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**The *Smart Set* Magazine and the Popularization
of American Modernism, 1908-1920.**

by

Sharon Hamilton

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

at

**Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
June 1999**

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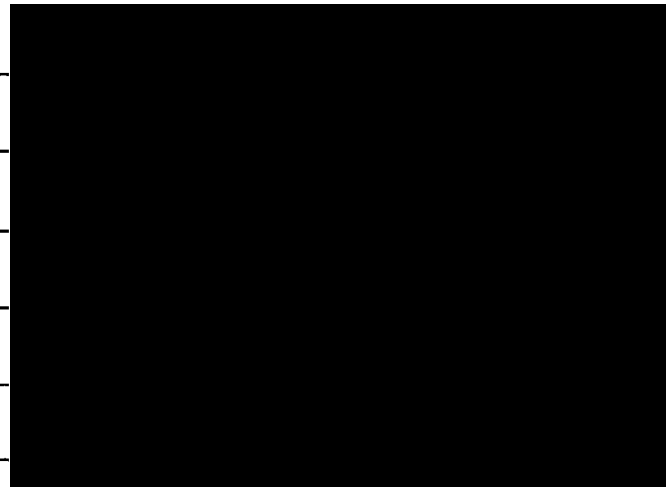
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by Sharon Elizabeth Hamilton

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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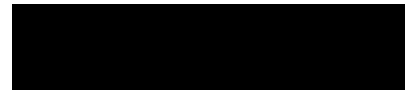
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Dedication

For Dennis

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Abstract

The thesis contends that the development of American literary modernism took place in more popular venues than formerly believed. This premise is supported through an analysis of the reception history of the *Smart Set* magazine, an early 20th century mass-market magazine published in New York and edited by the famous literary critic H. L. Mencken and the then well-known drama critic George Jean Nathan. The *Smart Set* was not one of the little magazines, the small circulation avant-garde monthlies such as the *Dial* and the *Little Review* that are currently associated with the development of modernism in America. Rather, the *Smart Set* was a monthly magazine with a sizable audience of 30,000–40,000 readers. In this commercial magazine, Mencken and Nathan published and promoted the early drama, poetry, and prose of such American and European writers as Eugene O’Neill, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Djuna Barnes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce.

While considerable academic attention has been paid to the little magazines of the era, the mass-market magazines have, until recently, received little academic attention. This neglect of the mass-market magazines has resulted in a distorted impression of cultural and literary trends in the United States at the turn-of-the-century since at that time monthly mass-market magazines reached more readers than newspapers and weekly periodicals combined, and vastly outsold individual books. During this period, the *Smart Set* played a pivotal role in introducing American readers to the writers, trends, and ideas of American modernism.

List of Abbreviations

EPFL	Enoch Pratt Free Library
NYPL	New York Public Library

Acknowledgements

All material pertaining to, or written by, H. L. Mencken is published here by permission of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in accordance with the terms of the will of H. L. Mencken.

An excerpt from an earlier version of the chapter “The *Smart Set* and Nativism: The Example of Joyce’s *Dubliners*, 1915” appeared in the *Literary Review of Canada* as “Dubliners in New York” (*LRC* Mar. 1999: 11-12).

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A Mass-Market Magazine for the Modernists

“One Civilized Reader is Worth a Thousand Boneheads”

–*Smart Set*, front cover (Oct. 1914).

The golden years of magazine production in the United States took place between the 1880s and the 1950s—these years were golden in terms of pure profit since until the development of television, magazines were one of the most popular forms of mass entertainment. In *Selling Culture*, Richard Ohmann demonstrates that by 1905 mass-market magazines “had become the major form of repeated cultural experience for the people of the United States” (29). Monthly magazines reached more readers than newspapers and weekly periodicals combined, and vastly outsold individual books. They were sold in such numbers that they averaged “three copies for every four people, or about four to every household” (Ohmann 29). During a period in which mass-market magazines thus played an extremely significant role in the exposure of American fiction to American readers, the *Smart Set* magazine was instrumental in introducing American readers to the writers, trends, and ideas of American modernism.

The *Smart Set* was not one of the “little magazines,” the small circulation avant-garde monthlies such as the *Dial* and the *Little Review* which have come to be associated with the development of modernism in America (see Major 83, 184; Bishop 287; Rainey 21). While the small circulation, not-for-profit magazines undoubtedly played a crucial role in the development and dissemination of modernist writing, the history of the *Smart Set* suggests that the development of American literary modernism took place in more popular venues than formerly believed. The *Smart Set* fits Richard Ohmann’s definition of

a mass-market magazine: it appeared regularly, shaped an habitual audience around “common needs or interests,” reached a sizable audience, and was published for profit (14-16). Its circulation was much smaller than that of the most popular mass-market magazines of the period—the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies’ Home Journal*—which reached millions of readers. But the *Smart Set*’s mid-sized audience of 30,000–40,000 readers distinguished it from the little magazines, which tended to reach only a few hundred.

The *Smart Set* was a national monthly magazine published in New York that specialized in short fiction. It was founded in 1900 by Colonel William D’Alton Mann as a companion for his New York gossip magazine, *Town Topics*. In 1911, the magazine was bought by John Adams Thayer, who determined to shift the magazine’s focus away from the publication of unsavoury romances to better quality literature. By 1913 the *Smart Set* was consistently publishing modernist authors, under the editorship of Willard Huntington Wright. Wright was the first *Smart Set* editor to seek modernist submissions, and during his one-year editorship, the magazine contained the work of Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, William Butler Yeats, and Ford Madox Ford.

In 1908, the now famous literary critic H. L. Mencken was hired as the *Smart Set*’s book review editor. In the following year, the then well-known drama critic George Jean Nathan was hired to write the *Smart Set*’s theatre reviews. Between 1914 and 1923, Mencken and Nathan jointly owned and edited the magazine. These editors consolidated the magazine’s unique and somewhat paradoxical position in the literary marketplace as a popular magazine which published and promoted avant-garde literature. Under their

editorship the magazine contained the early work of Eugene O'Neill, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Djuna Barnes, Amy Lowell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, and James Joyce. They not only published these writers but also promoted them in their monthly review columns. In their positions as the magazine's long-time literary and drama reviewers, Mencken and Nathan educated their readers about trends in literary modernism, while in their capacity as the magazine's editors, they provided examples of modern writing in their magazine. In essence, through the combination of Mencken and Nathan's review columns and the magazine's content, the *Smart Set* acted as a monthly primer to the changes taking place in early 20th century literature.

In contemporary literary criticism there are few terms as contested and challenged as "modernism." Critics agree that modernism was something "new," a movement in which conventional literary boundaries were transgressed, but beyond that understanding there is little critical consensus. For the purpose of this argument, however, I will not be relying on current definitions of this term. Instead, my focus is upon how the term "modern" was perceived within its historical context. Before 1920, when it might be argued that Ezra Pound narrowed this term to accommodate his own literary movement, the word "modern" embraced a wider gamut of literary styles than we now generally include under this rubric. Early critics applied this term to the work of writers as diverse as Joseph Conrad and Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald and James Joyce, Willa Cather and D. H. Lawrence. Period reviews indicate that critics employed this label when they were confronted with a work they had difficulty describing in conventional terms. My use of the term "modern" accords with its broad early 20th century definition.

Although the *Smart Set* played a vital role in popularizing American modernism, the literary and historical influence of the magazine has not been extensively documented. This situation may be partly attributed to Mencken's personal fame, which tends to overshadow his joint endeavours, and to the greater renown of the magazine which Mencken and Nathan founded after the *Smart Set*, *The American Mercury*. The cultural influence of both Mencken and the *American Mercury* during the 1920s has been well-documented, and as Mencken biographer Vincent Fitzpatrick has stated, the notoriety of both the man and his magazine during this period "would be very difficult to exaggerate" (193). It is entirely understandable, therefore, that academic attention to both Mencken and to the *American Mercury* has somewhat obscured the importance of the *Smart Set*.

While the *Mercury* was unquestionably influential, it is important to note that in reminiscences and overviews of the period, Mencken and Nathan's contemporaries often praised the *Smart Set* as much as, and sometimes more than, the magazine which followed. In *The Shock of Recognition* (1947) Edmund Wilson, the great literary critic of the 1920s and 30s, expressed his belief that Mencken's best work as a literary and social critic had appeared in the *Smart Set*, and not the *American Mercury*, wherein he felt Mencken was "less open-minded" in his criticism (1159). Wilson conceded that the *Mercury* was "more elegant and more pretentious" (1159), but he declared his preference for the "raffish" character of the earlier magazine (1156). Wilson was not alone among period critics to describe the *Smart Set* as an influential magazine. In *After the Genteel Tradition* (1936), Louis Kronenberger similarly declared that "the editorials and book reviews in the *Smart Set* and the earlier issues of the *American Mercury* provided formidable instruments—

probably the most formidable of their day—in creating literary trends and reputations” (89). Alfred Kazin, in his well-regarded history of the American literary renaissance *On Native Grounds* (1942), devoted a chapter to the *Smart Set* and argued that “the thin ranks of American realists had looked to *The Smart Set* for work of their fellows” (78). Such retrospectives indicate that the greater scholarly attention paid to the *American Mercury* does not necessarily reflect the historical significance of the *Smart Set*.

If the reputation of the *American Mercury* provides one possible reason for the critical neglect which the *Smart Set* has suffered, another consists of academic regard for the little magazines of the era, rather than the commercial magazines.¹ Until recently, mass-market magazines have received little scholarly attention. This situation is quickly changing, however; the past few years have witnessed a renaissance in this field. There is an annual journal, *American Periodicals*, devoted to the subject, and popular magazines have been the focus of several recent scholarly books, including Helen Damon-Moore’s *Magazines for the Millions* (1994), Ellen Gruber Garvey’s *The Adman in the Parlour* (1996), Richard Ohmann’s *Selling Culture* (1996), and David Reed’s *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States, 1880-1960* (1997). Yet, while this activity has certainly improved the state of scholarship on popular magazines, this is still a relatively empty field.

The *Smart Set* itself has been the subject of only a few academic studies. Carl Dolmetsch wrote the only detailed historical surveys which exist: his unpublished doctoral

¹ The assumption that literary modernism developed in conjunction with the little magazines has appeared again, most recently, in Jayne Marek’s *Women Editing Modernism: “Little” Magazines and Literary History* (1996).

thesis “A History of *The Smart Set* Magazine: 1914-1923” (1957) and his *The Smart Set: A History and Anthology* (1966). In addition to these works, studies which pay substantial scholarly attention to the *Smart Set* are William H. Nolte’s *H. L. Mencken: Literary Critic* (1964), his critical anthology *H. L. Mencken’s Smart Set Criticism* (1968), and the work of Mencken’s numerous biographers, most recently Fred Hobson in *Mencken: A Life* (1994). Among less scholarly texts, there are two, both recent, which examine the more colourful aspects of the magazine’s history: George Douglas’s *The Smart Magazines* (1991) and Thomas Quinn Curtiss’s *The Smart Set: George Jean Nathan and H. L. Mencken* (1998).

Among these, Dolmetsch’s work is undoubtedly the most substantial evaluation of the magazine. But, as he indicates in his introduction to his thesis, it was designed as a resource meant to underpin further research and not as a critical analysis of the magazine. He proposes some tentative conclusions, but in general he provides exactly what he promises, an “enumerative rather than critical” history of the magazine (5). As a result, in his thesis and in his subsequent anthology, Dolmetsch does not concentrate on the cultural and historical context of the magazine. His primary interest was with the content of the magazine under Mencken and Nathan’s editorship; accordingly, he lists all of the writers published by Mencken and Nathan during their editorship, and he outlines patterns in the type of material which they published and the policies that they adopted. He chose not to provide a detailed analysis of the relationship which the *Smart Set* formed with its most famous contributors, most of whom appeared in the magazine only once or twice, choosing instead to examine the individual histories of those writers who were the

magazine's regular contributors. In addition, he chose not to discuss the interplay between Mencken and Nathan's editorials and the fiction that they published. He strictly limited his survey to their role as editors (6). In brief, the issues left mainly undiscussed by Dolmetsch include the *Smart Set's* readership, the reception history of the magazine, the effect that Mencken and Nathan's personal fame had on their readers and contributors, the relation of this magazine to literary modernism, and the critical and theoretical interaction between Mencken and Nathan's editorials and the fiction which they published.

Dolmetsch explains in his thesis that he avoided an analysis of the *Smart Set's* reception history owing to the lack of material on other mass-market magazines of the period through which to compare "the exact nature and extent of this magazine's influence" (5). Unfortunately, the global analysis of American mass-market magazines which Dolmetsch suggested was necessary to a reception history of this magazine is not much more advanced today than it was when he wrote his thesis forty years ago. As David Reed indicates in his recent book *The Popular Magazines in Britain and the United States, 1880-1960*, there are few reliable comprehensive studies of either British or American magazines. As a result, Reed argues, scholars of popular magazines are "like Renaissance navigators," confronting "a world in which some fragments are visible but much is obscure" (9). Since few reliable historical surveys of American mass-market magazines currently exist, my analysis of the *Smart Set's* role in the popularization of American literary modernism is based, primarily, on the impression that this magazine made on its readers and contributors and especially on how they saw this magazine in relation to other magazines of the period.

Several methods allow for the recreation of this reception history. First is an analysis of the letters and memoirs of the *Smart Set's* most famous readers and contributors. These letters provide a better source for analysis than those of the lesser-known readers and contributors, primarily because more of their letters have been saved. Mencken discarded all his letters from unknown readers but kept a comprehensive collection of letters from those who are well-known (these are kept in the Mencken collection at the New York Public Library). Dolmetsch employed the testimonies of the *Smart Set's* regular contributors in his thesis. But I would suggest that while these people undoubtedly knew the *Smart Set* well, owing to their long and frequent association with it, the well-known writers had a more accurate perception of the magazine. The famous writers who were published in the *Smart Set* were less likely to be unduly biased since they had a better knowledge of the literary marketplace as a whole and therefore a more substantial basis for their opinion of the magazine.

In addition to analysis of the letters and memoirs of the *Smart Set's* most famous readers and contributors, another method of reconstructing its reception history exists in the period newspaper and magazine articles that Mencken collected through his clipping service and that are now in the Mencken collection at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. Owing to Mencken's personal popularity, the clippings collected for him by his service form a substantial archive. The clippings collected during his lifetime fill over 100 volumes, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library continues to fill volumes of clippings now, over forty years after his death. Over forty of the volumes in this collection are from the 1920s alone (Nardini 2). The period of Mencken's ascending fame and the years of his *Smart Set*

editorship fill fewer volumes, but these still contain a substantial record of several hundred articles. The archival record concerning the *Smart Set*'s reception history is thus substantial both in terms of the amount of available evidence and its immediacy, since these articles indicate how the *Smart Set* was perceived by its contemporaries while the magazine was still on the newsstand. Taken together, the personal reminiscences and letters of the *Smart Set*'s most famous readers and contributors, along with period reviews, conjoin to suggest trends in how the *Smart Set* was popularly received and how it was viewed in relation to other American literary monthlies.

Finally, although we still lack reliable comparative evidence concerning other magazines from the era, an analysis of the particular stories published in the *Smart Set* provides considerable insight into its distinctive role in promoting American modernism. Due to the *Smart Set*'s relatively small circulation compared to that of other mass-market magazines of the period, it could never afford to pay contributors a price beyond \$40 for a short story or \$200 for a novelette. This was at a time when the larger American mass-market magazines could afford to pay hundreds, or even thousands of dollars for a single short story. Accordingly, when stories by professional writers with large followings appeared in the *Smart Set*, this occurrence indicated that these authors could not place their stories elsewhere. This fact would be a minor consideration if the fiction was inferior, but this was not the case with many of the stories by popular authors that appeared in the *Smart Set*, such as Sinclair Lewis's "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," Willa Cather's "Coming Aphrodite!," F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," Dorothy Parker's "Such a Pretty Little Picture" and "Too Bad," and Somerset

Maugham's "Miss Thompson." That these stories appeared in the *Smart Set* is an anomaly which cannot be explained in terms of the popularity of their authors or the quality of the stories themselves, since these stories not only are highly regarded now but were also highly regarded at the time of their first publication. It follows, then, that these stories were rejected by the other mass-market magazines of the day not because of their quality but because of their subject matter and for their stylistic innovation, a fact which suggests the role which the *Smart Set* played in the American literary marketplace.

