetically, unabashedly leading a life of the mind and recognizing as a necessity the fact that one had to understand and incorporate into the fiber of your being that you were working in a tradition. That the idea that you would, that an artist could, create alone was every bit as self-deluding and narcissistic as the kind of, the philistine prejudice against writing, against being an artist at all. And so it put to rest at a level of habit, which is always the place to put things to rest: you just

stopped questioning the fact that your work is part of a conversation, with everybody, with the work that has preceded you and you can pray humbly that it will be part of the conversation which ensues.

MG: That's part of the real pleasure for the reader, from a literary standpoint, to see that conversation going on in *Deadwood*.

DM: Yes. Yes. And it isn't meant to be an elegant parlor trick. That is, an arcane reference or, you know, only for the really initiated. That's not what it is. By the process of working on all of those materials, over a number of years . . . it became part of the air that one breathes. . . .

Ultimately, after all of that work, and all of those different writers we studied—and you know we studied the Indian, all of the Indian poetry and the black spirituals—for me, that was what the river was for Mark Twain.

MG: Or the sea for Melville?

DM: Absolutely.

MG: His Harvard and his Yale?

DM: Absolutely. I had the sea and I had the river. I knocked around a little bit but understand that everyone that you met on the sea and on the river was also legitimately met in the world of the imagination. All of that stuff could be drawn on, and you didn't have to say, well, this is highbrow and this is lowbrow and all of that horseshit. It [literature] is a great leveler. It makes all of your experience available to you. That was the great gift that both Mr. Warren and Mr. Lewis gave me.

As we have seen, Milch repeatedly pays tribute to “all that stuff [that] could be drawn on,” mentions authors and texts that have influenced him. “The writer Katherine Anne Porter once said,” he writes, “‘There is no such thing as an exact synonym or an unmixed motive.’ I think both of those things are true”; the extravagance of *Deadwood*'s language suggests that no simple synonym will do, while we seldom, perhaps never, meet a character with an unmixed motive (Milch *Deadwood* 90). Milch also sees his work as honoring writers who have taught him his craft: “[I consider] the judgment that

they would make of the way that I work, that's the deepest tribute that I could pay to them, that I try not to be distracted by sterile ideas of novelty, I just try to serve the materials, and that's how all of those influences ad, mix, in a constructive fashion. And then sometimes when you're laying head to pillow at night, you think, 'Oh, maybe Twain liked that, maybe he would have liked that'" (Milch, personal interview). This is a wonderfully symbiotic moment, for as much as Milch takes pleasure in the idea that Twain would have liked his work, he also wants his work to give Twain pleasure. Like many readers influenced by Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), he enjoys the company of the "implied author," enjoys conversing with him. Although his motif of orphans in *Deadwood* has been connected to Dickens, we could as easily see Swearingen, with his concrete and self-expressive language, his confused but sometimes heartfelt morals, his (almost) solitary meditations, and his initial decision to "light out for the territories" as what we hope Huck Finn will not become, and variations of the King and the Duke parade through *Deadwood's* theatrical, deceptive, and violent world, offering their own versions of Shakespearean soliloquies.<sup>14</sup> For the remainder of this introduction, I will suggest only a few more of "those influences that ad, mix in a constructive fashion" into *Deadwood*. Other viewers will no doubt immediately think of dozens I have missed.

Through references to founding fathers and founding documents, in *Deadwood* and in *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, Milch implies that *Deadwood* is a microcosm of larger U.S. themes. "How would there be order in this environment in the absence of laws?" he asks. "In that regard, *Deadwood* was sort of a petri dish, it was a laboratory experiment in which was reenacted the entire American experience" (Milch and Carradine). And so, appropriately, although *Deadwood* is set in the frontier West, literarily it encompasses the whole nation. Most of the writers I have discussed so far were rooted in New England. Twain, however, unites the South with the West. Like his work *Deadwood* owes a good deal to what is known as the frontier region of the "Old Southwest," which introduces another genre to consider, the tall tale, described in a section on

Twain in *The Makers and the Making* as having “its own kind of poetry, . . . poetry [which] even in its wildest grotesquerie, was aimed at expression, not decoration” (2: 1278). Milch’s father, a looming figure in his life, apparently told stories in tall-tale style: “There was a hospitality in the exuberance of [my father’s] language. Exaggeration didn’t bother him. He felt it was of the essence” (Milch, *Deadwood* 17). When Al tries to bribe Blazanov, the new telegrapher, with the offer of having his “prick sucked constantly,” Merrick dissembles, “You encounter one of our wonderful, meaningless American traditions, Mr. Blazanov, the tall-tale conversation”; Al rejoins that customers enjoy his establishment, “be their preference for tall tale or otherwise” (2.8).

Southwest humor stories characteristically use a proper, educated, and verbally stilted frame narrator (think Merrick, though Farnum would be hilarious in this role, and perhaps embodies Milch’s satire of it) who is simultaneously appalled and enraptured by the outrageous, uncivilized behavior and equally outrageous verbal virtuosity of a frontier storyteller (think Swearingen). As Brad Benz has written in a Chinese box of quotations:

As Hughes notes, “the idiom of western expansion was tall talk, which in Boorstein’s words, ‘blurred the edges of fact and fiction,’ and tall talk has generally been celebrated as a particularly American discourse.” It’s worth asking why Twain is not taken to task for stretching the truth. (249)