The publishing history of this magazine suggests that its permissiveness in subject and style contributed to its publication of some of the best work by well-known American authors. In addition to this permissiveness, Alfred Kazin suggests that one of the main reasons for the quality of much of the *Smart Set*'s fiction related to the perceptiveness of its editors: "Because of their low word rate, the imposing list of discoveries made by Mencken and Nathan may be traced to nothing but the taste and sagacity of the editors. They got the unknowns, the disreputable, the unorthodox and unwanted manuscripts after everyone else in New York had had a crack at them" (80). Through this critical perceptiveness, Mencken and Nathan transformed the *Smart Set*'s status as a magazine of last resort from a weakness into a strength. Their ability to recognize talent in the submissions made to them from young unknown writers enabled them to help establish the literary careers of some of America's most influential writers. A comparison of the *Smart Set*'s authors with those in any critical anthology (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, for example) reveals that almost every single prose writer associated with the

American literary renaissance of the 1920s appeared in this magazine, and for many it was their first publication.²

Mencken and Nathan declared in their final circular to their readers that their magazine had welcomed beginning authors and had provided a liberal venue in which all authors, new or established, were free to exercise their artistic freedoms, and also that they had defended those freedoms in their editorials. Again, the reception history and the contents of the magazine jointly indicate that this was not an empty claim. For fifteen years Mencken and Nathan's editorials battled censorship and argued on behalf of modernist experimentation, realism, and the development of an identifiably native American literature.

It is useful to keep in mind that the two American magazines hitherto most closely associated with the development of American literary modernism, the *Little Review* and Thayer and Watson's *Dial*, possess their status as literary innovators primarily owing to the relationships which they formed with their foreign editor, Ezra Pound. However, Pound did not act as foreign editor for these magazines until 1916 and 1920 respectively. In contrast, Pound became an unofficial foreign editor to the *Smart Set* in 1913 and continued to recommend European authors to them until 1916. Moreover, Mencken's first notice of Pound had appeared in his *Smart Set* book review column as early as April 1911, wherein Mencken declared "here we have a poet with something to say and with the skill to say it in a new way, eloquently, sonorously and sometimes almost magnificently"

² One major exception was William Faulkner, however, while his work never appeared in the *Smart Set*, it would appear numerous times in Mencken and Nathan's *The American Mercury*. And while Hemingway was never published by Mencken and Nathan, he made his deep displeasure at the fact well-known.

(“Meredith” 166-7). This mass-market magazine was thus, along with *Poetry*, one of the first American magazines to notice Pound and his fellow modernists, and it was one of the earliest mass-market magazines to do so. Few people are aware that Pound’s first American outlet for the continental prose writers he discovered was in the pages of this magazine, not the *Little Review* or the *Dial*.

Since many of the *Smart Set*’s authors not only were writing fiction outside the critical mainstream but were also unknown, Mencken and Nathan’s final promise in their circular—to drum up an audience for their authors—was not an insignificant undertaking. Through a series of characteristics that were both unique to this magazine and new to the literary marketplace, the *Smart Set* managed to publish and promote modern literature, much of it by unknown authors, without alienating a mass readership. The *Smart Set*’s historical association with scandal along with the critical renown enjoyed by Mencken and Nathan combined to create a magazine associated with wit, irreverence, cleverness, continentalism, and literary sophistication. As the first American magazine to combine these characteristics the *Smart Set* became the instigator for a series of American humour magazines with serious literary pretensions. It would later be imitated by *Vanity Fair* (1914), *The New Yorker* (1925), and *Esquire* (1933). The relation of this magazine to the early promotion of literary modernism in America resulted from its tone, its welcoming attitude to all good literature regardless of subject matter, and its encouragement of unknown authors; moreover, this magazine encouraged a general awareness of trends in literary modernism through both its fiction and its editorials.

In its content, the *Smart Set* promoted and popularized³ literary modernism, but for whom? Who were its readers? Nathan recorded in a column for the *Bookman* magazine in 1916 that he and Mencken published their magazine with a particular type of reader in mind: “The magazine addresses itself, not merely to what are called (by the newspapers) society people, but to all persons who are well-fed, educated, worldly-wise, and of good taste” (“Smart Set” 283). It is one thing, of course, to declare that you have sophisticated readers, and another to prove that you do. It is impossible to reconstruct the *Smart Set*’s readership through its subscription list since it has been lost. Even if the list somehow reappeared it would be of only limited use in reconstructing the magazine’s readership because, according to Mencken, the magazine’s profits relied upon newsstand sales (*My Life* 56). Mencken estimated that he and Nathan never had more than 1000 annual subscribers (“My Life” 210). Although there is no subscription list, available evidence from letters, memoirs, and period reviews combines to suggest that Mencken and Nathan found the kind of audience which they sought.

External evidence suggests that their readership included such authors as Theodore Dreiser, Ezra Pound, Sinclair Lewis, Hugh Walpole, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway; such university professors as Stuart Sherman and Percy Boynton; and a number of prominent journalists and critics, including Edmund Wilson, Burton Rascoe, Alfred Kazin, Franklin Pearce Adams, and Harold Ross. The largest percentage of the magazine’s readers, however, were probably university and college students. The clearest

³ The popularizing influence of the *Smart Set* was recognized by period critics. See, in particular, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s comments in “How I Would Sell My Book If I Were a Bookseller” (*Bookseller and Stationer* 15 Jan. 1923).

indication of this readership appears in the University of California student paper *laughing horse*. Their first issue in 1922 not only contained such unmistakable Mencken and Nathanisms as “hurlers of brickbats” and “shooters of barbs” (“Apologia” 2), but it also contained a ‘Credo of the Californiac’ which they subtitled “submitted as a collegiate addenda [*sic*] to Mencken and Nathan’s ‘The American Credo.’”(5).⁴ In addition to students, professors, and reporters, a few period articles indicate that the magazine was reaching such professionals as engineers (“What Shall He Read?”) and doctors (“Mencken’s Reviews”). The available evidence, however limited, thus indicates that Mencken and Nathan were reaching well-read, highly educated readers.

In addition, irrefutable evidence indicates that the magazine’s geographic breadth was considerable. Articles on the *Smart Set* appear in papers from all over the United States, not just New York, and Mencken’s clippings provide unquestionable evidence that this magazine was being read by Canadians, Europeans, and even Australians. In 1918 alone, reviews of this journal appeared in such disparate sources as *The Toronto Mail and Empire* (“Letters about Books”), *The Triad, Melbourne* (“Pure Scholarship”) and *The Continental Times* (Orchelle). Each of these sources contained detailed accounts of the magazine’s contents. For example, an article which appeared in the “Letters about Books” column in the *Toronto Mail and Empire* challenged the letter of a previous writer with the following assertion: “your correspondent evidently misunderstood the article, and he certainly has conveyed a very wrong impression of its contents. I looked up my old copies of ‘Smart Set’ and read the article, and was surprised at the meaning which your

⁴The American Credo was a regular *Smart Set* department which mocked American myths.

correspondent read into it" ("Letters"). The *Triad* article bemoaned the fact that it was difficult to get the American edition of the *Smart Set* in Australia, and reviewed a specific issue of the magazine (Clippings).⁵ In Europe, the *Continental Times* pronounced Mencken "one of the most accomplished, honest and catholic of American critics" (Orchelle). Moreover, this article explained that Mencken was one of the two editors of the *Smart Set* and that he had "drunk deeply of Europe and modernity" (Orchelle). These articles from other nations demonstrate the esteem in which it was held by many foreign readers.

In America itself, the widespread attention the magazine received is indicated by the fact that it was mentioned in mainstream magazines and newspapers, specialized periodicals, and even in the "little magazines." Among reviews of the magazine in specialized periodicals, perhaps the most specialized was a positive review of the *Smart Set* which appeared in Hebrew in the *Jewish Daily Forward* in May 1918 (Clippings). This article praised the fact that Mencken used his review column to tear down "literary quacks" and to promote realistic literature, particularly Dreiser's novels (Clippings). Most of the major American newspapers, as well as many lesser known ones, regularly mentioned either Mencken or his magazine: these ranged from the *New York Sun* to the *New Orleans Picayune*. The magazine was not only noted in the mainstream press and popular specialty publications but also noticed in the avant-garde little magazines. Mencken was mentioned in both the *Little Review* (Heap "Glossary") and *Poetry*

⁵ There was a British edition of the *Smart Set* which reprinted the stories from the American version, but not Mencken and Nathan's review columns. It does not seem to have done well and may simply have existed as a means for the American owners to try to get rid of extra stock. It should be emphasized that most *Smart Set* readers in Europe, such as Ezra Pound, were clearly reading the American edition.

([Monroe]). This magazine was reaching educated readers and possessed a national audience.

Mencken and Nathan's claim that they were attempting to reach a sophisticated audience is also supported by their choice of authors. As Dolmetsch notes, the tight finances of the magazine "made it quite impossible for Mencken and Nathan to compete in the marketplace for the services of established authors of the first rank. But they were not satisfied, as many of their predecessors in the days of Thayer and Mann had been, to take what they could get from well-known contributors of the *second* rank" ("Mencken" 6). Instead, Mencken, Nathan, and Wright created a mass-market venue for the early fiction of unknown writers of the first rank, many of whom would prove to be dominant figures in the post-war American literary scene: Eugene O'Neill, Amy Lowell, Djuna Barnes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Dorothy Parker, and Dashiell Hammett. Along with these American figures, Mencken and Nathan were also responsible for introducing to American readers some of the key modernists then writing in Europe, including W. B. Yeats, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Ford Madox Ford, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce. In addition to publishing the works of these little-known but soon to be influential authors, the *Smart Set* also provided a venue for the work of such well-established authors as Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, and Somerset Maugham.

They also published authors who, while less well-known now, went on after their initial *Smart Set* publications to become authors of considerable importance in the 1920s and 30s: Carl Van Vechten (a novelist and critic best known for his support for the

Harlem Renaissance and the writing of Gertrude Stein); Anita Loos (author of the popular comic novels *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1925] and *But Gentlemen Marry Brunnettes* [1928]); Donald Ogden Stewart (who won an Oscar in 1940 for his screenplay to *The Philadelphia Story*); James Branch Cabell (a southern writer, best known in the period for his banned novel *Jurgen*); Zoë Akins (a popular 1920s playwright who won a Pulitzer prize in 1935); John Peale Bishop (who edited *Vanity Fair* magazine in the 1920s); and Edna St. Vincent Millay (a popular poet and regular member of the Algonquin Round Table). In their work, each of these writers displayed the cynicism, the wit, and the sophistication which were associated with the *Smart Set*, and each appeared in that magazine early in their literary careers.

The physical artifact that the *Smart Set*'s readers bought at the newsstand each month remained relatively unchanged throughout its history. It had a grey cover with a bowing gentleman and a curtsying lady, and it declared in its subtitle that it was a "Magazine of Cleverness."⁶ Edmund Wilson later noted that the magazine's cover was part of its unique character: "There was the cover, with its young man and woman in evening dress, he bowing, she curtsying with a fan, watched from the background by a masked devil, who was snaring them with long strings prettily baited with winged hearts" (*Devils* 94; see fig. 1). He went on to suggest that this initial cover later became a mockery of itself and part of the humour of the magazine: "As the magazine became more and more a vehicle for the editors' ideas and for superior stories and poems, this cover became incongruous; it underwent many transformations in order to bring it up to date,

⁶ Some of the later issues featured the head of an aristocratic-looking woman in profile, but this cover design did not become common until 1918.

but it basically remained the same and came to seem one of the jokes of Mencken and Nathan, who were informal and recklessly mischievous” (*Devils* 94; see fig. 2).

Upon opening the magazine the reader would discover on the masthead any one of several flippant self-judgements—during Mencken and Nathan’s editorship the magazine most often described itself in the masthead as “The Aristocrat Among Magazines.” A novelette and several short stories followed. These stories often bore such outlandish titles as “The Misspent Youth of Max Trelawney” (Jan. 1916) and “Lady Marjory’s Undies” (Apr. 1917). Interspersed between these stories were short poems and epigrams. The poems were usually unabashedly romantic, while the epigrams tended towards cynicism, an ironic conflation in which straightforward love poems would often be accompanied in the same issue with such curt rejoinders as “There is nothing new under the moon” (Feb. 1923) or, “When love dies there is no funeral—the corpse remains in the house” (Apr. 1915).

For Mencken and Nathan humour was a serious business. It was a way of attracting attention to themselves, of course, but it was also part of their ongoing criticism of the fine arts in America, since one of their primary criticisms of American artistic endeavours was that American art not only lacked humour but erred on the side of moral earnestness: it was, in short, art which took itself far too seriously. Mencken made this point, for example, in his *Smart Set* review column for July 1920, “Observations upon the National Letters,” in which he described American art as an exercise in morality: “The thing is correctly and decorously done; it is never crude or gross; there is in it the lavender perfume of college-town society. But when this highly refined and attenuated manner is

allowed for what remains is next to nothing” (138). Mencken’s emphasis on the distressing decorum of American letters was battled here in Mencken’s characteristic manner—with a lack of decorum. The objects of his scorn were insulted and lambasted by Mencken’s irreverent prose.

The obviously youthful nature of much of the humour in this magazine helps to explain why it appealed to college students. What is less clear is how a humour magazine became the first American magazine to promote European and American modern fiction. Part of the answer may be explained by the fact that, in the manner of its better-known descendant, the *New Yorker*, the *Smart Set* exerted its influence upon the literary marketplace through its appeal to elitism, an appeal which combined smug self-congratulation with a searing dismissal of American readers incapable of appreciating good literature (the “booboisie”). Carl Dolmetsch suggests that the similarity in tone and appeal between the *New Yorker* and the *Smart Set* was not coincidental.

The *New Yorker* was founded in 1925 after a poker session during which Harold Ross and Raoul Fleischmann lamented the fact that Mencken and Nathan’s *Smart Set* was no longer being published. According to Dolmetsch, Ross and Fleischmann agreed to found a magazine that would be like the *Smart Set*, ““only better”” (“Mencken” 8). Dolmetsch’s conclusions concerning the relationship between the *Smart Set* and the *New Yorker* are echoed by James Schroeter in his overview of literary criticism from the period: “Bright undergraduates like Edmund Wilson and F. Scott Fitzgerald read the new issues of the *Smart Set* in much the way their followers were to read the *New Yorker*; it was the school in which they formed their tastes, snobberies, and sense of humor” (4). A

chronological analysis of the reception of this magazine from 1908 to 1920 confirms Dolmetsch and Schroeter's assertions concerning the influence of this magazine upon its own generation and its likely status as a forebear to the *New Yorker*.

This examination of the *Smart Set*'s role in the popularization of literary modernism rests upon the assumption that the size and breadth of the magazine's readership placed it in a position to educate a large number of American readers about American and European experimental fiction, who was writing it and what made it new. Mencken's unpublished personal record of net sales places the average circulation of the magazine between 30,000 and 40,000 copies ("My Life" 210-11; 237).⁷ Although this circulation was far below that of the largest mass-market magazines, such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, it was still sizable, especially in comparison with the "little magazines." Between 1912 and 1920 *Poetry* had a circulation of between 1,000 and 2,000 (Williams, *Harriet* 296) while the *Little Review* had a circulation of about 500 (Rainey 35). During this same period the *Smart Set* was reaching ten times the number of readers of the avant-garde "little magazines"—and was publishing many of the same authors. I would argue, therefore, that before 1920 the venue through which the greatest number of American readers became acquainted with literary modernism was the *Smart Set*.

⁷ According to *Ayer's Newspaper Annual and Directory*, the *Smart Set*'s average circulation was 50,000 (see Dolmetsch Appendix B 165); however, Mencken's figures are likely more accurate.

The *Smart Set* and Sexuality: The Example of D. H. Lawrence, 1913-14

Even in comparison to such avant-garde American monthlies as the *Little Review* and *The Dial*, the *Smart Set* was exceptional in its early and persistent willingness to expose its readers to the realistic portrayals of human sexuality found in post-Freudian psychological fiction. In a reminiscence of this magazine, Edmund Wilson provides a clue to the *Smart Set*'s ability to promote realism in a popular venue through his recollection that the magazine's tone was "something quite special" (*Devils* 94). He attributes the magazine's unique appeal to the personalities of its editors and its "variegated past" (94). In another essay, Wilson makes it clear that the *Smart Set*'s "variegated past" included its connection to its founder—the "dubious" Colonel William D'Alton Mann—and to its notorious sister magazine, the New York gossip magazine *Town Topics* (*Shock* 1155). Wilson was not alone in linking the *Smart Set*'s unique tone and accomplishments to its shady past. The reception history of this magazine supports the idea that during a period of intense American literary and cultural repression, the *Smart Set*'s notoriety as a sister magazine to *Town Topics* gave its editors the commercial and cultural precedent necessary to promote European experiments in realism. As part of the magazine's specific campaign to introduce American authors and readers to such European literary trends, in 1913 the *Smart Set* became the first American periodical to publish the work of D. H. Lawrence.

Wilson argues that this magazine acted as a guide for young readers in the "cultural confusion" of the early twentieth century because—unlike the older, more reputable magazines, which were "paralyzed by their publics and their publishers"—the *Smart Set* was free of such restraints (1156). In brief, if Wilson is correct, the magazine's

history between 1900 and 1913 was ultimately responsible for liberating its editors and may have contributed to both Willard Huntington Wright's ability to publish and promote the early work of D. H. Lawrence, and, later, Mencken and Nathan's ability to do the same for Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, Willa Cather, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. If the literary freedom that Wilson attributes to the magazine has its roots, as he hints, in the magazine's unsavoury origins, then the role of this magazine in the popularization of American literary modernism cannot be understood without an appreciation of its early history, which began in 1900 when the notorious Colonel D'Alton Mann decided to found a literary magazine for New York's high society.

Town Topics

Colonel D'Alton Mann founded the *Smart Set* in 1900 as a companion magazine to *Town Topics*. Both magazines were associated, through their mutual founder, with both celebrity and notoriety. Colonel D'Alton Mann's personal celebrity began during the Civil War. In 1862, at the age of twenty-three, Mann earned the position of Colonel, in command of the Seventh Michigan Cavalry Regiment. Soon thereafter he won a battle against the "famous Confederate cavalry raider" John Mosby (Logan I 59). His greatest renown, however, came from his actions at the battle of Gettysburg, where he led the Seventh Michigan into a skirmish in Rummel's cow pasture, an encounter which some historians argue was partially responsible for the Union victory (Logan I 59). Mann's actions earned him General Custer's written commendation and a reputation for heroism that would follow him most of his life (Logan I 59). Mann's heroism was complicated in 1885 when he became part owner of the gossip magazine *Town Topics*.

Town Topics had been founded by dress-pattern manufacturer W. R. Andrews in 1879 as a rather innocuous journal of high society called *Andrews' American Queen, a National Society Journal* (Pratte 152). At first this magazine was “devoted entirely to accounts of dinners, receptions and other more or less fashionable functions” (Rowe 275). It floundered under several different owners and was finally sold by its printers (who had acquired it by default when it went bankrupt in 1885) to Eugene Mann, Colonel Mann’s brother. Under Eugene the magazine took on a decidedly different flavour, especially in the opening pages of society gossip which were now suggestively titled “Saunterings.” The nature of its gossip acquired a racy enough tone that in 1887 Eugene Mann was convicted of “sending obscene matter through the mails” (Logan I 81). His sentence was suspended, but a few years later he was charged again with the same offence; according to Andy Logan in his series of *New Yorker* articles on the Colonel this second charge was likely the “result of a brazen item in ‘Saunterings’ about the prevalence of abortion among society women” (I 81). Eugene managed to have the case postponed by pleading that he was suffering from consumption (which was, in fact, true) and then transferred his shares in the magazine to his brother (I 81). Over the next six years the case was repeatedly postponed until, in 1897, the charges were “compassionately withdrawn” owing to Eugene’s rapidly failing health (Logan I 81).

Colonel William D’Alton Mann became the owner of *Town Topics* in 1891. Under the Colonel’s ownership the magazine’s gossip columns ventured beyond even the subject matter permitted by Eugene Mann, so that while the “Saunterings” section that opened the magazine contained the usual society notices of marriages, engagements, parties, and so

forth, through puns and innuendo it also branded people as “adulterers (frequently incestuous), transvestites, nymphomaniacs, and homosexuals (male and female)” (Logan I 84). No one was named in relation to the most serious of the Saunterer’s insinuations, but veiled suggestions were provided to aid the inferences of the magazine’s readers, and sometimes the people in question *were*, in fact, openly named through the technique of a conveniently placed “keyed paragraph”—an ostensibly innocent notice of the recent social activities of the people in question placed a few paragraphs after the paragraph which alluded to their more scandalous predilections (Pratte 153).

Under Colonel Mann the magazine began with a section consisting of New York gossip, but it also contained a fair amount of good literature, including stories by Stephen Crane, Jack London, and O. Henry. It also included unsigned literary criticism by Percival Pollard, and music and cultural criticism by James Huneker, both of whom were perceptive critics, with the result that the magazine became “a weird blend of the dubious and the respectable” (Logan I 82). Owing to the Colonel’s low rate of pay, it is likely that Pollard and Huneker wrote for the magazine because of the Colonel’s lack of restriction upon what they wrote. In support of this theory, Logan records that Pollard and Huneker used their columns to write about Moussorgsky, Schoenberg, Strindberg, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Shaw, Gorki, and Cézanne (I 84). In *My Life as Author and Editor*, H. L. Mencken would later indicate that both of these critics of the 1890s were influential in his own early thinking and criticism (35). The contact between the *Smart Set* and *Town Topics* extended well beyond Mencken’s personal admiration for Pollard and Huneker’s *Town Topics*’s reviews. Before 1909, Pollard acted as the *Smart Set*’s theatre critic, and

in 1914 (after Pollard's death) several of Mencken's unsigned but easily identifiable book reviews appeared in *Town Topics*. Mencken wrote many favourable reviews of Huneker's texts in the *Smart Set* and Huneker returned the favour with positive notices of Mencken's books in *Puck*, the American humour magazine, and contributed several short stories to the *Smart Set*. After Huneker's death in 1921, Mencken edited a memorial collection of his essays.

This overlap between the critics for *Town Topics* and the *Smart Set* was typical of the fairly close relationship established between the two magazines, a relationship which may also have included some overlap in their readership. So, for example, Willa Cather wrote for the *Smart Set* and read *Town Topics*. During her years as a journalist, between 1893 and 1902, Cather regularly reviewed the contents of various magazines, including the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the *Century*, the *Critic*, the *Independent*, the *Outlook* (see W&P I 256-57). Within this context, it is significant that in an article for the *Lincoln Journal* in November 1894, she mentions *Town Topics* as the source of "new" literary discoveries. Later, in a review article from 1897, she refers to *Town Topics* as a "naughty but mighty clever paper" (W&P II 505). With respect to the *Smart Set* and its later reception history, it is significant that the two adjectives employed by Cather in her description *Town Topics*—"naughty" and "clever"—were often used to characterize the *Smart Set* under Mencken, Nathan, and Wright: three editors who exploited these characteristics in their promotion of the "new."

Cather wasn't alone among major American authors who both published in the *Smart Set* and demonstrated a familiarity with its sister magazine. This awareness was

also displayed by *Smart Set* alumnus F. Scott Fitzgerald through his incorporation of a thinly disguised *Town Topics* into *The Great Gatsby*. In this novel Fitzgerald revealed his awareness of the subject matter in *Town Topics* (and in particular its emphasis on extramarital affairs) though a small ironic allusion in which Myrtle buys a copy of "*Town Tattle*" to amuse her on her trip into New York with Tom, her married lover (27). There is some possibility that Fitzgerald may have had a personal reason for this condemnation of the magazine in *Gatsby* since, in an unmailed letter to Zelda in 1939, he hints that they were victims of *Town Topics*'s gossip column: "You—thinking I slept with that Bankhead—making all your drunks innocent + mine calculated till even *Town Topics* protested" (*Correspondence* 559). Whether Fitzgerald's reference to *Town Topics* is literal or figurative, his public writing illustrates his awareness of the *Town Topics* as a part of New York culture. Both Fitzgerald and Cather's writings indicate that this was a popular magazine and that Americans were familiar with it. Since this magazine was well known, it is reasonable to assume that it may have influenced the preconceptions which readers brought to its sister magazine, the *Smart Set*, when Mann founded it in 1900.

The Early History of the *Smart Set*

It is not obvious why Mann decided to found a fiction monthly, but whatever his motive, it is clear that he intended *Town Topics* and the *Smart Set* to support and complement one another. The connection between the magazines was not hidden; the *Smart Set* contained ads for *Town Topics* and *vice versa*. As the title *Smart Set* suggests, this magazine was originally designed as an entertainment for New York's richest families, the same people who peopled the society columns of *Town Topics* and who, Mann

believed, were also its readers. Whether both magazines really catered to America's wealthy classes is not known, but the advertisements in both magazines indicate that their advertisers, at any rate, felt that their readers led opulent and rather dissolute lifestyles. *Town Topics* usually contained ads for clothing, especially, and not surprisingly ads for Ladies' Lingerie, including one prominently displayed on the cover (see fig. 3). The magazine also contained ads for such products as whiskey, cigarettes, hotels, and vacation spots. The ads in the *Smart Set* were similar, with the interesting and regular addition of advertisements offering cures for opium, morphine, and liquor addiction (see, for example, "Smart Set Advertiser" *Smart Set* July 1903). The presence in both magazines of advertisements appealing to both men and women (for example, both contained ads for cars and hosiery), would seem to indicate that their advertisers believed that their audience consisted of both sexes.⁸

The covers of both magazines reinforced the image of wealth contained in their advertisements; the cover of *Town Topics* showed two elegant women reading a copy of the magazine while the cover of the *Smart Set* showed a man in a tuxedo and a woman in evening wear. These covers, along with the consistently high price of items offered for sale in both magazines, would seem to indicate that the readers of both *Town Topics* and the *Smart Set* had a fairly high income, a belief partly corroborated by the *Smart Set's* comparatively high newsstand price. This magazine cost twenty-five cents at a time when most popular monthly magazines cost ten or fifteen. In 1917, the price of the magazine

⁸ The assumption of relative affluence and mixed male/female readership would also, later, inform the advertisements in Ross's *New Yorker*. So it is not, perhaps, surprising that two of the most regular *Smart Set* advertising clients throughout its history now advertise in the *New Yorker*: The Prudential Insurance Company and Waterman's Fountain Pens.

was still being used as a form of elitism; a newspaper advertisement from the period declared that the *Smart Set* was a “magazine of distinct cleverness and class, appealing to readers who want quality and are willing to pay the price” (“Smart Set” Clippings). The cost of the magazine itself and of the items that it advertised may indicate that the magazine’s readers, at least during the initial years of its publication, likely belonged to America’s middle and upper classes.

Not coincidentally, considering the nature of its sister magazine, the *Smart Set* was from the beginning an entertainment with slightly unsavoury underpinnings. The fiction in this magazine often strongly resembled the facts appearing in *Town Topics*’ weekly “Saunterings” column. So while the gossip in *Town Topics* most often consisted of hinting at extramarital affairs, the majority of the stories in the *Smart Set* between 1900 and 1913 concerned the same subject. The most common pattern for *Smart Set* stories during these years contained the portrayal of a woman unhappy in her marriage who, by chance, re-encounters a beau from her single days. Several suggestive kisses later, and usually on the verge of elopement, in the perfunctory final paragraph of the story the woman repents of her evil ways and returns to her husband, thus placing the suggestive allusions in the story within a safely moral framework.⁹ Moreover, the fiction in the *Smart Set* drew upon the power of insinuation which was adopted in the gossip columns of *Town Topics*; the *Smart Set* was never banned from going through the mails, but its stories strongly implied what it would have been impermissible to state.

⁹ For a typical example of this type of story see “In Earthen Vessels,” by Austin Adams, *Smart Set* Jan. 1908: 58-64.

Such stories as “Consequences,” which appeared in the *Smart Set* for December 1908, involved premises which lent themselves to titillation. In this story, a middle-aged man and young woman marry for companionship, both agreeing that they do not want to be a married couple in the conventional sense and that the arrangement should remain platonic. It is only a matter of time before he is thinking to himself, “She could not know that with the passing of each day platonic seemed to grow less possible to him; that he felt that his one safeguard lay in holding fast to the letter of his bond” (Giltner 60). Since he is tortured by her closeness, youth, and beauty, the story contains several passages similar to the following: “His heart was beating thickly; her nearness, as always, stirred him strongly” (62). Several pages later they agree to be married in the conventional sense. Technically, nothing in the story extends beyond the portrayal of some passionate kisses, but the sexual allusions possess some of the suggestiveness found in the “Saunterings” column of the Colonel’s other magazine. Of the *Smart Set*’s fiction under the Colonel’s ownership, Mencken later contended that while its boldest fiction at the time “would seem banal today” it “sometimes went near enough to the line of impropriety to pass as very piquant” (*My Life* 11).

Neither *Town Topics* nor the *Smart Set* approached the circulation of the larger mass-market magazines of the era (*Scribner’s*, *Harper’s Monthly*, *McClure’s*, *The American Magazine*, *Collier’s*, *Munsey’s*, and *The Cosmopolitan*), magazines which boasted circulations in the hundreds of thousands, or *The Ladies’ Home Journal* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, which had readers in the millions. However, both magazines managed respectable circulations. Between 1902 and 1905 each magazine had a

circulation of about 140,000 (Pratte 152; Dolmetsch 165). In 1905-06, the *Smart Set*'s circulation reached 165,000 as a result of the Colonel's highly publicized libel and perjury trials (Dolmetsch 20). In considering the magazine's later reputation as a champion of literary freedom, it is important to note that the highest circulation figures in its history were the result of a huge public scandal. It was precisely this type of association which Edmund Wilson likely had in mind when he attributed Mencken and Nathan's ability to promote avant-garde literature in the *Smart Set* to the magazine's "variegated past."

In 1905 it became public knowledge in New York that Mann's main source of income from *Town Topics* wasn't from selling copies. His profit resulted from the money which he accepted for suppressing articles planned for its pages. This information was made public through a sting operation involving Edwin Post—husband of *the* Emily Post, later of etiquette book fame—and Charles P. Ahle, who was connected to Charles Stokes Wayne, the managing editor of *Town Topics*. Post had been informed by Ahle that a forthcoming issue of the magazine would contain a paragraph describing his activities with a "fair charmer" who was not his wife unless he agreed to pay \$500 as a "subscription" to a forthcoming book, to be titled *America's Smart Set* (Logan I 37). Post responded by arranging with the District Attorney to have the monetary exchange witnessed by a detective. Ahle was arrested after accepting money from Post. It was widely assumed that Ahle's trial would inevitably bring the unsavoury activities of Colonel Mann to light. As a result of this general belief, when the Colonel returned from England (where he had been when the affair between Post and Ahle took place) a front page story in the *New York Times* announced that he had been confronted by a "score of reporters loaded with

questions” (“Oh Roosevelt” 1). Mann answered their questions with outrage, stating that “if any *Town Topics* man has been guilty of blackmail he’ll go to jail, and I’ll do my best to put him there” (“Oh Roosevelt” 2). Perhaps with Mann’s well-publicized warning in mind, Ahle’s wife paid his bail of \$3,500 and she and Ahle left the country (Logan I 46).

The Colonel may have successfully extricated himself from any possible legal ramifications of the Ahle affair at this time if it had not been for Norman Hapgood, a graduate of Harvard law school and the current editor of *Collier’s Weekly*, a popular mass market magazine with a circulation of 300,000. Hapgood had been hired in 1902 by Robert Collier, the son of the magazine’s founder and namesake Peter Collier, with the aim of adding an “air of culture and respectability” to the magazine’s editorials (Reed 109). Peter Collier had often borne the brunt of sarcastic comments in *Town Topics* owing to his Irish ancestry and the fact that he had worked his way into the circles of America’s pre-eminent families, who were collectively known as “the 400.” Subsequent events would indicate that Robert Collier had not forgotten the Colonel’s slights against his father. In the months following Ahle’s arrest, Robert Collier encouraged Hapgood to write a series of condemnatory articles on *Town Topics* in *Collier’s* with the specific goal of forcing the Colonel to sue for criminal libel (Logan I 88). This is, in fact, what happened.

In 1905, Judge Duel, Mann’s cohort in *Town Topics*’s blackmailing schemes, sued Norman Hapgood for criminal libel and, in a situation strangely analogous to Oscar Wilde’s trial, Mann took the witness stand and not only condemned but perjured himself. He was forced to confess several rather unsavoury financial transactions which concerned

various loans for unspecified reasons and for enormous amounts. These loans had been made to him by several prominent men, including J. Pierpont Morgan and William Vanderbilt. It was revealed in court that the Colonel's "borrowings" had resulted in a net profit of almost \$200,000 (Rowe 280). In the subsequent perjury trial, Mann's lawyer used a speech about the Colonel's wartime heroism to secure his acquittal.

As late as 1916, there is ample evidence to suggest that the Colonel's actions had not been forgotten. That year, an American play by Amélie Rives called "The Fear Market," which ran for over a hundred performances, outlined the "venal" activities of a "retired military figure" who owned a scandal magazine (Logan II 41). Mann, in fact, did not die until 1920, at the age of 81. He owned and published *Town Topics* until his death. As a result, both the *Smart Set's* notorious sister magazine and its dubious founder remained recognizable New York fixtures throughout Mencken and Nathan's tenure at the *Smart Set*.