While Milch makes overt Twain’s influence on *Deadwood*, when I met him at Yale he acknowledged that he knew the marvelous *Sut Lovingood Tales* (1867), by George Washington Harris, whose “Mrs. Yardley’s Quilting” was reprinted in *The Makers and the Making*, where he was cited as an influence on Twain and Faulkner (Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1: 1116). Among Southwest humorists Harris most pushed the boundaries of “decency,” creating, in the words of the introduction to the story in *The Makers and the Making*, a “world of amiable brutality, grotesque high jinks, and crazy poetry” (1: 1115). Sut challenges all social proprieties, law, morality, and social institutions, in his actions and in his language. For Harris’s

time his treatment of sex was almost as startling, as audacious, as *Deadwood*'s. Here is the conclusion to a long passage in which Sut describes to the conventionally educated city boy George what goes on in the dark at quilting bees:

“But then, George, gals and ole maids ain’t the things to fool time away on. It’s widders, by golly, what am the real sensible, steady-goin’, never-scarin’, never-kickin’, willin spirited smooth pacers. They come close’t up to the hoss-block, standin still with their purty, silky ears playin and the neck-veins a-throbbin, and waits for the word—which of course you gives after you finds your feet well in the stirrup—and away they moves like a cradle on cushioned rockers, or a spring buggy runnin in damp sand. A tetch of the bridle and they knows you want ’em to turn, and they does it as willin as if the idea were their own. I be dod-rabbitted if a man can’t ’propriate happiness by the skinful is he is contact with somebody’s widder and is smart.” (1: 1118)

As the editors conclude, “The saga of Sut gives a gallery of other characters drawn with verve and astuteness; around him there is a whole society, a world grotesque but humanly recognizable. And Harris caught, created even, a language for that world. It is a language of vital rhythm and vivid images” (1: 1116). Surely this passage could as well describe *Deadwood*.

The grotesque often resides in southern literature. *Deadwood* is filled with such characters. It might take one to know one in Wolcott’s description of the hotel owner, “a grotesque named Farnum,” or in E.B.’s later recognition of Richardson as a “grotesque” (2.8; 3.3). After Swearingen’s suggestion to “sheath your prick,” Bullock fights him at the beginning of season 2, Milch says, “because it is his own soul speaking to him in the form of this grotesque little man. Bullock doesn’t want to believe that his soul can be housed in that” (*Deadwood* 157). As with Al, the “grotesque” characters in *Deadwood* are often treated most sympathetically. Since at least the nineteenth century, writers have employed the grotesque to express, humorously and ludicrously, a sympathy for humankind and its generally painful conditions, an emotion much in evidence in *Dead-*

wood. Milch suggests one source for his vision when he says of Swearingen: “Something in him is impelled to enfranchise Jewel, to give her a place to stand. He can’t understand why. He is moved by grace even as he disavows it” (*Deadwood* 19). “All my stories,” wrote Flannery O’Connor, “are about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it, but most people think of these stories as hard, hopeless and brutal” (275). (*The Makers and the Making* reprinted “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” ([1955].) The grotesque and grace are often linked through humor: according to O’Connor, Simone Weil’s “life is almost a perfect blending of the Comic and the Terrible, which two things may be opposite sides of the same coin. In my own experience, everything funny I have written is even more terrible than it is funny, or only funny because it is terrible, or only terrible because it is funny” (105). “Seeming absolute contraries contain each other,” says Milch, and the conjoining of the comic and the terrible is central to *Deadwood* (“Wedding Ceremony”). Throughout *Deadwood* we see characters struggling to accept the compassion and caring of others, moments of grace—Trixie, Bullock, Swearingen, Joanie, Jane. Sometimes the light of grace shines over them all: I think of the moment when Trixie looks up to meet Al’s eyes and smiles as they watch Doc and Jewel, wearing her new brace, dance around the Gem at the end of season 1 (1.12).

One of the more grotesque story lines begins in season 2, when characters debate whether Steve “fucked the sheriff’s horse” or perhaps, as he says, only “beat off on it,” and extends into season 3 (2.6). This story line could have originated in Faulkner’s *The Hamlet* (1940), though Ike Snopes’s love affair with a cow is recounted in romantic language, while Steve’s rape of Bullock’s horse displays the sense of inferiority and powerlessness he can’t express in words. (Imagine a Milch adaptation of the Snopes trilogy!) Milch clearly shares one of Faulkner’s central tenets, stated in his Nobel Prize address in 1950: great writing concerns itself with “the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” (qtd. in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 2: 2546). He frequently mentions Faulkner, suggesting he had him in mind in creating scenes. When Lila tells the outraged

Cy that she believes God loves us and that she prays for him every night, Milch comments, “That’s a tough one for a guy like Tolliver to feel someone’s praying for him. *Light in August*—it’s a great novel by Faulkner—the fundamental turn in it is where a woman [Johana Burden] starts praying over this guy [Joe Christmas]. He kills her” (audio commentary 3.2). Perhaps Lila survives because of her economic value to Cy. In season 1 Johnny Burns tries to prevent the immigrant upstart Wu from walking in the front door of the Gem. In Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Thomas Sutpen’s grand “design” to build a dynasty originates when he, believing the stories America likes to tell about itself, presumes to approach the front door of the Pettibone mansion and is turned away. Significantly, Al tells Johnny to let Wu in, and before he later sends Wu out the back door, having made a deal with him, he pats him gently and fondly on the back (1.10).