In addition to bequeathing the *Smart Set* a birthright of scandal, which later played a role in its ability to promote modern literature, the Colonel's other main contribution to the later development of the magazine was hiring a series of competent editors for the *Smart Set* and allowing them considerable leeway both in the selection of manuscripts and in whom they hired to work for the magazine (Dolmetsch 15). In 1908 the *Smart Set's* editorial assistant, Norman Boyer, suggested to its editor, Fredric Splint, that the position of *Smart Set* book reviewer would be well-handled by a man he had heard of while he was working as a journalist in Baltimore. In 1908 this young Baltimore journalist, the twenty-eight year-old H. L. Mencken, was hired to write a monthly book review column

(Mencken *My Life* 10). During his fifteen years at the *Smart Set*, Mencken would build up an enormous popular following. By the mid-1920s he would be considered America's most important literary and social critic. In the prestigious *Saturday Review* in 1926 Walter Lippmann described Mencken as "the most powerful personal influence on this whole generation of educated people" (1).

While Mencken's greatest personal fame occurred immediately after the *Smart Set* years, there is little question that between his first *Smart Set* book review column in 1908 and his last in 1923 he had progressed from a relatively unknown journalist into a national figure. As Robert Nardini has argued, this rapid rise to a position of extreme celebrity was not by chance: "Mencken, critic that he was of the popular culture surrounding him, was at the same time a deft operator of the machinery of celebrity" (2). In fact, this was an admission that Mencken himself made. That he knew how to attract an audience was revealed by him in a 1914 article for the *Atlantic Monthly*: "You must give a good show to get a crowd, and a good show means one with slaughter in it" ("Newspaper" 289). Mencken commenced to give a good show in his very first review column for the *Smart Set*, "The Good, The Bad and the Best Sellers," which appeared in November 1908. In his review of Henry James's *Views and Reviews*, he dismissed the highly popular and highly regarded writer with a single sentence: "Early essays by Henry James—some in the English Language" (159).

In 1909, Frederic Splint, the *Smart Set* editor who had hired Mencken, also hired a freelance writer, whose articles on the theatre regularly appeared in the *Bookman* and *Harper's Weekly*, to write a monthly review column. This man was George Jean Nathan;

during his years as the *Smart Set*'s theatre critic he would become an extremely influential figure in the New York drama scene. When Nathan died in 1958, an obituary calling him the "Dean of Broadway Drama Critics" appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. This obituary declared that during his fifty years as a reviewer on Broadway "the name George Jean Nathan and the word 'theatre' became almost synonymous," adding: "It is generally acknowledged—even by most of those badly stung by Mr. Nathan's barbs—that no other American critic of the period had so greatly raised the standards of play producers or so determinedly elevated the tastes of playgoers" ("George" 1). In the *Smart Set*, Nathan's elevation of the tastes of New York's playgoers took place most specifically through his publication of early plays by Eugene O'Neill, and through his promotion of them. As with Mencken's book review columns, Nathan's early review columns indicate his fondness for writing columns with slaughter in them. In his second theatre review for the *Smart Set*, Nathan dismisses a play by comparing its noise level to that of the Civil War, adding only "To be perfectly fair, however, it must be admitted that in 'The Man Who Owns Broadway' the noise is a little bit louder" ("The Drama" 149).

The magazine during these first years relied, as it would always, on the submission of fiction from unknown writers. The magazine never had a large enough circulation or the accompanying advertising revenue to afford the kind of per story rates offered by the larger mass-market magazines, and as a result it was forced to try unknown talent. Before Mencken and Nathan's editorship, this policy had uneven results. Most of the fiction in

the early *Smart Set* is unremarkable.¹⁰ The magazine's history of scandal and its welcoming attitude toward young writers would aid its transition, between 1911 and 1913, from a popular entertainment monthly into an avant-garde organ of modernist writing for a mass audience.

John Adams Thayer

The *Smart Set*'s transition into a mass-market proponent of literary modernism began in 1911, when Colonel Mann decided to sell the magazine. The buyer was John Adams Thayer, a man who had made a personal fortune as an advertising manager at the *Ladies' Home Journal* and as the owner of the muckraking magazine *Everybody's*.¹¹ It was his vision for the magazine that, despite Mencken's low view of him, was primarily responsible for changing its focus. One of his first innovations as the magazine's new owner was to introduce a series of editorial articles under the heading "Something Personal By the Publisher." For the first time, these articles clarified for the magazine's readers both the magazine's current image and what Thayer wished it to become. Obviously, declarations by the new owner of a magazine regarding its image are not likely to be impartial, but since these stated intentions became prescriptions for an actual change in the magazine's contents and attitude, they are essential documents in understanding its evolution over the next three years.

¹⁰ However, as Dolmetsch convincingly argues, there was one important series of publications during these first years. The *Smart Set*'s first editor, Arthur Grissom, made an arrangement with the *Société des Gens de Lettres* of Paris in which it was agreed that they would supply French fiction, both stories and poems, to the magazine (12-13). These untranslated stories appeared in every issue of the magazine from 1900 to 1921 and gave a continental air to the magazine.

¹¹ Thayer soon discovered (not surprisingly considered the Colonel's habits) that the financial status of the magazine had not been fully revealed to him before he bought it. As Mencken summarizes the situation: "Characteristically, [Mann] rooked Thayer" (*My Life* 11).

In his first editorial to the magazine's readers in April 1911, Thayer stressed that the magazine would keep its "distinct individuality," declaring that this magazine would remain—as its subtitle announced—a "magazine of cleverness" (176). Thayer added that he wished to make the magazine a "striking exponent of originality" (176). This emphasis on originality was new. In his second editorial, Thayer responded to a letter from one of the magazine's readers. Significantly, considering the magazine's heritage, the first letter published in the magazine specifically addressed its scandalous past. In this letter "a writer" expressed the view that the magazine's new owner ought to "change its notorious title," adding "The Smart Set has always suffered from its name" ("Something" May 1911, 175). The publication of this letter highlights the fact that Thayer felt the notoriety of the magazine had to be publicly addressed. In his response to this letter Thayer tried to assert the innocence of the magazine (presumably in contrast to *Town Topics*) by claiming "The Smart Set is not on trial" (175).

The associations with notoriety inherited by Thayer and addressed in his early editorials were complicated in 1912 through Colonel Mann's establishment of a direct competitor to the *Smart Set*. This magazine was unambiguously titled *Snappy Stories* (in the teens and twenties pulp magazines with sexual content were given the descriptive adjectives "saucy," "snappy," "spicy," and "peppy"). As Mencken records in his memoir, *Snappy Stories* was likely founded by the Colonel in an attempt to infringe upon, if not to steal, the *Smart Set*'s readership after his sale of the magazine so as to "recover as much as possible of what he had sold" (*My Life* 12). In the Colonel's attempt to do so he imitated the *Smart Set* in several important respects. He designed the cover of *Snappy*

Stories with the “two long s’s that were the trademark of the *Smart Set*” and in its contents he imitated some of the characteristics associated with *Smart Set*, including its regular monthly novelette and the notoriety of its fiction. On the newsstands, according to Mencken, the “two magazines looked pretty much alike” (*My Life* 12). The similar appearance and content of the two magazines reinforced the *Smart Set*’s association with scandal since *Snappy Stories* “quickly got a reputation for salacity, and that reputation backflared against the *Smart Set* itself, which began to be confused with the newcomer” (Mencken, *My Life* 12). To complicate matters still further, in 1916 Mencken and Nathan attempted to steal readers from *Snappy Stories* by establishing the pulp magazine *Saucy Stories*; this magazine also boasted two long s’s on its cover, and thus similarly reinforced the *Smart Set*’s association with scandal.

The stories in Mencken and Nathan’s *Saucy Stories*, as with the *Smart Set* and *Snappy Stories*, only implied sexual relations; however, the implications were much stronger than those found in *Smart Set* fiction. So, for example, one of the stories in the August 1916 issue—“The Obstacle”—portrays a series of negotiations between an actress and a theatre manager, one of which gives the flavour of the whole:

“Then you really mean that I am not to get the part unless—unless—I—I—”

“Absolutely!”

The words came with a sudden abruptness that left no doubt as to its meaning. It stung the girl into a little of her usual impertiveness [*sic*] and she retorted somewhat haughtily:

“You know very well that I am entirely capable of playing it.” (Lamb 7)

The antecedent of the “it” with which the actress concludes this exchange is left ambiguous until the close of the story (which reveals the pronoun’s innocence). As with most of the fiction in *Saucy Stories*, “The Obstacle” relies on obvious *double entendre*. Barring only the stories in this issue dealing with violence—such as the unambiguously titled “The Murderer”—sex is the obvious theme of the fiction.

In 1915, Mencken and Nathan founded another pulp magazine along similar lines, called *Parisienne*. That the fiction in this magazine was of a similarly titillating nature to that in *Saucy Stories*, if not more so, is indicated by the fact that in 1915 it was raided by the Vice Society. Mencken contended that the vice crusaders had been alerted to its scandalous nature by the editor of *Snappy Stories*, W. M. Clayton, who had been the circulation manager of the *Smart Set* while it was under the Colonel’s ownership and who, Mencken believed, was Colonel Mann’s illegitimate son (*My Life* 12). Mencken, Nathan, and the magazine’s publisher, Eltinge Warner, took the expedients both of hiring a well-known lawyer and of bribing one of the three judges overseeing the case (*My Life* 77); the judges sided with the defence by a vote of two to one (*My Life* 77). This trial became part of the pattern of scandals surrounding the *Smart Set*. While Mencken and Nathan tried to distance themselves from *Parisienne* and *Saucy Stories* by not using their names on the masthead, their ownership of these magazines was well enough known to appear in the *New York Press*.¹²

As a result of the *Smart Set*’s association with scandal, Thayer decided to change the *Smart Set*’s image through carefully worded editorials on the nature of the magazine’s

¹² See *New York Review* Oct. 28, 1916 and Nov. 4, 1916.

fiction, its attitude toward sexual content, and the assumptions of its owners and editors regarding their readership. An essential change in the magazine's philosophy appeared in Thayer's first year as the magazine's new owner. In an editorial column in October 1911, Thayer clarified an essential distinction: "Some new reader, who, perchance, is at present in the subway, his nose forced against the page and with no room to turn the leaf, may peevishly limit the aims of the 'smart set' to the last cry in hats, the correct size of calling cards, the coldest bottle and the hottest bird. But we are not that kind of a smart set" (168). He explained that the *Smart Set* did not celebrate wealth but was, rather, concerned with representing the "Smart Set Idea," which was to "provide lively entertainment for minds that are not primitive" (168). By appealing directly to the man on the subway, who is presumably not a member of the upper class, Thayer explicitly attempted to change the idea of a "smart set" from an aristocracy of money to one of taste. From this point on, in its fiction and its editorials, the *Smart Set* would appeal to an intellectual, not a moneyed, "smart set." And as Thayer's following editorials indicate, this new "smart set" would be capable of appreciating the newest innovations in European literature, including the post-Freudian portrayals of sexual relations appearing in the early fiction of D. H. Lawrence.

Thayer's wish to change the image and direction of the magazine was realized in practice in 1912 when he hired the magazine's new editor, Willard Huntington Wright. In an editorial on February 1913, Thayer explained that "Like us, Mr. Wright believes in printing the best material that can be obtained, irrespective of its subject matter. He is not a moralist in the narrow sense of the word, and is free from literary conventionalism"

(160). To this announcement, he added that the magazine would not adopt an “editorial policy which cater[ed] to the prejudices, superstitions and sentimentalities of unintelligent readers” (160). After explaining the magazine’s new editorial policy, Thayer provided a redefinition of his earlier “Smart Set Idea”: “The Smart Set [is] not only a magazine whose primary object is to provide lively entertainment for minds that are not primitive, but also a magazine which will be an outlet for those meritorious contributions which are forced out of the more conventional publications” (160). This statement was no mere boast; it would embody the main editorial policy of the magazine over the next ten years.

In these editorials Thayer transformed the magazine’s historical association with scandal into a form of literary sophistication, turning the magazine’s unsavoury past into a virtue. Wright firmly endorsed Thayer’s revised image of the magazine in his first editorial to the magazine’s readers. In the March 1913 issue, Wright declared the changes in the magazine to be nothing short of revolutionary: “I believe that this is a day of enlightenment on the part of magazine readers. . . . A widespread critical awakening has come, and with it a desire for better literary material” (159). In a subsequent editorial, with the attention-getting subheading “Sex Stories,” Wright summarized the magazine’s openness to sexual subject matter: “If a sex story is worth telling, it should present the facts truthfully and employ the language which the telling demands. Sex in itself is not indecent. It is the innuendoes that make it so” (“Something,” May 1913 159). Wright’s declaration that “sex in itself is not indecent” allowed this magazine with a slightly tawdry reputation to align itself with revolutions in literary content and style: it allowed the Colonel’s magazine to become modern.

Willard Huntington Wright

Wright's assertion that there was nothing indecent about making sex the subject of literary investigation was a particularly radical position for the editor of a mass-market magazine to adopt in 1913. As journalist and literary critic Burton Rascoe indicates in his 1934 *Smart Set Anthology* "those were the days, not twenty-five years ago, when even the word 'Hell' was written like 'Jehovah' among the Hebrews, without a vowel" (xxi). In Rascoe's account, this conservatism was ubiquitous; magazines were published with consideration of "editorial taboos" which would "make a list several typewritten pages long" (xxi). Although Rascoe's description of the conservatism of most editorial policies at the time is rendered suspect by the fact that he was writing a tribute to the *Smart Set*, his contentions are supported by what period editors of mass-market magazines had to say on the subject.

In 1916 the *Bookman* magazine sponsored a symposium for mass-market magazine editors in which they were asked the question "Why Are Manuscripts Rejected?" This symposium was arranged to provide advice to aspiring authors, and it included responses from most of the popular magazines of the day: *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *McClure's*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Woman's Home Companion*.¹³ The answer provided by W. F. Bigelow, editor of *Good Housekeeping*, was typical of the responses made by the other editors of large "family magazines." Bigelow summarized the policies of his magazine toward sexual subject matter through the admission that "unsuitableness accounts for the

¹³ This symposium also included *The Smart Set*, although this may have been owing more to Nathan's longtime association with the *Bookman* than to the popularity of the magazine.

rejection of a large number of manuscripts” (268). He added that the unsuitableness of the manuscript might even extend to the personal life of the author; he indicated that a manuscript would be returned if the author had “broken a convention of society” and was, therefore, “*persona non grata* to many readers” (268). Bigelow stressed this consideration again, at the end of his commentary, where he argued that “a sin that is paraded in public” should not be “condoned by those who should mold public opinion” (269). In the family magazines, then, even the sexual behaviour of the author, let alone that of his characters, could prevent acceptance.

In her submission on behalf of *The Woman's Home Companion*, Gertrude Lane similarly stressed the importance of appropriate subject matter. She explained that regardless of personal or editorial preference, the economic realities faced by the large successful monthlies placed a constraint on what their editors might accept. As she explained, the larger the readership of the magazine, the greater the likelihood that one of their readers might be offended. As a result of this economic imperative, Lane admitted that they must aim for a “universal interest” (285) in accepted material, and that they must reject anything with an “unpleasant theme” (286).

This avoidance of “unpleasant themes” in the family magazines was so pervasive that even the mention of pregnancy in a story was considered problematic. The slowness with which this situation changed is indicated by the fact that, ten years after this symposium, sexual subject matter in the mass-market family magazines was still being censored. In 1926, when F. Scott Fitzgerald sold his novella “The Rich Boy” to *Redbook*, they bowdlerized it for publication. All the references to Paula Hagerty’s pregnancy were

removed. Since she dies in childbirth later in the story, this editorial decision made little sense. Indeed, the magazine's readers must have been somewhat confused by the heroine's entirely unexpected demise (West 109). Among the mass-market magazines, the magazines with the strictest policies toward inappropriate subject matter—the general family magazines—were also the magazines that offered the highest payment for the stories they published. As a result, these magazines wielded an enormous power in the literary marketplace, one that included the authority to transform basic human sexual relations into immaculate conceptions.

The editors of the “quality magazines” (the highbrow literary magazines associated with the American East coast, and with Boston in particular) expressed similar reservations to those made by the editors of the family magazines. Writing on behalf of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Ellery Sedgwick argued that in his magazine politeness was key. He characterized the magazine's contributors as “guests at a dinner party” (264). He noted that he did not have to agree with the opinions of his contributors, but he would not welcome any material which was “out of place in company” (264). Sedgwick's emphasis upon politeness was echoed by the editor of *The Century*, Douglas Doty, who declared that he would reject anything on “unlovely or trivial themes” (266). Accordingly, among mass-market magazines, neither the popular family magazines nor the highly respected quality magazines, were willing to publish anything which might offend the sensibilities of their readers—they were particularly unwilling to risk such offence through the publication of sexual subject matter.