The writer Milch still calls his mentor, Robert Penn Warren, as deeply southern in outlook and wrote particularly about the southern frontier. Joseph Millichap has argued the influence of Warren’s work on *Deadwood*, focusing particularly on shared “Naturalistic visions” and a thematic focus on “the exploitation and betrayal of youthful innocence” (107, 108). Frequently quoting Warren’s poetry, Milch suggests that Swearingen’s character originated in one of his poems, “Audubon” (1978), “about his father, where the father says, ‘I longed to know the world’s name.’” As Milch explains, “Swearingen affects a kind of ruthless pragmatism, but in fact his whole being yearns toward knowing the world’s name. It embarrasses him” (*Deadwood* 19). The example he offers of what Al “wants to understand” is, significantly, Jewel. “He’s fascinated by Jewel, the cripple. But he can’t acknowledge that in his behavior. . . . The real reason is that there is a miracle embodied in Jewel, that she seems so wounded as to be disqualified, and yet she isn’t” (19). Jewel, who insists on her own humanity, is one of the few characters who gets away with talking back to Al. His acceptance of her smart mouth is certainly a miracle, but Milch’s use of the word suggests that Jewel renders visible to Al some act of grace he wants to understand. As Warren wrote, “The grotesque is one of the most obvious forms art

may take to pierce the veil of familiarity, to stab us up from the drowse of the accustomed, to make us aware of the perilous paradoxicality of life” (qtd. in Adams and Yates xi).

Although most critics, including Milch, consider Warren’s poetry his greatest achievement, his best-known work is a historical novel based on a “real life” figure, *All the King’s Men* (1946). Certainly Willie Stark, a charismatic leader who commits morally unjustifiable acts to build a better society, anachronistically fathers Al Swearingen. Stark is killed by the morally rigid Adam Stanton; fortunately for Al he was able to seduce his “Adam,” Silas Adams, and avoid being murdered. In our interview Milch acknowledged the important influence of *The American Adam*, by his longtime office mate and advisor, R. W. B. Lewis, as he has in speaking about *Deadwood*:<sup>15</sup>

Gold was a second chance, a fresh state that had nothing to do with the Indians. In this New World, Silas Adams is Adam. The reason that Dority has such misgivings about Adams is that he intuits that he is Swearingen’s natural successor. . . . Adams is the educable primitive self, a political opportunist who is also something more. . . . Adams is waiting for his father, and he finds him in Swearingen, who is a man not afraid to act, but who keeps on going back to discover the source of his actions. They both share a curiosity about how things work. (*Deadwood* 143)

If Silas is Adam, then Al takes on an ironically powerful role as the creator of the universe of *Deadwood*. (In the beginning was the word?) Lewis identifies various Adamic figures, but a key characteristic is innocence. Certainly innocence (Sofia, the Reverend Smith, William Bullock, the Chinese prostitutes, Johnny Burns, Jane, even Alma) and experience are central themes in *Deadwood*, as both a human and a social trait. Silas is hardly an innocent, but perhaps he is, in Lewis’s words, “advancing hopefully into a complex world he knows not of,” a characteristic of the Adam created by Melville, who was, according to Lewis, “engaged in a long quarrel with himself” (*American Adam* 127, 129) — as are Swearingen, Bullock, Trixie, Jane, Joanie, and many others, all of whom share Faulkner’s “problems of the human heart in conflict with itself.”



3. Al and Adams discuss the “Founding Document.” “Boy-the-Earth-Talks-To” (*Deadwood* 2.12).

In creating his characters Milch might agree with Emerson that “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds” (“Self Reliance,” in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1: 715). The large-minded—and large-hearted—“Al is a very good man with none of the behaviors of goodness” (Milch, *Deadwood* 17). But Milch’s vision of the conflicted human character is much darker than that of the “spiritual sun-worshipper.” While he believes that “seeming absolute contraries contain each other” (“Wedding Ceremony”), no *Deadwood* character could rest as comfortably in his contradictoriness as does Whitman: “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself / (I am large, I contain multitudes)” (“Song of Myself,” in Brooks, Lewis and Warren 1: 979). Much of *Deadwood*’s dark viewing pleasure results from watching characters we have come to know and care about struggle with their internal conflicts. Sharing Hawthorne’s—and Melville’s—“catlike faculty for seeing in the dark,” Milch does not envision these moments as merry and expansive. Yet, contradictory himself, he believes that “the human heart yearns to be lifted up” by stories “about our brothers and sisters” (Milch, *Deadwood* 11).

*The American Adam*, of course, is much concerned with “original

sin,” a concept Milch uses psychologically—in his borrowings from Hawthorne about “the violation of the sanctity of another’s heart” and in comments such as “the failure to respect the common humanity of our fellow travelers is to me the fundamental sin” (Milch and Carradine)—and symbolically: “Taking the gold from the Indians is our original sin. That’s what comes before. *Deadwood* is the story of what comes after” (Milch, *Deadwood* 12, 53). According to Milch, when Bullock kills the Indian, “he got kicked out of the fucking Garden” (*Deadwood* 201). Both usages render history aesthetically, producing a historical romance. He elaborates: “The men who came to Deadwood craved a new beginning a chance to break their ties to civilized institutions and forms of meaning,” but they soon recognized the need to develop a new society (*Deadwood* 15). Moving from the frontier story as emblematic of the American story, Milch extends outward: “The American story is a microcosm of the more universal story, the original sin” (Milch and Carradine). He grounds that “universal story” and his “big themes” in the muddy streets of Deadwood because he believes that “the way to get to the most general or universal portrayal is to be rigorously specific. If the details are right and the emotional life of the characters and the situation are both right, they begin to attract to themselves more general truths and more universal themes” (Milch and Carradine).

Viewed this way the shockingly original *Deadwood* fits quite comfortably into the early paradigms of the field of American studies, a field Lewis greatly influenced, then focused on the “myth and symbol” school; on “the American character”; on regional literature; on using literature, elite and popular, to understand cultural history; on reading texts in conversation with one another. Milch no doubt sat in on some of the many discussions Brooks, Warren, and Lewis must have had about the themes of innocence and experience in U.S. literature. One wonders if the telegraph’s portentous arrival in Deadwood owes something to Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964); if Milch’s choice to make Calamity Jane a major character allows him to revisit Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950); if any of his characters achieve the “regeneration through violence” described by Richard Slotkin (1975); if his insistence on

the development of community as a key western theme reveals a reading of Wallace Stegner, who expressed the following sentiment in multiple genres: “When [the West] fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves it, then it will have achieved itself and outlived its origins. Then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery” (*Sound* 38). (Milch cannot be accused of buying into “American exceptionalism,” one of the attacks against early American studies scholarship, since the themes he spins out in *Deadwood* he originally planned to explore in ancient Rome.)

When Milch left Yale “to write *Hill Street Blues*,” circa 1980–81, he and Lewis had planned another collaboration, “had signed a contract . . . to do the biography of the James family, which [Lewis] finally published years later and very graciously acknowledged having issued from [their] original ideas” (Milch, personal interview).<sup>16</sup> The research for this book left a deep impression, evidenced by Milch’s frequent references to both William and Henry James, whom he discusses at some length in Mark Singer’s profile. Perhaps he also made a suggestion to Molly Parker (Alma), who, seeking to understand the pressures on Victorian women, mentions that she’s “been reading the diary of Alice James” (audio commentary 2.1).<sup>17</sup> He calls on Henry to help him address the gap between representation and “real life”: “They once asked Henry James about a character, in ‘The Spoils of Poynton’ [1897]. He was so good but does such a character exist in real life? And James said, ‘So much the worse for real life’” (“Imaginative Reality”). Many have pointed to James’s “The Turn of the Screw” as the source of the names of the con couple, Flora and Miles, in “Suffer the Little Children,” which Millichap argues raises the theme of innocence and experience, certainly a persistent theme in James’s work. The presence of the innocent Sofia looking on silently at adult desire and duplicity recalls *What Maisie Knew* (1897). Confidence people abound in James’s novels—Mme Merle is a prime example—characters who pretend to be what they are not, to feel what they do not feel, who dissemble with indirect and ambiguous language. I suggest that while the American studies tradition influenced Milch’s represen-



4. Sofia observes. “Sold under Sin” (*Deadwood*, 1.12).

tation of character and cultural symbolism, James’s aesthetics, particularly his insights about point of view, inform *Deadwood*.

Consider, for instance, James’s use of dialogue and interior monologues. In James’s novels there is always a subtext, often concealed within dialogue, which is often characterized by indirection. Consider: Al to Trixie: “How’s the Jew going?” . . . Trixie (as if disgusted): “He stares in my eyes when he fucks me . . .” Al: “Jesus Christ” (2.6). I could spend two paragraphs dismantling the emotions, the cover-ups, the cultural references, the innuendoes, and the wordplay in these few words. Characters sometimes delude themselves in their inner thoughts, but they also come to understand themselves and their histories in internal monologues. Perhaps it appears ludicrous, grotesque, to compare “Isabel Archer’s vigil before the fire” in her villa in Rome when she comes to realize how her husband and dear friend have lied to and used her, described in *The Makers and the Making* as, a “characteristic moment . . . of self-confrontation,” to Swearengen’s soliloquy about his mother and the orphanage as Dolly sucks him off (Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 2: 1374; 1.11). But Milch and James put the moments to similar uses.

But even more significantly, for his themes—surveillance, decep-

tion, disconnection, interpretation, insight into human nature—and for his set, Milch takes as his blueprint one of James’s most famous comments about storytelling.

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need to the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbors are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. (*Art of Fiction* 46)

Of course this passage about narrative point of view owes a debt to chapters 17, “The Hotel,” and 18, “The Boarding House,” of Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), in which the cold, prying, unreliable narrator, Coverdale, observes through his hotel window the tribulations of his friends in the boardinghouse across the street as if they were “actors in a drama” (145).

Many characters stand at windows in *Deadwood*—first and second story—or posture on balconies, each with his or her unique point of view about “the show” they’re watching. This theme is overt in a comment from Seth to Martha about their new house: “I think you may laugh to see the mullion windows with their view of the camp from out the parlor. Being unfinished, they look like unfocused eyes” (2.1). Although Alma’s red dress has provoked Martha’s initiation, it will take a few episodes for her inexperienced eyes to see what’s going on in the camp. The series’ many observation scenes



5. The team surveys Main Street. “A Lie Agreed Upon, Part I” (*Deadwood* 2.1).

establish gender, class, and racial positions. For instance, Alma most often peers out from her hotel window while Trixie watches from the sidewalks. The men own the town from the balconies, as Hearst soon recognizes. Wu watches from his doorstep. Al brings the (dead) chief out on his balcony to watch Nuttall ride his new technology, his bike, apologizing to the chief that he will “have to suffer the low vantage” (2.8).

Although I agree with John Dudley, whose essay appears later in this volume, that these settings indicate a concern for surveillance, control, and power, they also announce the series’ obsession with point of view. In *Deadwood* we encounter a remarkable number of individualized characters with diverse viewpoints on events, as if Milch, playing Monopoly, is trading in James’s house for a town. Their points of view are established through language, but we also watch characters watching one another, the skilled actors offering us access to what they’re thinking. The visual play capturing multiple points of view on “the show” could be demonstrated by a close reading of many of the final scenes of episodes, which focus on the establishment of community—“Advances, None Miraculous,” where the town worries over the injured William Bullock (2.10), or “I Am Not the Fine Man You Take Me For,” where the election speeches

take place and where the mutilated, much observed Swearengen must lean on Bullock to help him save pride as he staggers from Hearst's room to the Gem (3.2). For a closer analysis I will briefly look at the two concluding episodes of season 1, where Jewel is one of the scrutinized: "Jewel's Boot Is Made for Walking" and "Sold under Sin" (1.11 and 1.12).