In contrast, in his entry on the *Smart Set* in the *Bookman* symposium, George Jean Nathan argued that the *Smart Set* would find room “any month” for contributions that contained “truly distinguished writing” (283). He promised that they would do so no matter how much the work might outrage their “private notions of the true, the good, and the beautiful” (283). It was this attitude which Thayer and Wright first announced to the magazine’s readers between 1911 and 1913. In their editorials, they introduced their readers to the idea that in this magazine quality would be considered more important than subject matter—an attitude that distinguished it from many of the mass-market magazines of the day. Accordingly, Wright emphasized in his first *Smart Set* editorial in March 1913 that the editorial policies of most American mass-market magazines had the potential to hinder both American artistic development and aesthetic appreciation. He argued that “the average editor,” through the fear of offending his readers, “not only thwarted and stultified talent, but also . . . kept the best of the modern literary output from those capable of appreciating it” (160). Wright recognized that some of the “modern literary output” then being produced consisted of new experiments with literary realism—and that few American readers of mass-market magazines had seen it.

As a result of his determination to share the “best of the modern literary output” with the magazine’s readers, Wright went to London in the summer of 1913 in search of manuscripts by new, upcoming writers. While there, he sought out the then almost unknown expatriate poet Ezra Pound. Beyond Harriet Monroe’s small avant-garde circle in Chicago, few Americans had heard of Pound, let alone felt the need to go to England to meet him. The question, “why Pound?” relates to the *Smart Set*’s literary critic, H. L.

Mencken. Mencken had first reviewed Pound's work in his *Smart Set* review column for April 1911; in this review of Pound's *Provença*, Mencken drew attention not only to the talent of the young poet but also to the fact that such talent was not being nurtured in America. He praised Pound for his "revolt against that puerile kittenishness which [marked] so much latter day English poetry" ("Meredith" 166), but added that America had shown it was not ready for such a revolt. As he explained, "Mr. Pound is an American, but he had to go to England to gain recognition" (166). Pound himself may have been aware of this review since he indicated in an early letter to H. L. Mencken, in January 1915, that he believed Mencken had been responsible for first bringing his work to Wright's attention ("Mencken Collection" NYPL). There is little reason to believe otherwise.¹⁴

The important fact, in conjunction with the *Smart Set*'s historical association with scandal, was that Pound not only provided Wright with his own work but also recommended the work of a recent discovery of his, D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence must have seemed like a godsend to Wright who, only a few months prior, had declared to his readers that American readers had "grown tired of the effeminacy and falsities of current fiction" and that a "critical awakening" had resulted in a desire for literature which did not avoid the facts of life ("Something," Mar. 1913: 159). Wright may have been somewhat premature in assuming that such a critical awakening was, indeed, "widespread"—only one year later, in 1914, George H. Doran, Lawrence's American publisher, refused to publish *The Rainbow* (De Grazia 69). In 1915, Ben Huebsch agreed to publish *The Rainbow* in

¹⁴ Mencken's personal and literary relationship to Pound will be examined in the following chapter.

America, but he did so in an expurgated form and without asking Lawrence's permission for the changes (69). The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was still very active, and after the suppression of *The Rainbow* in England, Huebsch felt that he could not afford to take any risks (70-71).

Within this historical context, the *Smart Set* was uniquely positioned to challenge the pruderies of the time. The shady history of the magazine and its particular association with a gossip magazine meant that it was already associated with sexual matters. While the reception history of the magazine certainly indicates that the *Smart Set* was considered a "naughty" magazine, it is possible to argue this notoriety helped, rather than hindered, the magazine's ability to popularize literary modernism. The magazine's reputation, along with Thayer's and Wright's determination to promote modernism, contributed to the ultimate publication in the magazine of Lawrence's "The White Stocking," and then later, James Joyce's "The Boarding House," Willa Cather's "Coming Aphrodite!," Somerset Maugham's "Miss Thompson," and Dorothy Parker's "Such a Pretty Little Picture," all of which contained stark, unadorned, portrayals of relations between the sexes.

When Wright approached Pound in 1913, he was in the unique position of offering Pound a mass-market venue for his poetry and for the authors whom he represented. For Lawrence, the timing was fortuitous. In 1913, Lawrence was still at the beginning of his career as a professional writer. His first published story had appeared in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, under a pseudonym, in 1907, but the first poems to be attributed to Lawrence by name did not appear until November 1909, and the first short story attributed to him waited until Ford Madox Ford published "Goose Fair" in the

English Review in February 1910. His first novel, *The White Peacock*, was published in England and America in 1911. Lawrence reached his decision to quit his teaching job and become a professional writer full-time in early 1912 (Worthen 325). Accordingly, he had been relying on sales of his writing for his income for a little over one year when Wright arrived in London. At that time, Pound had only recently become acquainted with Lawrence's work, but he was already determined to help promote it. He essentially became Lawrence's unofficial literary agent, although Pound refused to accept payment for his efforts on Lawrence's behalf (see *Letters of D. H. Lawrence* 132). Lawrence, although he was not particularly pleased by the fact that Pound seemed to consider him one of his "show-dogs" (*Letters* 133), was nevertheless willing to accept his help. As a result, when Ezra Pound approached Lawrence for some stories and poems to place in the *Smart Set*, Lawrence supplied him with material almost immediately. As Lawrence explained in a letter to his friend David Garnett on 21 June 1913, Pound's offer to try to place his fiction had come as good news: "I should be glad to have some stories in magazines" (*Letters* 27). He did not have to wait long.

D. H. Lawrence

Lawrence's work appeared in almost half of the issues of the *Smart Set* published between September 1913 and October 1914. His poem "Violets" appeared in September; "Kisses in the Train" in October ; and "The Mowers" in November 1913. These poems were the first examples of Lawrence's work to appear in an American magazine. The *Smart Set* also became the venue for his first prose publications in an American periodical. "The Christening," "The White Stocking," and "The Shadow in the Rose Garden"

appeared in the *Smart Set* in February, March, and October 1914 respectively. As I shall indicate in subsequent chapters, Lawrence's publication history in the *Smart Set* is indicative of a pattern characteristic of the experience of several of its authors. Under Mencken's and Nathan's and Wright's editorship, the magazine was one of the first American venues for the early work of such writers as Ezra Pound, Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neill, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Moreover, they published these writers repeatedly and often, thereby introducing these writers into the literary marketplace and making their work familiar to their readers.

When Lawrence's stories and poems first appeared in the *Smart Set*, his work was not utterly unknown in the United States. His novel *The White Peacock* had been published there in January 1911, and his second novel, *The Tresspasser*, appeared in an American edition in May 1912. This novel was, in fact, favourably reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, where it was described as an exercise in "modern fiction" which contained a "nakedness of physical detail" that was "almost morbid in its ugliness" ("Latest" 677); indeed, the reviewer argued that the novel's stark realism was not for the "commonplace reader," because such a reader would only find it "hideous" (677).

It is important to consider the possible interaction between such reviews and Lawrence's publishing history in the *Smart Set* since such reviews provide an additional support for the magazine's claims to modernity. This review, in particular, supports what Wright was saying in the magazine about the nature of the "modern." In his first editorial, in March 1913, he explained that "the best writers today" were concerned with "the highways and byways of life itself" and that they drew their characters from "real people—

people who are human, who possess weaknesses, who err—people who are not mere painted manikins [*sic*]” (159). Moreover, Wright had argued that this new attention to reality was not sick but healthy: “A health and vigor is becoming manifest, and with it a demand for stories which deal with life truthfully and frankly” (159). Wright made these comments in the magazine in March 1913. The *New York Times* review had appeared in November 1912, only a few months prior to Wright’s pronouncements in the magazine. Wright’s assertions in the *Smart Set* echoed, in effect, the *New York Times* review of *The Tresspasser*, both critics arguing that realism, especially sexual realism, was recognizably modern.

The *New York Times Review* not only declared Lawrence’s novel to be modern but added that it was “the frankest of serious contemporary novels” and, moreover, that it came near to being “the best” (“Latest” 677). By the time Lawrence’s first work appeared in the *Smart Set*, therefore, his literary project had been praised both implicitly and explicitly, inside and outside the magazine’s pages. Lawrence was, as the *New York Times* reviewer declared, “almost unknown” (677), but, nevertheless, it was readily conceded that this writer had talent and that he represented a new kind of literary endeavour, one which was primarily concerned with the frank representation of life as it is.

Lawrence’s first poetry collection, *Love Poems and Others*, was published in February 1913, and *Sons and Lovers* appeared in May. Louise Maunsell Field’s review of *Sons and Lovers* appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* in September 1913. Field argued that while there was “probably no phrase much more hackneyed than that of ‘human document,’” it was the only phrase which she could think of to describe

Lawrence's "very unusual book" ("Mother" 479). The keynote of Field's review was Lawrence's modernism. Her definition of the modern accords with Willard Huntington Wright's pronouncements in the *Smart Set*. Like Wright, she argued that sexual realism was nothing of which to be ashamed: "Mr. Lawrence has small regard for what we term conventional morality; nevertheless, though plain spoken to a degree, his book is not in the least offensive" (479). This review appeared in the *New York Times* on September 21, and the October issue of the *Smart Set* would have been on the newsstands when it appeared.¹⁵

Lawrence's poem "Kisses in the Train" appeared in the October issue of the *Smart Set* and his poem "The Mowers" appeared in November. It is possible, owing to the timing of the publication of these poems, that the *Smart Set*'s readers may have connected Lawrence's appearance in that magazine to both Field's *New York Times* review and to the reception of *Sons and Lovers*. Whether or not this specific connection was made, both Wright's editorials and these *New York Times* reviews reinforced the same idea: writing realistically about sex was modern; publishing such frankness was modern; and the appreciation of such material was not for the "common" reader.

The idea that modernism was something that only readers with broad minds could appreciate was reinforced in the *Smart Set* through a series of editorials by Mencken, Nathan, and Wright which described various European capitals: Munich, London, Vienna, and Berlin (*Smart Set* April, October, November, and December 1913). These editorials each tested their readers' willingness to accept sexual frankness. Many of these articles appeared in the same issues as Lawrence's poetry or prose, and some actually appeared in

¹⁵ The *Smart Set* was always sent out on the 15th of the previous month.

close proximity to his writing. These articles were subsequently reissued in book form as *Europe after 8:15*. Reviews of this book indicate that the presence of such articles in the *Smart Set* gave the magazine a scandalous but also sophisticated tone. These articles appeared in a third of the issues in 1913 and seem intended to give the magazine more of a European air. In Wright's first editorial to the magazine's readers, he had specifically argued that although American artists were capable of the type of literary experimentation taking place in Europe, they lacked receptive venues for their more experimental work. Proving them equal to their European counterparts would require a magazine "free from the stringent and false conventionalities" ("Something," Mar. 1913 160). This emphasis on remaining aware of literary developments in European literature while supporting the creation of a uniquely native literary product remained, from this time onward, a central tenet of the magazine's editorials and publishing policies.

Wright's article on the night life of Vienna appeared in the same issue of the magazine as Lawrence's erotic poem "Kisses in the Train," with the result that Lawrence's tribute to the sensuality of kissing—"And still in my nostrils / The scent of her flesh" (62)—was accompanied in the body of the magazine by Wright's homage to Vienna, a city which he portrays as having "almost no restrictions, no engines of repression" (104). Wright describes theatre-going, Viennese dinners, and coffee, and concludes with memories of the masked balls with their "murmuring of clandestine whispers" and "the rhythm of swaying girls still in our blood," a "pagan gaiety" which the Viennese "have preserved in all its innocence, its sensuous splendor, its spontaneity and youth" (110). Coincidentally, Wright's comments about the pagan splendours of the Viennese balls echoes the imagery

of the emotions caused by the kisses in the train in the penultimate stanza of Lawrence's poem:

And the world all whirling
 Around in joy
 Like the dance of a dervish
 Did destroy
 My sense—and my reason
 Spun like a toy. (62)

There is no reason to believe that Wright had Lawrence's writing in mind when he composed his entry on the sensuous, innocent splendours of nights in Vienna, but there is also little question that in his editorials he celebrated some of the major themes embodied in Lawrence's work.

The subject matter and style of Lawrence's fiction was again echoed by other contents in the issue for November 1913. This issue contained both Lawrence's poem "The Mowers" and Nathan's essay on the night life of Berlin, which was, as with Wright's essay on Vienna, a celebration of European hedonism. Lawrence's poem is a realistic portrayal of sexual passion and its consequences. In his poem a woman watches a young man in the fields, who is unaware that she is pregnant (12). She recognizes that now she must "claim him once for all" (12). So the child has, presumably, been conceived out of wedlock: "An' a man an' a father tha'tl ha'e to be, / My young slim lad, an' I'm sorry for thee" (12). In this poem Lawrence combines the consequences of sex with a sensitive portrayal of the sexual attraction which lead to this situation in the first place. As the

woman watches the man she admires his strength, grace, and youth: "His head as proud as a deer that looks / Shoulder-deep out o' th' corn" (12). Since all references to pregnancy were edited out of Fitzgerald's story "The Rich Boy" in 1926, Wright's 1913 publication of a poem which contained the phrase "Lad, tha's gotten a childt in me" (12) undoubtedly challenged the boundaries of what was considered permissible in mass-market magazine fiction. That the child was conceived outside marriage would have exacerbated the scandalousness of this poem's publication.

A final example of the sort of interweaving of theory and practice between the content of the magazine's editorials and Lawrence's fiction appears in the February 1914 issue of the magazine, in which Lawrence's "The Christening" is separated by only one page from Mencken's essay "The American: His New Puritanism." Lawrence's story represents the emotions of the various family members at the unorthodox home baptism of an illegitimate child. The situation is portrayed with sympathy and understanding: "the young mother who had given rise to all this solemnity ate in sulky discomfort, snatching bright little smiles at her child, smiles which came, in spite of her, when she felt its little limbs stirring vigorously on her lap" (84). Three pages later, Mencken condemned the narrow-minded, prudish attitude of most Americans toward natural human behaviours: "If there is one mental vice, indeed, which sets off the American people from all other folks who walk the earth . . . it is that of assuming that every human act must be either right or wrong and that ninety-nine percent of them are wrong" (87). Mencken's promotion of liberal attitudes toward sexuality reinforces, and is reinforced by, the close proximity of Lawrence's story on the same theme.

The liberal context for Lawrence's fiction provided within the magazine through its editorials was recognized in articles on the magazine's editors which were beginning to appear outside its pages. As already mentioned, the series of *Smart Set* articles on the night life of various European cities was compiled into book form in 1914 and published by John Lane as *Europe after 8:15*. The book did not sell well; as Mencken notes in his memoir the timing could not have been much worse, "The book, overtaken by the war, which destroyed the Europe it described, was a complete failure" (*My Life* 39). Although the sales of the book were poor, it was widely reviewed, a testament to the increasing renown of its joint authors—Mencken, Nathan, and Wright. More significantly, however, with respect to the magazine's historical association with scandal, the reviews indicate that these three men not only upheld but perhaps even advanced the *Smart Set's* salacious reputation.

In the reviews these three men came to be associated with wickedness (whether this was considered a healthy trait or not depending on the reviewer). The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* asserted that these authors managed "to get plenty of wickedness into the book without becoming vulgar" ("Europe after Dark"); the *Los Angeles Graphic* explained that "immoralities are hinted at broadly" ("Books"); and, under the headline "Three Bad Boys' Wicked Book," the *St. Louis Mirror* declared this book "a wicked book and witty." Some of the reviewers actually chided the authors for not being naughty *enough*. The review in the *Los Angeles Times* for 7 June 1914 was typical in its claim that "these three guardsmen of sex freedom, ready to pinch the nose of prudery and take on a quarrel at any hour, give us to understand that they are a little more conversant with what they didn't

find in Europe after 8:15 than the average Sunday-school superintendent” (“Blase Adventures”). This reviewer confessed that he had expected more wickedness from three men for whom “self-conscious superiority in matters of indelicacy is a stock-in-trade pose” (“Blase”).¹⁶

Most of the reviewers seemed to enjoy the naughtiness of the text, some wishing for more, while a few reviewers viewed the text as overly wicked. The review which appeared in the *Denver News* was particularly harsh; it condemned the book’s writers for displaying “the same spirit that marked the work of the decadents of the last century” (Clippings). They saw the cleverness of the text as a “snare,” declaring that “with a cleverness that might almost be called criminal, a philosophy of pure hedonism is preached” (Clippings). The reviewer particularly condemned the book for promoting European immorality in America: “The cry of ‘art for art’ that went up during the last part of the last century and resulted in such effete and decadent morals in England and France is back of much of that spirit still alive now. It is worse than bad because the badness is not evident. Under the cloak of unconventionality it conceals immorality” (Clippings). This association of the *Smart Set* with the decadents was not limited to this review; indeed, this association was strengthened in 1916 through the promotional copy for Mencken’s book of epigrams, *A Little Book in C Major*, which associated Mencken’s witticisms with those of Oscar Wilde.¹⁷

¹⁶ For other reviews of this sort see “About the World” *Vogue* 15 July 1914; *Chicago News* 26 June 1914; and *Springfield Republican* 7 Aug. 1914.