From Al's window Trixie spies Jewel walking through the streets; both wonder where she could be going, not just out of curiosity or control; their reason for concern is established when Trixie says to Jane, "Why [Jewel] is around is his sick fucking way of protecting her," not unlike his sick fucking way of protecting Trixie (2.3). We next see her from behind a wagon driver, who yells, "Get out of the way!" She is entertainment to a man imitating her walk to get laughs from a crowd. Jewel apparently ignores him, as she does a group of men who, without offering help, watch her fall into the mud and struggle to get up. Only a Chinese woman working on a sidewalk meets her eyes, but she is as powerless as Jewel appears to be. The street "show" ends in the sanctuary of Doc's office, but even he berates her before he hears her desire, her need from him. Finally he identifies with her, pointing out that "everybody's got limits. You draggin' your leg is yours" (1.11). Later he comments on his own limits as a doctor (2.2) and repeats the line—"as having limits like the rest of us"—to the woman in the camp perhaps most unlike Jewel, Alma Garret (3.3).

In the next episode, in the final scenes of season 1, the viewer looks at the house, or town, of fiction, reviewing many of the points of view that have observed tonight's show. (Ian McShane calls this medley a "curtain call" [audio commentary 1.12].) Crook's men depart the town, carrying Alma's unconscious father on a horse, a victory for Al and the camp, who will be "left to go their own way." Seth and Al, having just agreed to be allies, watch from Al's balcony. The camera cuts to a series of characters watching from street side: Sol alone; Trixie alone, joined by Adams; Dan joined by Johnny; Utter alone; Farnum joined by Merrick. Then the camera watches from behind a hoople-head, who "speaks" for many camp denizens by mooning the departing troops. Alma, still warm from a session



6. Alma teases Bullock. “Sold under Sin” (*Deadwood* 1.12).

of lovemaking with Bullock (who has promised to return), watches from her window across the narrow street. Gazes meet. As Seth and Al talk, we hear piano music from inside the Gem, the music so loved by Reverend Smith, whom Al has gently dispatched. We follow Al to the interior balcony, where he sees Doc Cochrane, happy to be relieved from the Reverend Smith’s suffering and emotionally protected by Al, dancing with Jewel in her new boot. At the bar Trixie and Dan exchange a look of mutual happiness at their dance. Feeling Al’s eyes on her, Trixie looks up and smiles, trying to share her pleasure. Burdened with the memory of his mercy killing of Smith, to spare Doc and the rest of the community, smarting from Trixie’s desertion, Al rebuffs her with a heavy sorrowful gaze, then when she turns away, back to Jewel and Doc, looks down at his folded hands in regret. The camera moves behind Al; with him we watch two people ignore their “limits” to cavort, each “nimble as a forest creature” (1.12). Through all these eyes, we experience “the yearning of the spirit toward community” (Milch and Carradine).<sup>18</sup>



Cleanth Brooks suggested that the truths of history depend on a cor-

respondence to an externally verifiable reality, whereas the truths of storytelling depend on an internal emotional coherence.

DAVID MILCH

In real life, Sol never married, but I don't think you let the facts get in the way of truth necessarily.

JOHN HAWKES (Sol Starr) discussing his hopes for Sol's relationship with Trixie

In their introduction to *True West: Authenticity and the American West* (2004), William Handley and Nathaniel Lewis note how often readers and critics of western American literature “make unexamined assumptions about what is authentic, what is real, what is true” (1). Quoting Don D. Walker, who “wrote that ‘western literary criticism has for a long time been dominated by the historian’s way of judgment,’” they suggest that too often “‘history’ overwhelms ‘literature’ with the effect that the inevitable fissures and fractures, inherent in any literary tradition, seem to disappear behind a simple question: is the work true?” (9). In *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship* (2003), Lewis pushes this point further: “When encountering a western work, readers tend not to engage ‘literary’ issues (such as narrative aesthetics, forms of signification, or intertextuality) but to question its realism” (2). While arguing that “the literary and the historical are inseparable whenever we read the West” (9), Handley discusses in *Marriage, Violence, and the Nation in the Literary West* (2002) Forrest Robinson’s assertion “that historians fail to take into account the postmodernist awareness of the discursive, constructed nature of all representation, including the historiographical” (226). In so doing they undervalue “literary complexity” (233).<sup>19</sup>

*Deadwood* is a representation of the frontier West. Despite my analysis of its literary conversations with its predecessors, it is a strikingly original one. Too much of the reaction to the series has focused on the question of historical accuracy rather than on its literary complexity. With its emotional coherence, its compelling characterizations, its compressed structural brilliance, its moral am-

biguity, its language experiments, its interpretation of the past and its relevance to the present, and its engagement with its literary forebears, *Deadwood* is an aesthetic triumph as historical fiction. Like much great literature *Deadwood* makes a case for the humanistic value of storytelling. As Milch says in answer to the question of how he turns his research into fiction,

You forget [the reading you've done] and to allow it become an imaginative reality. The truths of storytelling are not the truths of reportage. The truths of reportage finally depend upon their correspondence to an externally verifiable reality. The truths of storytelling may incorporate the so-called real event but they don't depend for their effect on the fact that a researcher can corroborate that an event occurred. They have to come alive in the imagination of the viewer. ("Imaginative Reality")

*Deadwood* is ultimately about the imagination, a verbal and visual construct, a literary masterpiece, richly rewarding close analysis and interpretation. We take on that project in this volume because it has come alive in our imaginations. Sally fucking forth into the literary landscape of *Deadwood*.



Although *Deadwood* is a collaborative project, with many writers and many voices involved in the production, we have chosen to focus on Milch as the primary creative force behind the series. For a detailed discussion of his role as “auteur,” see Horace Newcomb, who points out in “Deadwood” that as “‘creator and executive producer,’ . . . Milch reviews every script; all go through his edit, alteration, and approval, dictated or otherwise formed. And it also remains part of the executive producer’s role to oversee all other elements of the production process, from performance to final editing” (193). Although he notes out that crediting Milch for *Deadwood* or David Simon for *The Wire* is part of contemporary TV culture, he argues that *Deadwood*, more than other series, “is fully realized, created, from Milch’s vision” (96). A viewing of the special features at the end of season 2 suggests that the actors agree. “I don’t think



7. Bullock accepts his badge. “Sold under Sin” (*Deadwood* 1.12).

anything goes on on this set that David doesn't affect, alter, correct, delete, or add,” says Stephen Tobolowsky (Hugo Jarry). “No scene starts until David shows up,” says Jeffrey Jones (A. W. Merrick). “David will show up and do a little background on the scene, show what is at stake in the scene, what the connections are, and throw a few curve balls in, in fact make some changes on the spot. . . . There's always some other depth, some other dimension, that he illuminates” (“Trusting the Process”). Viewers recognize the truth of Jones's assertion when observing Milch in “Trusting the Process” or “Mr. Wu Proves Out,” as he suggests new lines to actors, ways of speaking and inhabiting space, how to conceive of their characters. In an audio commentary to “Sold under Sin,” Timothy Olyphant (Bullock) describes how Milch “made up” all the dialogue in a scene between him and Ian McShane “right there,” as they were rehearsing, but that he, Olyphant, added a line about the sheriff badge, “I *know* where it goes” (1.12). Milch persistently emphasizes the collaborative nature of the process. “When you go down to the set, you always want to be willing to respond to either the suggestions of an actor or the director,” he says in “Mr. Wu Proves Out,” where we watch his hands-on involvement in a key scene, watch him get excited about Keone Young's suggestion that Wu should cut off

his queue to symbolize his acceptance of being an American, a gesture incorporated into the end of the episode (2.12).

Generally the authors in this volume checked their own notes against the transcriptions prepared by Cristi H. Brockway. However, occasionally authors, hearing different words or intonations, made small unnoted modifications to these transcriptions. Whenever possible we have taken Milch's written lead; for instance, we use the spelling "hoople-head" as Milch did in *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*.

Rather than repeat the names of episodes and actors, again following Milch's lead, we have chosen to cite episodes by season and number—1.4, for instance, or 3.9—and omit the names of actors from individual essays. Instead we provide a list of episode names and numbers and a list of characters and actors immediately following this introduction.

While many introductions provide brief summaries of the essays in the volume, we have chosen instead to write headnotes to essays, drawing parallels between them. We have grouped the essays, all of which are richer than this categorization, into three loosely defined groups: the first employs poststructuralist criticism; the second explores genre; and the third examines *Deadwood* through the lenses of current critical approaches.

### Notes

1. Throughout this essay I refer to the two-volume *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, first published in 1973. Whenever possible I have cited from it because Milch worked on it, and we can be sure he has a copy on his bookshelf. The authors write in the "Letter to the Reader," "our mode of working was social; that is we read and we talked" (1: xi). Milch was a consistent participant in these conversations. The anthology was a perfect vehicle for studying for my exams because it is as much a literary history as a collection of pieces and excerpts. "Though we began by thinking of an anthology with relatively brief introductions and headnotes," the authors write, "we found, as the work proceeded, that this plan would not accommodate a discussion of the urgent issues that kept arising. Eventually we found that we were being driven to write a history"

(1: xiii). As a result the introductions to sections and to major authors are often twenty (large) pages long, ambitiously drawing parallels and connections between authors and literary styles. The anthology was also one of the first to dismantle distinctions between high, popular, and folk culture, including not only works by such figures as Thorpe and Harris but also sections on spirituals, folk songs, “Indian Oratory” and poetry, speeches, and diaries. While the authors have sometimes been critiqued as exemplars of the New Criticism, by the time they wrote *The Makers and the Making*, they had combined close reading with cultural criticism. Lewis in particular was influential in the emerging field of American studies.

Although Lewis’s later *Yale Review* essay points out a few sections written primarily by one author, the anthology does not identify individual authors of introductions. I therefore refer to “the authors” when citing the text.

2. Mark Singer initially reported on Milch’s work on the anthology. Joseph Millichap has suggested generally “how much [Milch] is influenced by the great traditions of American literature” (104). My analysis is more extensive.
3. Others have, of course, noted *Deadwood*’s literariness. Many have commented on the “Shakespearian” qualities of *Deadwood*’s dialogue, notably Brad Benz in an essay on language in the series. Sean O’Sullivan has adapted ideas about “serial fiction,” most particularly Dickens’s, to discuss *Deadwood*’s second season as an “allegory of seriality” (118). Millichap examines Milch’s debt to Warren. Horace Newcomb compares Swearingen to Milton’s “heroic Satan” (97). Many have also commented that the names of the unfortunate con artists in “Suffer the Little Children,” Miles and Flora, reference James’s *The Turn of the Screw*.