¹⁷ This comparison between Mencken and Wilde also appeared on the book’s dust jacket. For examples of the book’s promotional copy see *San Francisco Bulletin* 30 Sept. 1916; *Salt Lake City Herald* 8 Oct. 1916; *Rochester Post Express* 23 Sept. 1916.

In his dissertation on the history of the magazine Carl Dolmetsch suggests that while the *Smart Set* had no direct ancestors, one indirect predecessor of the magazine was the London *Yellow Book*, the famed turn-of-the-century publication primarily associated with Aubrey Beardsley (1). Although the *Smart Set* and the *Yellow Book* are very dissimilar magazines, Dolmetsch's analogy is useful since these magazines shared one key characteristic: an association with scandalousness and sexuality which allowed both magazines to promote modern literature in their pages. This association with decadence was tempered, however, in both cases by the moderately scandalous nature of the literature which was actually published. According to Edward Bishop's overview of the reception history of the *Yellow Book*, this magazine managed to attract a mainstream, probably middle class, audience by maintaining a pretence of salaciousness (particularly through the yellow covers which linked the magazine to French fiction) while publishing such popular authors as Henry James and Max Beerbohm. This combination of respectability and scandal allowed the magazine to attract readers interested in acquiring something "mildly daring" while taking some risks in the experimental nature of its content (291). Such a description of content, reputation, and achievement might equally be applied to the *Smart Set*.

That the *Smart Set's* readers equated the sexual permissiveness of the magazine with the modernity of its literature is clearly indicated in two articles from the period. The last issue of the magazine under Wright's editorship appeared in January 1914. The following month the *St. Louis Mirror* declared that under Wright "The Smart Set became the most advanced publication of its sort in the world. It had no morals at all" ("Literature

and Morals”). A few months later, a similar article appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post*. This article discussed the *Smart Set*’s articles on Europe in *Europe After 8:15* as part of a growing movement in support of literary realism:

There are, of course, people who feel that this series of articles was ‘not conceived in the proper spirit.’ They feel, one has no doubt, that life is not conceived in the proper spirit. The literature they read succeeds, at least, in avoiding all possible connection with life. It disapproves and falsifies. Whereas this book accepts and is true. If we are to look for a sane, healthy movement in our literature . . . it is to such a book that we must turn. (“Europe after 8:15”)

This review appeared in mid-1914, the year in which three of Lawrence’s short stories appeared in the *Smart Set*, each of which dealt with life, and with sexuality, in an unadorned, realistic fashion. Lawrence’s “The White Stocking,” for example, is a story in which a young wife contemplates an extramarital affair; at the opening, Whiston, the new husband, watches his wife perform her morning ablutions: “She was a pretty little thing, with her rather short, curly black hair all tousled. She got dressed quickly, throwing her clothes upon her. Everything about her was untidy, but it only made Whiston smile and feel warm She stood before the mirror, half dressed, and roughly scrambled together her profuse, rather short hair” (97). This scene exemplifies what the reviewer in the *Pittsburgh Post* praised in *Europe after 8:15*, the portrayal of life as it is.

Judging by the many reviews of *Europe after 8:15*, it is unlikely that Lawrence’s short fiction was received neutrally by its first American readers. These short stories first appeared in a magazine which thrived on generating controversy, and under Wright and

Thayer's editorship the magazine's traditional notoriety had become part of a specific literary campaign: the right of authors and publishers to deal in "stories which deal with life truthfully and frankly" (Wright, Mar. 1913: 160). The *Smart Set* was officially changing its focus. The transition was not entirely smooth, however; in early 1914 Wright was fired as the magazine's editor. According to Thayer the magazine was losing money, a fact bluntly confessed by Thayer in editorials which appeared in the March and April issues in 1914. In March, Thayer explained to the magazine's readers that "to gather laurels is one thing; to publish a successful magazine is quite another thing" (159). The April issue announced that the magazine would have a new, clean image. Its cover proclaimed, "The Smart Set: Clean—Crisp—Clever." It also announced a "whimsical" essay by Max Beerbohm. Thayer reinforced the new cleanliness of the magazine's image in an editorial in which he explained that the *Smart Set* had "abandoned the sort of fiction which, though approved by literary men and critics, many readers last year criticized as sordid and pessimistic and unnecessarily realistic and plain-spoken" ("Something" Apr. 1914: 160).

The critics were quick to condemn Thayer for his short-sightedness. The same article in the *Pittsburgh Post* which contained a review of *Europe after 8:15* also stated that "Mr. Wright was the editor of the 'Smart Set' who pursued a splendid policy in an indiscreetly enthusiastic fashion, and, suffering for it, has won the deep enthusiasm of those who agree with him" ("Europe after 8:15"). Similarly, the *St. Louis Mirror* article on "Literature and Morals" declared: "The *Smart Set* is nice and lady-like again. And Willard Huntington Wright is doing a department of verse and prose, in every vein, upon

the *Daily Mail*.” This media response to Wright’s dismissal indicated that at least some of the magazine’s readers, if not its advertisers, had appreciated the new direction in which Wright took the magazine in 1913.

Perhaps owing to the pervasive air of scandal built up over the years, Thayer’s plan to clean up the magazine’s image in 1914 did not last long, if it really ever existed anywhere but in his editorials. Thayer’s editorials in which he promised to reduce the number of “realistic” stories were undercut by the fact that much of the fiction bought by Wright in 1913 continued to be published in the magazine. Moreover, in his review columns, Mencken continued his battle against literary censorship and American prudery. Throughout the period of official sanitization, as Mencken characterizes it in his memoir (*My Life* 40), Lawrence’s stories continued to appear in the magazine. The interim editor, Norman Boyer, who was ostensibly responsible for cleaning up the magazine, was actually responsible for buying at least one and perhaps two of Lawrence’s stories (see Lawrence’s *Letters 2*: 197). There was, in fact, never much hope of the magazine cleaning up its image and becoming “clean” and “crisp,” since from the start, like its sister magazine *Town Topics*, it had always been naughty and clever.

Mencken and Nathan

With the onset of war, Thayer’s finances were thrown into disarray and the magazine’s printer, Eugene F. Crowe, gained control of the magazine. He and its new publisher, Eltinge Warner, offered Nathan the editorship of the magazine. Nathan agreed on the condition that Mencken be offered the position of co-editor. With this arrangement in place the two men became the magazine’s new editors in late 1914. The November

issue of the magazine was the first under their joint editorship, although it is difficult to believe that they did not also have a hand in designing the October issue of the magazine. This issue, which contained Lawrence's story "Shadow in the Garden," declared boldly on its front cover "One Civilized Reader is Worth a Thousand Boneheads." The search for an elite, intellectual reader, which had begun under Thayer and been solidified under Wright, continued under Mencken and Nathan and was as much an offensive against readers as an invitation to them.

In October 1914 *The Boston Advertiser* welcomed the *Smart Set*'s return to its openly scandalous nature: "H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan are now editing The Smart Set. . . . They are not members of Anthony Comstock's League for the Emasculation of Literature, and The Smart Set under their management may be expected to divest itself of the fig leaf which it recently donned with so much eclat" (Clippings). The following month, the *New Orleans Picayune* similarly declared, "After a wobbly period, during which The Smart Set did not seem certain whether to remain naughtily clever, or to become prim, proper and dull, it has now decided upon the former course. It has now, as editors, two very witty men" ("Along Literary"). Unlike the many mass-market magazines of the time which emasculated literature through self-censorship, the *Smart Set* used its historical association with scandal to publish stories which portrayed human sexuality with directness and honesty.

Marketing Modernism: Mencken, Conrad, and Pound, 1914-15

In 1926 the esteemed critic Walter Lippmann compared Mencken's essays on American culture to Rousseau's "Social Contract" and Tom Paine's "Rights of Man" (1). He argued that, like Rousseau and Paine, Mencken was able to alter "men's prejudices" (1). Among the educated people affected by Mencken's opinion was one who is commonly acknowledged as the champion of literary modernism, Ezra Pound. That Pound and Mencken respected one another's opinions is apparent in the personal and professional letters that they exchanged for over twenty-five years, from 1914 to 1939. Through their letters they developed a personal and working relationship that extended to Mencken's promotion both of Pound and of literary modernism in the *Smart Set*.

Yet while Pound's relationships with Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*, with Margaret Anderson of the *Little Review*, and with Scofield Thayer of the *Dial* have received ample commentary, this relationship between Pound and Mencken remains a grey zone, earning only brief mentions in their biographies and from articles on literary trends of the day. Their relationship tends to be treated in passing as a sort of personal curiosity—the great guardian of modernism and the Baltimore iconoclast—but their relationship extended well beyond this. The respect that these two men exhibited toward one another's opinions extended into practical application: Mencken published and reviewed many of the key modernist authors whom Pound wished to promote. Together, through the *Smart Set*, they marketed modernism to a popular audience.

This popularization of modernism in the *Smart Set* was facilitated by four key factors: Mencken's personal reputation as a proponent of contemporary literature; the

publication in the *Smart Set* of such European modernists as Pound, Joyce, Huxley, Yeats, and Lawrence; Mencken's accessible criticism of modernist works, especially of books by Joseph Conrad; and, finally, the magazine's close working relationship with Ezra Pound. Before the publication of either *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*, this magazine provided its readers with a detailed overview of modernist literary developments in America and abroad. In this magazine, Mencken not only predicted an American literary renaissance but aided in its reception.

Mencken on the Moderns

In academic criticism H. L. Mencken is not generally portrayed as a proponent of modernism. In general, this disassociation of Mencken from the moderns stems from Mencken's own writing. In particular, in letters to friends, in his diary, and in his memoir, Mencken privately expressed the opinion that *Ulysses* was "deliberately mystifying" (*My Life* 61) and that T. S. Eliot's poetry was not very good (Hobson 246). Such assertions have been used by many of his critics to demonstrate his antipathy to modernism and in particular his unwillingness to tackle the extremely experimental nature of high modernism (see, for example, Fitzpatrick 187; W. H. A. Williams 48; Hobson 246). While there is little question that Mencken did not embrace either *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*, it should be emphasized that he criticized these works late in his career, and in his private correspondence rather than his public writings. I would suggest that the critical emphasis that has been placed on these later, private, opinions has obscured Mencken's role in the introduction and popularization of modernism in America.

In the first place, Mencken's negative statements regarding *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* were opinions which he formed and expressed well after his years as the *Smart Set's* book reviewer. The chronology of Mencken's opinions with regard to modernism is highly significant but rarely discussed. His negative pronouncements on Joyce and Eliot appear in his letters to friends in the 1930s; entries in his diary, which he began in 1930 at the age of 50; and in his memoir, which he began in 1942 at the age of 62 (Hobson 605). The point is that by the 1930s and 40s, when Mencken was expressing negative opinions about the two writers who are associated most closely with the development of literary modernism, he was entering middle age, and all of his opinions, social or literary, were beginning to reflect an age-related conservatism.

It is important to stress that Mencken's condemnations of literary modernism appeared late in his career since, as I will indicate, his later opinions did not correlate with the conclusions that he reached as a younger man and that he expressed in his earlier, public writings on modernism in the *Smart Set*. With the notable exceptions of Gertrude Stein, whom Mencken mocked in his *Smart Set* review column (see "Review of Reviewers" Oct. 1914: 158-59), and D. H. Lawrence, whom he found dull but who, as I have noted, was embraced by the magazine if not by Mencken (see "Public Prints" 143), most of the writers who are considered central figures in the development of literary modernism were both praised by Mencken and, often, also published in his magazine.¹⁸ In

¹⁸ Although Mencken disliked *Tender Buttons*, in his memoir he records that this book did, in fact, have a tenuous connection to the *Smart Set*. It was published in America by Claire Burke [Claire Marie], who was, at that time, living with the *Smart Set's* former editor Willard Huntington Wright (*My Life* 207-10). Although Mencken felt most of the books she published were "rubbish," he records that he found her a "very intelligent woman," and he enjoyed discussing her book projects with her. He frankly admits that

fact, there are few key modernist writers, either Continental or American, who were not promoted—early and regularly—in the pages of Mencken’s *Smart Set* book review column. In brief, the contents of his *Smart Set* review columns suggest that while Mencken would later criticize some of the major modernist works, he was initially receptive to all sorts of literary experimentation. In his fifteen years as the *Smart Set*’s book review critic not only did he praise many of the new techniques now associated with literary modernism, but he was also instrumental in paving the way for their public reception.

W. H. A. Williams argues in his 1977 biography of Mencken that “few American critics prior to the mid-1920s were deeply involved with those problems of form and symbolism that were to become the focal points for so much American criticism in the following decades” (47). Williams places Mencken along with the critics of the period who demonstrated a lack of appreciation for modernist experimentation. He argues that Mencken’s lack of appreciation for “form and symbolism” appears in his lack of interest in the experiments of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce (48). Instead, he argues that Mencken’s strength lay with his awareness of the “cultural and social implications” of a work of art (47). There is little question that Williams is correct in the second of these two assertions; in his war against literary censorship and on behalf of the development of a uniquely American voice in literature, Mencken consistently revealed his awareness of how art and society interacted, and the ways in which they clashed. In subsequent chapters, both of these aspects of Mencken’s criticism will be

he gave negative reviews to most of the books of poetry which she published, but he did, at least, review them (210).

examined in relation to developments in American literature. But my concern here is with Williams's first charge, the assertion that Mencken did not appreciate the major technical developments of the period and that he proved incapable of embracing such writers as Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Yeats. As I will indicate, during his tenure as co-editor of the *Smart Set*, and as the *Smart Set*'s book review critic, Mencken repeatedly demonstrated that he *was* receptive to the work of Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Yeats, and the content of his book review columns reveals that he was attuned to questions of form and symbolism *as well as* the cultural and social implications of a work of art. Moreover, through his technical appreciation of music he not only found a personal perspective from which to evaluate modern art but also developed a critical vocabulary that allowed him to describe some of the new literary developments to a popular audience.

The question of Mencken's relationship to literary modernism should not be confused with his individual strengths and weaknesses as a critic. There is no question that Mencken had shortcomings as a critic. His love of hyperbole and his own strong prejudices prevented him from writing nuanced book review columns, and in his desire to entertain he was capable of writing reviews which were not always particularly astute. Ezra Pound summarized both these strengths and weaknesses of Mencken's criticism in a review of Mencken's *Book of Prefaces*, published in the *Little Review* in January 1918. Pound began by praising Mencken's uniqueness as a critic, suggesting that America had, in him, "at last produced" a critic (10). He went on, however, to explain why Mencken "falls heavily" in his criticism of Henry James: "I venture to suggest, very simply, that Mr. Mencken has read very little of the author, and that he is so intent on his main theme

(wherein he is right in the main) that he has rather warped his idea of James to his own particular purpose" (12). This analysis demonstrates not only Pound's appreciation of Mencken's criticism but also his understanding of the effect that Mencken's prejudices could have upon his critical opinion.

Despite some of Mencken's weaknesses as a literary reviewer, the critical reception of Mencken's *Smart Set* reviews during the teens indicates that Pound was far from being alone in viewing Mencken as a unique figure among American literary critics. At that time Mencken was seen as one of the few American critics who was, specifically, associated with the "new." He was, in fact, seen as a champion of contemporary literature. Several newspaper articles from this time associated Mencken directly with the "moderns." In 1913, in response to one of Mencken's columns in the *Baltimore Sun*, several newspaper columnists nominated Mencken as a champion of contemporary writers. In this column Mencken had disparaged some of the popular British Victorian novelists, then still very much in vogue, in favour of younger contemporary writers. The *Chicago Evening Post* responded on 10 January 1913 with an article titled "Mencken on the Moderns," a second, in the *Boston Globe*, chided Mencken for going too far in his defense of contemporary literature, and a third, this in the *Harrisburg Patriot*, was titled "For the Moderns." This last association would stick. From this point on, in ways unacknowledged by most scholars of literary modernism, Mencken became the chief popular spokesman of literary modernism in America.

The *Post* article "Mencken on the Moderns" noted that Mencken had dismissed such "greatly revered masters" as Thackeray, Dickens, and Scott and recommended,

instead, writers at the forefront of American naturalism: Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, as well as several European writers, including H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, and the then still relatively unknown Joseph Conrad (Clippings). In his original article, quoted at length in both the *Post* and the *Patriot*, Mencken had particularly emphasized the merit of Joseph Conrad's work in comparison to the novels of Thackeray, Scott, and Hawthorne. That this was a controversial position for a reviewer to adopt is clearly indicated in the column in the *Harrisburg Patriot*: "Adding fuel to the old, old fire of controversy between those who see merit in contemporaneous literature and those who see none whatever. . . Henry L. Mencken, of the Baltimore Sun, and one of the best-known literary critics in the United States has taken up the cudgels for the present day writers" (Clippings). The *Patriot* was alone among these three papers in supporting Mencken in his views.