In this essay I focus on Milch’s debts to American literature, but I in no way mean to suggest that these are his only influences. His “favorite character” in literature is Falstaff, “whose capacity for language, the exuberance of whose expression was such that every experience, in the method of its expression, ultimately had a joyful effect,” as does, paradoxically, the violent and often obscene language in *Deadwood* (qtd. in Singer 205). In *Deadwood: Stories from the Black Hills*, he says, “The writers who are alive to me, whom I consider my contemporaries, are writers who lived in another time—Dickens and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Twain” (12). He points out that the language used by *Deadwood* characters stems in part from their reading: the Bible, Shakespeare, and the Romantic novelists (25). He observes, “That encounter between the Doc and Jewel is a bit based on a scene in *Madame Bovary* with the hunchback Hippolyte. Her mope husband does an operation on the guy in order to impress Emma and fucks the hunchback up worse than ever” (*Deadwood*

181). Cochrane has a complicated literary heritage: “The doctor is a figure out of Conrad. Whereas Dr. Monygham in *Nostramo* broke under torture, this doctor broke in the Civil War. He’s kind of an exile, like most of the characters in *Deadwood*” (Thorburn). Nevertheless, he discusses and obliquely references primarily U.S. authors.

4. See the end of the chapter “Quality and Equality,” where the Virginian uses a “how you play your cards” metaphor to define the concepts to Molly Wood; the end of “The Game and the Nation—Act First,” where he discusses Henry IV’s poker skills; and the end of “The Game and the Nation—Last Act,” where he acknowledges that good as the Virginian is, Queen Elizabeth would have beat him at poker. (Milch attributes this metaphor to William James in Singer 205.) As I have argued in “What if Wister Were a Woman,” the poker and bluffing conceit operates throughout the novel, which depends significantly on the tall-tale genre and which explores wordplay, meaning, and language. Of numerous examples I could quote, the following line from the Virginian to Molly is echoed by Ellsworth to Alma (quoted later in this essay): “I ask your pardon if I say what I have a right to say in language not as good as I’d like to talk to yu’ with” (82). Perhaps coincidentally, Falstaff is one the Virginian’s favorite literary characters; he talks about him with the narrator (“The Game and the Nation—Act First”) and with Molly (“Grandmother Stark”). Set during the “dawn of a neighborhood,” *The Virginian*’s characters also take matters into their own hands to bring law and social order to land that originally belonged to Indians, who are shoved offstage much as they are in *Deadwood* (60).
5. I have incorporated some of my original talk into this introduction as a way of demonstrating Milch’s extemporaneous engagement with U.S. literary traditions. I had typed up some key quotes to bring with me, but I actually did write up what I had to say after hearing Milch speak, so many of the non-*Deadwood* quotations were from memory. For instance, I actually said, “While the *Novel* must exhibit the utmost fidelity to fact, the *romance* sins unpardonably when it swerves from the deeper truths of the human heart.” I have replaced my imprecise quotations with exact ones and cited them when possible. I have occasionally added comments to flesh out the argument, enclosed in brackets.
6. In *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, Milch suggests that his understanding of Ahab informs his thinking about Swarengen, who “can’t figure a way out. He thinks, ‘I don’t understand what it is that is moving Hearst, but sometimes you never understand and you have to act anyway.’ He should be able to figure things out and then act. . . . Ahab spends so much time trying to understand the whale and finally he says, ‘I know not what the whale may mean but I must call it evil’” (164).

Seeking to explain Dority's sadness after fighting Hearst's henchman, Captain Turner, Milch turns immediately to a Melville poem, "The College Colonel," about a "kid who comes back home from the Civil War to his little village in Massachusetts," to explain how "the entire truth of what life is like absent civilization has come home to" Dority (*Deadwood* 169).

7. I wish I had thought to mention to Milch that I purposefully took the PhD oral exams, for which I used *The Makers and the Making*, on April 1, the day, significantly, that *The Confidence Man* takes place.
8. When I later visited Melody Ranch and watched Milch and some of his crew working on a scene from *John from Cincinnati* I realized that we were extemporaneously cowriting my talk in much the manner that he writes his scripts, elaborating on and extending each other's comments. See Singer for a fuller description of this collaborative process, which can be observed on some of the special features on *Deadwood* DVDs, notably "Making Episode 12."
9. For Milch's discussions of issues surrounding the historical authenticity of *Deadwood's* language, view Milch and Carradine, "The New Language of the Old West." See also Benz.
10. Opening with only a brief reference to the historical record, Douglas L. Howard devotes an entire essay, so titled, to "Why Wild Bill Hickok Had to Die."
11. In fact, *Deadwood* persistently plays with pairings on many levels, some partnerships, some alliances (a favorite word of Al's), some oppositions, many shifting and various: Swearingen and Dority, Swearingen and Trixie, Swearingen and Tolliver, Swearingen and Bullock, Swearingen and Hearst, Swearingen and Wu, Dority and Burns, Bullock and Star, Star and Trixie, Alma and Trixie, Jewel and Trixie, the Doc and Jewel. And then there are the doubled pairings: Swearingen/Trixie and Tolliver/Joanie; Bullock/Star and Wild Bill/Charlie; Alma/Bullock and Alma/Ellsworth. Some are more unlikely: Martha/Jane (Martha Jane Canary).
12. In popular culture the western hero has usually been seen as distrustful language, as silent and violent. See Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything*, for a version of that argument. Others, notably Lee Clark Mitchell, "When You Call Me That, Smile," and myself, "What if Wister Were a Woman?," have argued that the seminal popular western is in fact all about talk, and we can see Milch extending this tradition. Later in this volume, Jennilyn Merten discusses the relationship between language and emotion in the series.

Milch has commented on the film evolution of the silent western hero, which he argues is a result of the Hays Code, which forbade the kind of language used on *Deadwood*.

It's my experience that a good storyteller can find a way to internalize and neutralize the pernicious effect of those kinds of extraneous, controlling statutes or strictures by finding equivalence within the story that obey the terms that are . . . laid down within the code without doing violence to the emotional integrity of the character or of the story. So, if characters can't say anything obscene, you try and conceive a character for whom obscenity is a kind of fallen or pathetic expression of weakness. I believe that was the source of development of the laconic cowboy. . . . A man of few words but deep and complicated morality. (Milch and Carradine)

13. In February 2007, at David Milch's invitation, I spent a day at Melody Ranch, touring the *Deadwood* set (which was still up, though the interiors were being used to film *John from Cincinnati*), observing the writing and filming of a *John* episode, and conducting a short interview with Milch. These are excerpts of that interview, in which he also discussed work by William James, Theodore Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson.

Milch sometimes jokes about his debts to authors: "I try to be very careful about who I steal from. I only steal from the best. Nathaniel West wrote, I thought beautifully, about that syndrome [those who feed off celebrity, in relation to Wild Bill]" (Milch and Carradine).

14. In Singer's profile Milch comments, "Mark Twain used to say that when he would formulate a character he would suddenly realize he was meeting them for the second time; he met them the first time on the river" (196). As he often does, he uses this anecdote to provide language to describe his engagement with the Bullock character: "I knew that there had to be a Bullock, and when I read about him it was like '—he snapped his fingers—'I met him on the river'" (196).
15. Here is the transcription from the interview:

MG: What about R. W. B. Lewis? I see "the American Adam" lingering behind *Deadwood*.

DM: Sure. Oh absolutely. Absolutely.

MG: With Silas Adams and original sin.

DM: Yeah. Yes, absolutely. And you know, Dick and I shared an office for ever so long, even after the work on *The American Literature: The Makers in the Making*.

I don't have the space here, but an extended reading of *Deadwood's* characters and themes in relationship to Lewis's representation of the various avatars of the American Adam would yield some interesting insights.

16. Lewis writes in the first paragraph of his acknowledgments:

To David Milch I owe a very large and special debt of gratitude. This work began in fact as a collaborative venture with my former student, colleague, and office-sharer, the venture itself being an offshoot of a proposed television series

on the James family. The series was first conceived by David Milch, and we worked it up together into twelve episodes. It fell by the wayside, however, and the collaborative biographical enterprise was eventually given up as impractical. But the book I went on to write contains—however transformed in definition and style of expression—many ideas, findings, and emphases originating in discussions and trial runs with David Milch. It is an enormous pleasure for me to record this debt, even as it is next to impossible for me to measure it. (671)

In *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (1975), Lewis wrote, “David Milch has been another *sine qua non* of this book. . . . As grateful as I am for [his practical assistance], I owe Mr. Milch even more for the wealth of suggestions he made out of his extensive literary, psychological, medical, and legal knowledge” (573). Like Alma, Wharton was pressured into marriage with a man she did not love and later found sexual fulfillment outside the boundaries of convention.

17. Milch planned to turn to another woman author to help him write Alma’s future: “Alma had lied about her reason for coming out to *Deadwood*, which was to become a writer, and I hope to mine a lot of Willa Cather’s experiences for her character” (“Trusting the Process”).
18. After I wrote this line, which I worried was a stretch, I was pleased to hear Ian McShane comment about this scene, “This is the epiphany. I love this. . . . He [Milch] gives every character a view of the Army leaving. So you’re left with a sense of community. This is *Deadwood*. This is what the show’s about” (audio commentary 1.12).

The language Milch uses to describe community could come directly from John Steinbeck, who frequently used concepts he borrowed from ecology; in *Cannery Row* (1945), for instance, the community is described as a biological organism, with its own internal interdependent relationships. “Our best nature is when we find ourselves part of some larger organism,” says Milch. “The emotional ecology of the Gem and to some extent the whole camp is disrupted by Swearengen’s disempowerment” (audio commentary 2.3).

19. Handley refers to Robinson’s pioneering work in “Clio Bereft of Calliope: Literature and the New Western History” (1997), in which he explores “the failure of historians to consult literature—either as a source of information, a model for historical interpretation, or a laboratory on language and meaning” and argues for the blurring of “the boundaries separating history and literature” (88–89). In the same special issue of *Arizona Quarterly*, Krista Comer makes a case “for the very active role that literature makes in the making of history,” for the importance of exploring “the ways that cultural works themselves shape, influence, and prevail upon history” (“Literature, Gender Studies” 121, 127). Both argue

that when the New Western historians dismiss western literature as “mythic,” they overlook a long revisionist tradition in western literature *and* historical writing, a tradition highly critical of western expansion, a tradition *Deadwood* extends. More recently Lee Clark Mitchell has argued that “the relationship between history and literature will vex western studies so long as truth is associated with narrow notions of historical pattern rather than literary insight. And to the extent that literary critics buy into this logic, western literature becomes a pale imitation not only of the actual West but of its recorded history. Style and narrative inventiveness are the first to fall by the wayside, but even subject matter limps along, victim of narrow conceptions of what constitutes the ‘authentic’” (“What’s Authentic?” 104).