The *Boston Globe* wrote of his views that "there is, of course, some common sense in all this" but then chides him for going too far (Clippings). The *Post* was more moderate in its dismissal of Mencken's views. It defended Thackeray, Dickens, and Scott as "greatly revered masters," but it also granted Mencken his praise for "the writers of the present day" (Clippings). In addition to these newspaper notices, Mencken's opinions also provoked a letter to the *Post*. This letter, which appeared in the *Post* on 17 January 1913, exemplifies the controversial nature of Mencken's support for contemporary writers: "May I add a word as to Mr. Mencken's defence of contemporary writers? It represents a movement that takes place in every generation, and which Walter Pater (who will soon be thrown aside, too) beautifully exposes in his chapter called 'Modernity' in

‘Gaston de Latour’” (How). This letter, along with the articles on Mencken and the moderns, demonstrates that in 1913 Mencken’s praise for the Edwardian writers in preference to their Victorian predecessors was still a highly contested issue. The battle for the later moderns had not yet even begun.

Mencken’s response to such articles, according to his memoir, was his realization that American journalists and critics saw him as the “chief fogleman of a new criticism” (*My Life* 41). His assessment of the popular perception is supported not only by the newspaper clippings that he collected but also by external events: in 1914 he was approached by Doubleday, Page & Co. to act as the “chief fogleman” for a particular contemporary author, Joseph Conrad. As Mencken records the event: “in April 1914, I succumbed to an invitation from Doubleday, Page & Company to join Booth Tarkington and Walter Prichard Eaton in a committee formed to whoop up Joseph Conrad” (41). That Doubleday approached Mencken to promote Conrad indicates both that he was already a well-known critic a full ten years before his heyday in the mid-twenties and that he was indeed, as he himself claimed, recognized as a proponent of modern literature.

In Mencken’s clippings collection there are two ads from the 1914–1915 period (both undated) which link him with Conrad. One of these ads proclaimed in a banner across the top “What Distinguished Writers Have Said of Joseph Conrad.” The list of quotations that follows includes accolades by H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Ford Madox Ford, and the American critic James Huneker. Significantly, almost all of the critics quoted are European, revealing the extent to which Mencken and Huneker stood out in America for their praise of Conrad. Mencken’s quotation appeared in closest proximity to

the name of Conrad's publisher. In the other Doubleday advertisement for Conrad, Mencken is specifically mentioned in conjunction with the *Smart Set*: "H. L. Mencken, Editor of 'Smart Set,' says: A tale indeed! I think it will do a lot for Conrad. It is closer to the conventional novel than anything else he has done, and yet it is full of his characteristic touches" ("World's Work"). This banner appeared at the top of the advertisement; even after the American success of *Chance*, then, it is to be assumed that Mencken's name was far more marketable than Conrad's own.

In this advertisement, Mencken's name and approving quotation were followed by Mencken's signature. The reproduction of Mencken's signature indicates his cultural stature at that time—a stature which reached the fetishism of an autograph: he was already something of a celebrity (fig. 4). By implication, Mencken's name, that of his magazine, and even his signature, had acquired the cultural capital necessary to promote the work of a difficult modern writer. In sum, Doubleday's use of Mencken's name in their publicity material reveals that Mencken's name was a valuable commodity in the promotion and sale of books and in particular of writers who did not have a wide public following. Perhaps more importantly, though, their overture indicates how accurately Mencken assessed his own critical reputation. The evidence in period advertisements and newspaper columns suggests that Mencken was correct to contend in his memoirs that in the early teens he had been considered the herald of a new literature; he was seen as an advocate of modernism.

Ezra Pound

Mencken's reputation as an advocate for the work of contemporary writers was complemented by three separate aspects of the *Smart Set* magazine itself: the publication of modernist writers in its pages; Mencken's reviews of modernist works; and his explanations on how to read and understand new literary techniques. The first of these factors in the *Smart Set*'s promotion of modern literature—the acceptance and publication of many modernist works—began in 1913 through the collaboration of Ezra Pound. The magazine's table of contents for that year shows Pound's unmistakable touch. The first submissions that can be attributed to Pound appeared in the magazine in September 1913. This issue contains six poems by Pound, one of them a tribute of sorts to the city in which the magazine was published, "N. Y." In addition to Pound's poetry, there was a poem by W. B. Yeats, "The Three Hermits," and one by D. H. Lawrence, "Violets." The next issue of the magazine contained poems by both Pound, "Phasellus Ille," and Lawrence, "Kisses in the Train." The November issue contained Pound's "Portrait D'Une Femme," Lawrence's "The Mowers," and Ford Madox Ford's short story "Telepathy." In the December issue, there were eleven of Pound's short poems. As a result, between September and December 1913, there were no fewer than twenty-four separate works by Pound, Lawrence, Ford, and Yeats in the magazine.

Lawrence Rainey argues in "The Price of Modernism" that Pound was interested in having "the principal authors and works of modernism gathered under one roof, including Yeats" (25). In this statement, Rainey is referring to the relationship which Pound formed with the *Dial* magazine in 1920, but the number of submissions which

Pound made to the *Smart Set* in 1913, both for himself and for others, might be an early manifestation of the same desire to see the modern authors whom he promoted gathered in one place. Certainly, this early in his career, he may simply have leapt at the chance to get his work, and that of authors whom he wished to promote, published anywhere. But it would be a mistake to assume that Pound did not, already, shrewdly understand the American magazine industry. Before he formally allied himself with any American magazines, Pound revealed his knowledge of the mechanics of American literary production in a series of essays which appeared in the radical London weekly the *New Age* in eleven instalments between September and November 1912. In this series of essays, titled "Patria Mia," Pound summarized the condition of American art in relation to the facilities of American printers and publishers, declaring that "at no time was there such machinery for the circulation of printed expression—and all this machinery favours a sham" (79). He thus encapsulated for his readers the situation of supply and demand as it existed in America: at no time had there been more printed matter reaching more people, but while the mass-market brought the benefit of a mass audience, it also posed the danger of mediocrity.

Pound realized that the circulation of an American mass-market magazines could prove as much a hindrance to what it published as its philosophy or readership: "art and prosperous magazines are eternally incompatible, for it is the business of the artist to tell the truth whoever mislike it, and it is the business of the magazine editor to maintain his circulation" (44). He contends that American mass-market magazines reduce artists to tradesmen, forced to provide what will fit the scheme of the magazine as a whole, and to

neglect their duty to their art. He compares the role of the artist in mass-market magazines to that of the factory drudge, one man asked “to make screws” and another “to make wheels” (39). He rails against word count restrictions, declaring that “Nature does not give all herself in a paragraph” (40). He notes too that there is the ever-present danger of financial success for artists who sell their art to commercial magazines. He believed that this financial success would encourage them to repeat the same effect in different ways, at the expense of their artistic development (40). As Pound saw it, “the system of magazine publication is at bottom opposed to the aims of the serious artist in letters” (*Patria Mia* 39). But above all, he argues that an artistic “Dark Ages” is inevitable in a country in which the magazines that are considered the cultural leaders are remnants of the previous century.

He argues that there can be no artistic progress, no hope for the kind of American “Risorgimento” in letters that was taking place in architecture, without the provision of respected venues open to the exchange of new ideas. According to Pound, one of the main problems facing the American literary artist at that time was that the most respected mass-market magazines of the time were not open to such an exchange: these were the magazines collectively known in magazines and newspapers of the time as the “Quality” group: *Harper’s*, *Atlantic*, *Century*, and *Scribner’s*. In “*Patria Mia*” Pound lists the first three of these magazines by name, addressing them collectively as these “highly respected and very decrepit magazines” (42). His opinion of these magazines was derived from personal experience, since by 1912 he had had his poetry rejected by both the respected *North American Review* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. The rejection letters that he received

from these magazines confirmed for him that literary innovations had no place in their pages and that, in fact, these magazines would reject anything which did not possess a “conventional form” (43).

In 1907, when Pound was still living in America and was teaching at Wabash College, he submitted two poems to the most prestigious mass-market magazine of the day, the *Atlantic Monthly*. While some of Pound’s early prose pieces had appeared before this time in Philadelphia’s *Book News Monthly*, his familiarity with the mechanics of mass produced periodical literature began in earnest with this submission—and its rejection. Indeed, in “Patria Mia” Pound devoted several pages to an analysis of American mass market magazines based, in large part, on this rejection. While bitterness was no doubt a motive for Pound’s denunciation of American mass-market magazines, he nevertheless provided an acute analysis of the difficulties facing young writers who wished to produce and sell literature written in a new or unconventional manner.

As Pound makes clear, there were only a few magazines in America at that time which were considered the guardians of literary taste, the *Atlantic*, *Harper’s*, and *Century*. The closeness with which these magazines were associated with literary prestige is indicated by Pound though his description of them as the “better magazines” (*Patria Mia* 38). A typical assertion regarding the cultural importance of these magazines appeared in an editorial article in the Christian paper *The Independent* in August 1895. This article bemoaned the presence of ten and fifteen-cent magazines in the marketplace. It encouraged such “higher priced” magazines as *Harper’s* and *The Century* not to compete with such magazines by lowering their cover price but, rather, to maintain the “higher,

purser literary standard which succeeds in securing the best but not the most numerous readers" (21). In addition to the obvious elitism which these comments reveal, such assertions make it very clear that the "quality" magazines were considered bulwarks against the lowering of cultural standards: they were the preservers of a "higher, purer, literary standard."

The reputation for quality that these magazines possessed related to their heritage. That they were considered the guardians of "high" culture had to do with the fact that they were each associated, through their contributors, editors, and even their publishing houses, with the cream of 19th century culture: American contributors such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson; British contributors such as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope; editors such as James Russell Lowell, William Dean Howells, and Henry Mills Alden; the publishing houses of Phillips and Sampson, Harper and Brothers, and the Century Company. In each case, the magazine was associated with the most reputable names that the previous century had to offer. Indeed, as I shall indicate in a subsequent chapter, William Dean Howells, who was both an editor for the *Atlantic* and then, later, a regular contributor to *Harper's*, became such a cultural force in his own right that in 1920 both H. L. Mencken and Willa Cather were still combating his specific views on art and the role of the artist.

The reputation of the *Atlantic* among the magazines in the "quality group" was pre-eminent. In 1892, the popular Chicago semi-monthly *The Dial* (not to be confused with its later incarnation as an avant-garde "little magazine") was typical in its declaration that "the *Atlantic* occupies a place by itself, and stands more distinctly for culture than any

other American monthly” (204). Accordingly, when Pound reflected in 1912 that “at twenty [he] should have counted it some honour to have been printed in the ‘Atlantic’” (*Patria Mia* 44) there is little question of his sincerity. When Pound submitted his poems to it in 1907, the *Atlantic* was still the magazine to which American poets aspired. As Pound himself would later note, the paradox facing young writers in the teens was that the magazines which were the most likely to help them achieve literary reputations were also the least likely to embrace new art. Following the rejection of his poetry in the *Atlantic*, this situation was confirmed for Pound by the subsequent rejection of his poetry by the conservative *North American Review*. Pound described this second rejection in “*Patria Mia*.” In his account Pound relates that he realized that the only way to succeed in the mass-market magazines was to acquiesce to the formulas which they required.

Accordingly, he writes, “I sent them a grammatical exercise, scrupulously correct, and gathered avowedly from the Greek Anthology”; the poems were accepted after they had earned the approval of “an aged member of the American Academy (Mr. Howells, to be precise)” (45). Although Pound had sent them an imitation of the Greek Anthology, it is unlikely that he held them in quite as low esteem as he claims, since the next poem which he sent them was one which he considered his best, “Portrait d’une Femme.” Pound called it “a real poem, a modern poem” (45). The rejection of this poem confirmed his low opinion of the American “quality” magazines.

In “*Patria Mia*” he provides a detailed description of this poem’s rejection. The response to this poem, according to Pound, was a letter in which he was informed that he had “used the letter ‘r’ three times in the first line, and that it was very difficult to

pronounce, and that I might not remember that Tennyson had once condemned the use of four s's in a certain line of different metre" (45). Pound's honesty about his early desire to appear in the *Atlantic* is complemented in this essay by his accurate assessment of why his poetry could never appear there: "It is well-known that in the year of grace 1870 Jehovah appeared to Messers. Harper and Co. and to the editors of 'The Century,' 'The Atlantic,' and certain others, and spake thus: 'The style of 1870 is the final and divine revelation. Keep things always just as they are now'" (42).

In an article titled "American Magazines," which appeared in the *St. Louis Mirror* on Christmas 1919, Maxwell Bodenheim gave an overview of those magazines which he considered were the "American magazines with professed intellectual and aesthetic aims" (Clippings). In this list he included the *Century*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper's Monthly*, but of them he argued that they were "all products of a literary rebellion in the early eighties" and that they did not "seem to realize that another century [had] been entered since their inception" (Clippings). Mencken and Nathan argued essentially the same point in 1923, in their final circular to the *Smart Set's* readers. They declared to the magazine's readers, that when they had taken over the editorship of the *Smart Set* in 1914, one of their primary goals had been to free beginning authors from "the conventional 'quality' magazine with its distressing dread of ideas" ("Pamphlets," EPFL). Pound's and Bodenheim's articles indicate that Mencken and Nathan had been correct in assuming that artists needed a mass-market venue that did not conform to the tastes of a previous century.

In April 1913, Willard Huntington Wright had declared to the magazine's readers that he wanted to make the *Smart Set* "not only the best magazine in America, but something entirely new—the sort of magazine that Europe has been able to support, but which so far has not yet been attempted in America" ("A Word" 160). There is little doubt that this must have been how he described the aims of the magazine to Pound. In his description of their first meeting, Pound later described Wright as an editor who was "determined to buy up the best stuff he could find," an aim which resulted in the publication in the *Smart Set* of the early fiction of both James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence ("Three Views" 11). Pound was well-versed enough in the *Smart Set*'s particular outlook that he incorporated its slogan into a letter to Mencken in 1914; in this letter he promoted the poetry of T. S. Eliot by describing him to Mencken as a poet whose mind was "not primitive" (*Letters* 81). Pound placed the "not primitive" in quotations, thus indicating his specific awareness of the wording which the *Smart Set* used to promote itself. As already indicated, the slogan "The Magazine for Minds that Are Not Primitive" was introduced by its new owner, John Adams Thayer, in an editorial to its readers in October 1911, and appeared on the first page of the magazine from April 1913 to April 1914.

That Pound may have been aware of this direction in the magazine, even before he met Wright, is indicated by the fact that he submitted poetry to the magazine and, indeed, was published there. Pound's sonnet "Silet" appeared in the *Smart Set* in May 1912. That this magazine was, even before Wright's editorship, open to poetic and literary innovation is indicated by the character of "Silet." Pound's biographer, Noel Stock, argues that among his early poems "Silet" was "perhaps his most successful handling of a regular

form, nicely balanced between the demands of natural language and the forward steps of the metre" (101). In this poem there is a feeling for the natural, colloquial language which Pound would later champion in poetry: "It is enough that we once came together, / What is the use of setting it to rime" (122). But Pound had contributed to the magazine even before this; his familiarity with the magazine extends back to 1908, when he first moved to Europe. Humphrey Carpenter notes in his biography of Pound that, having decided to live by his pen, Pound had asked his mother to type up two stories for submission to the *Smart Set* (92). These two stories, "La Dogesa's Necklace" and "Genoa," were not published in the magazine and have not survived, but that Pound had the *Smart Set* in mind as a potential venue for his fiction as early as 1908 and that his poetry in fact appeared there in 1912 indicates Pound's awareness of the magazine and, presumably, of what it contained, before he became its unofficial foreign editor in 1913.

When Willard Huntington Wright approached Pound, he was the second American editor to ask Pound to act as a foreign editor. Harriet Monroe had written to Pound in August 1912 and had asked him if he would be interested in contributing to a new American poetry magazine, to be launched shortly. In return, Pound wrote her to say that he would be more than happy not only to contribute to the magazine but also to act as its foreign editor. He added that she might announce, if she thought it would help, that "for the present such of my work as appears in America. . . will appear exclusively in your magazine" (*Letters* 43). This arrangement would not, however, last long. The reason was hinted at in this letter to Monroe, wherein he encouraged her not to make the "usual 'esthetic magazine'"; he describes these magazines as periodicals which expect "the artist

to do all the work, [pay] nothing and then [undermine] his credit by making all his convictions appear ridiculous” (43). He calls these magazines “worse than the popular” (43). Pound was, at this point, writing “Patria Mia,” in which the mass-market magazines receive most of the blame for America’s current literary state, but this letter to Monroe indicates that he was aware as well of the pitfalls of the little magazines for artists. Certainly, in a few months, he would have the opportunity to show that, in fact, it was possible for an artist to collaborate with a popular magazine, and he would do so at the expense of this newly established relationship with a little magazine.

While Wright was the second American magazine editor to approach Pound with an expressed interest in receiving contributions from him, he was the first editor of a mass-market magazine to do so, and the first to make his offer in person. As I have indicated, when Wright first approached Pound, Pound already had a firm understanding of the American magazine industry. He realized that mass-market magazines, and in particular the “better” magazines, forced their contributors to conform to “certain formulae” (41). Owing to Pound’s attitude toward mass-market magazines it might be asked why he agreed to collaborate with Wright at all. Certainly, the question of money should not be discounted. The *Smart Set* was able to pay Pound more than the other magazines to which he contributed; indeed, when Harriet Monroe later asked him why he had broken their agreement of exclusive American magazine rights, Pound promptly replied that the *Smart Set* paid better (Carpenter 207).

But better payment may not have been the only factor; it should be remembered that only six years prior to Wright’s arrival in London, Pound would have considered it an

“honour” to appear in the *Atlantic*. There is, then, at least the possibility that he had not completely dismissed the idea of reaching a larger audience. In one of his letters to Mencken he indicates that James Joyce’s work not only promised artistic success but might also have success “commercially” (*Letters* 100). While there is some question about this claim, it highlights the fact that Pound did not necessarily separate artistic and commercial success. He recognized the dangers of mass production and the kind of formulaic fiction that could invade the mass-market magazines, but he did not shun the money, or the notice, which publication in a larger venue could bring.

There is another possible reason for Pound’s willingness to co-operate with Wright, and that was the location of the magazine. Pound had, through *Poetry*, established contact with a Chicago magazine, but he had been very clear in “Patria Mia” about where America’s artistic renaissance would take place: New York. He begins, in his very first sentence, with the proscription that no nation can have an artistic renaissance without a “city to which all roads lead, and from which there goes out an authority” (21). He argues that the city that will act as the guide for all others can usually be discerned from its architecture, since architecture is the most practical of the arts (28). There was no question in his mind that the skyscrapers in New York were representative of a new way of thinking, a truly American art: “I have looked down across the city from high windows. It is then that the great buildings lose reality and take on their magical powers. . . . Squares after squares of flame, set and cut into the aether. Here is our poetry, for we have pulled down the stars to our will” (32-33). It would be little wonder, then, if the man who had prophesied in 1912 that New York would be the centre of American creativity—

the source of her “Risorgimento” (42)—appreciated the chance to work with a magazine which was situated there. The likelihood of this reasoning is corroborated to some extent by the fact that the first of Pound’s poems to appear in the magazine after his meeting with Wright was titled, simply, “N. Y.”

In the issue for September 1913, “N.Y.” was given a prominent position in the magazine, after the opening fiction. This poem, and the five published with it, resembled Pound’s “Contemporania,” which had been published a few months earlier in *Poetry*, in that they were “self-consciously modern” (Carpenter 188-89). Pound began “N. Y.” with a homage to the city “My city, my beloved, my white!” but quickly mocks both his love for the city and his archaic manner of addressing her through the unadorned proclamation: “*Now do I know that I am mad, / For here are a million people surly with traffic*” (17). Pound had already, at this point, published his series of “A Few Don’ts by an Imagist” (this list had appeared in *Poetry* in March 1913). Through this proclamation, and through the controversy stirred up by “Contemporania,” he was already known in the American press as a poet who was practising the “new” (see Homberger 98-107). The appearance in the *Smart Set* of such poems as “N. Y.”—with its dissonant combination of the archaic and the colloquial—would have confirmed such an opinion.

Considering Pound’s published views on mass-market magazines *before* Willard Huntington Wright approached him in the summer of 1913, it is suspicious that one of the poems which he submitted to Wright was “Portrait D’une Femme,” the same poem which the *North American Review* had rejected for having too many “r” sounds in the opening line. In giving Wright one of his most modern poems to date he may have been testing the

willingness of a mass-market magazine to promote modernism. The *Smart Set* passed Pound's test, if that is what it was. "Portrait D'une Femme" appeared in the *Smart Set* in November 1913. This poem was, as Pound had said in "Patria Mia," a departure, something new. In his biography of Pound, John Tytell indicates that this was one of Pound's more important early poems; it was "a new sound, a concentrated suavity" (82). Humphrey Carpenter is less effusive in his praise, but still recognizes in this poem Pound's "own most determined attempt at modernity" (170).

"Portrait D'une Femme" found an appropriate venue in the *Smart Set* since the magazine's satiric tone neatly offset the poem's offbeat ode to what Tytell characterizes as a "soiled muse" (82):

Great minds have sought you—lacking someone else.

You have been second always. Tragical?

No. You preferred it to the usual thing:

One dull man, dulling and uxorious,

One average mind—with one thought less, each year. (88)

Not content to submit a poem that had been rejected by one of America's "better" magazines, Pound also submitted a poem *about* them.

As with "Portrait D'une Femme," that Pound submitted "Phasellus Ille" to the *Smart Set* may have been a test of their tolerance, and, again, whether it was a test or not, by publishing this poem the *Smart Set* showed its willingness to thumb its nose at the conventions of the "quality magazines." In essence, "Phasellus Ille" summarizes the ideas which Pound presented in "Patria Mia." This poem, which appeared in the *Smart Set* in

October 1913, condemned the 19th-century reticence of the “quality” magazines, and in particular their rejection of modern poems:

This *papier-maché*, which you see, my friends,
 Saith ‘twas the worthiest of editors.
 Its mind made up in “the seventies,”
 Nor hath it ever since changed that concoction.
 It works to represent that school of thought
 Which brought the haircloth to such perfection (80)

Although it may only be a coincidence, this poem was placed in the magazine beside Mencken’s essay “The American: His Freedom.” Mencken’s condemnation of the puritanical in the American spirit complements Pound’s assertion that the quality magazines of the time promoted the “haircloth” over art.

In their mutual dislike of American Puritanism and of the “quality” magazines Mencken and Pound had something in common before Mencken became editor of the *Smart Set* and before they started to correspond with one another. The association established between Wright and Pound ended with Wright’s dismissal in early 1914; after this Pound contacted Mencken directly, writing his first letter to Mencken in 1914. This letter makes clear that he knew that someone still on the *Smart Set*’s staff was sympathetic to his aims. He asks for Mencken’s suggestions as to which American magazines might accept his work and adds that there is no particular reason that Mencken should wish to help him, unless it is owing to their shared prejudices. He then summarizes those prejudices by quoting one of Mencken’s favourite critical terms for the American

desire to improve life, literature, and morals—the “Uplift” (“Mencken Collection,” NYPL). Through this single word, Pound indicated his familiarity with Mencken’s opinions, and his endorsement of them.

Indeed, Pound’s desire to analyze, and if possible to suggest remedies, for the state of American letters was a lifelong concern which he shared with Mencken. In fact, not long after Pound wrote his series of articles on American culture for the *New Age*, Mencken was contributing a series of articles under the title “The American” to the *Smart Set*. Owing, in particular, to the placement of “Phasellus Ille” in the October issue, as well as Pound’s reference to the “Uplift,” there is good reason to believe that Pound not only saw but very probably also read some of these. He clearly recognized the possibility of a continued relationship. Accordingly, in March 1915 he wrote Mencken to suggest that he publish some poems by Douglas Goldring (“Mencken Collection,” NYPL); in June, he wrote his father to report that he was collecting poetry by Robert Frost and expected to place it in either the *Smart Set* or *Poetry* “before long” (57); and after Mencken and Nathan officially became the magazine’s editors and owners in November 1914, Pound wrote Mencken in order to inform him that he would like to continue receiving copies of the magazine, as he had under Willard Huntington Wright’s editorship, in order that he might stay abreast of its contents. He promises, moreover, to watch for material which would be appropriate for the magazine (20 Jan 1915 “Mencken Collection,” NYPL).

A few days later Pound enclosed one of his own pieces, a “skit” which he suggests that the magazine’s readers might find humorous owing to its similarity to his earlier attack on the “better magazines” in “Phasellus Ille” (22 Jan 1915 “Mencken Collection,”

NYPL). Pound's satire never appeared in the magazine, but his letter reveals an awareness of both the magazine's tone and its contents, including his awareness of how well "Phasellus Ille" suited the magazine's readership. Mencken notes in his memoir that he did not have the chance to publish as much of Pound's work as he would have liked, owing to Nathan's not liking it and both editors having a veto over submissions (*My Life* 63); nevertheless, Pound along with other moderns (whether recommended by him or not) continued to appear in the magazine after Mencken and Nathan took over its editorship: James Joyce in May 1915; Edgar Lee Masters in September 1915; Amy Lowell in April 1916; Frances Gregg, a friend of H. D.'s, in November 1916 and November 1918; and Aldous Huxley in November 1920, January 1922, and April 1923. Pound himself was published in the magazine in July, August, and October 1915.¹⁹

In a letter to Mencken in May 1915, clearly written in response to Mencken's offer of money for his work, Pound notes that he is only recommending friends and that Mencken need not worry too much about payment, adding: "The fact that some editor actually wants the best he can get is a very considerable comfort to me; perhaps we had better let it go at that" (*Letters* 104). Pound thus indicated at least some faith in what the magazine was doing, and, indeed, he continued to recommend authors to the magazine even after he had switched his primary allegiance to the *Little Review* in 1917. Pound agreed to be associated with the *Little Review* in 1916; this agreement was formalized in the *Little Review* in May 1917 wherein he declared himself its Foreign Editor; however, during this same period he was still explaining in letters to authors that he thought he

¹⁹ In *Ezra Pound: A Bibliography*, Donald Gallup argues that the unsigned poem "Reflection," which appeared in the *Smart Set* in January 1916, was probably by Pound (240).

could get more for their fiction “from Mencken” (*Letters* 168). It is clear, too, that Pound stayed abreast of the magazine even after this time, since in the latter half of 1917 he was still writing Mencken to comment on various features of the magazine, praising what he liked, giving notice of what he disliked (in one case an intentionally scandalous feature which Mencken and Nathan ran throughout 1917 called “The Sins of the Four Hundred”), and admitting that he always read Mencken and Nathan, even when he did not agree with what they were saying (3 July 1917 “Mencken Collection” NYPL).

But perhaps Pound’s own most interesting assertion regarding the nature of the magazine came in a letter dated 8 August 1917, in which he suggested that the *Smart Set* might wish to exchange ads with the *Little Review*. Pound acknowledges that such an exchange of ads could only be a present on the part of the *Smart Set* but that it might, nevertheless, help them gain a few readers. Then, in an interesting reversal, he notes that perhaps such an ad would not help them gain any readers since the readers of the *Little Review* “probably read you (tacitly and unadmittedly in the midst of Browning societies) already” (*Letters* 170). Pound’s suggestion for co-operation between the *Smart Set* and the *Little Review*, along with his continued recommendation of writers to *both* magazines after he began his involvement with the *Little Review*, indicates his willingness to promote modernism to a wider audience. Indeed, in a 1918 letter to Mencken, Pound proposed establishing his own European weekly with a circulation of 20,000 to 30,000—a number very close to the circulation of the *Smart Set* and far larger than that of the *Little Review* ([1918] “Mencken Collection” NYPL). Not at all incidentally, he asked if Eltinge Warner, the *Smart Set*’s publisher, might be interested in the project. Pound might, of course, have

been trying to get anyone interested in his project any way he could, but it is important to note that he was interested in a commercial publisher and envisaged a mass circulation.

Pound's interest in finding one venue for himself and for others whom he considered representatives of "modernism" thus manifested itself very early—before his involvement as foreign editor with either the *Little Review* or with the *Dial*. Even after the beginning of his association with the *Little Review*, his letters to Mencken indicate that he still recognized the possibility of at least some modernist writing appearing in popular venues. Recognizing this fact makes it more comprehensible that in 1922, as Lawrence Rainey demonstrates, Pound offered *The Waste Land* to both the little magazine *The Dial*, and the mass-market "smart" magazine *Vanity Fair* (22). He went so far as to cable John Quinn, who was a friend of John Peale Bishop (the managing editor of *Vanity Fair*), to ask what *Vanity Fair* would pay for the poem. Rainey portrays this flirtation with *Vanity Fair* as an oddity in modernist publishing history, but the fact Pound considered *Vanity Fair* as a potential venue for *The Waste Land* becomes more comprehensible when it is recognized that *Vanity Fair* was similar in both style and content to the *Smart Set*.²⁰ As I have indicated, while Pound may have wanted all the modernist authors under one roof, he did not necessarily insist that they appear in a small avant-garde venue. Indeed, through his co-operation with the *Smart Set*, some of the first manifestations of the modernist movement in America were both avant-garde and commercial.

²⁰ Rainey explains Pound's overtures to *Vanity Fair* by indicating that Pound was looking "forward to modernism's future" (34); he argues that Pound foresaw "the ease and speed with which a market economy could purchase, assimilate, commodify, and revindicate the works of a literature whose ideological premises were bitterly inimical towards its ethos and cultural operations" (34). This is a reasonable explanation, but it neglects the fact that Pound had *already* realized that modernism and the mass-market need not be incompatible. By 1922, this was not modernism's future; it was its past.

Joseph Conrad

The principles that arose in Mencken's relationship with Pound were prefigured by Mencken's criticism of Conrad; owing to his astute analysis of Conrad's prose, Mencken was familiar with some of the primary tenets of modernism before he met Pound. A complete understanding of why this magazine was able to support Pound and his fellow modernists in 1913 and following, in both reviews and through publication, requires an analysis of how Mencken's criticism of Conrad's work acted as an analogue to his later explications of modernism, and especially of Pound's literary projects. In his *Smart Set* book review columns Mencken brought an early, and sustained, attention to Joseph Conrad's career, a fact which made him unique among American book reviewers. As Norman Sherry's book *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* makes clear, Conrad was virtually ignored by American reviewers in the early teens. Mencken avidly followed Conrad's early career, and in 1908, when he became the *Smart Set's* book reviewer, his columns were liberally strewn with praise for Conrad's work. As Fred Hobson indicates, Mencken "lauded Conrad more frequently and more lavishly than any other writer" (102).

In fact, in "Oyez! Oyez! All Ye Who Read Books," which was only his second book review column for the *Smart Set*, Mencken was already reviewing Conrad's work. This column appeared in the issue for December 1908. Mencken began his review with a caveat about the dangers of offering a positive review of contemporary work. He notes that reviewers who praise contemporary writers risk being humiliated by such men as the popular British critic Andrew Lang who might use the review as an occasion to "[set] up a laugh" at the reviewer's expense (153). As a young book reviewer, writing his second

book review column, Mencken indicated that he understood the possible ramifications of his positive review, but that he was more than willing to challenge the literary establishment anyway. In his introduction, Mencken specifically mocks Lang (and by implication all critics who agree with him) for his tendency to dismiss new writing on the basis of its newness, and not owing to any considered analysis. To both demonstrate and demolish this unthinking antipathy to contemporary writing, Mencken provides a mock commentary of the sort he suggests Lang writes when confronted with new writers: “A genius?” he cackles. “Go to! . . . The novelists of today may be men of talent (never having read their books I can’t be certain about that), but there are no geniuses among them. Of that clan, Sir Walter was the last!” (153).²¹ Thus meeting the major objection to his review, he proceeded to devote most of his column for that month to a review of Conrad’s *Point of Honor*. At the start of this review column, Mencken situated his review of Conrad within a wider debate concerning the state of recent literary production and the battle, waged in every era, between those who claim that no contemporary works could possibly measure up to those already produced and those who embrace the new.

Mencken firmly placed himself in the second camp by declaring Lang to be mistaken in the belief that that there had been no literary geniuses since Scott and by proceeding to name some of them. Mencken’s list of contemporary literary geniuses included Mark Twain (who died two years later in 1910), G. B. Shaw, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Joseph Conrad (153). In this, his first review of Conrad, Mencken

²¹ For another example of the kind of criticism mocked by Mencken in this 1908 review see the unsigned review of *The Secret Agent* which appeared in *Country Life* in 1907. In this review, the reviewer declared that although Conrad had been widely praised by reviewers *The Secret Agent* didn’t compare to anything written by Scott or Thackeray (Sherry 186).

declared not only his praise for Conrad but his faith in contemporary literature, through his assertion that in the tales written by Conrad there were some which came “dangerously near being unique in English literature” (154). As examples of these, Mencken lists *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Typhoon*, and *Nostramo* (154). Of *Youth* he unabashedly declared: “If there is a better story in the world today . . . old or new, grave or gay, in any living or dead language, I will cheerfully undertake the study of that language on receipt of the news” (154).

It was, in particular, in his reviews of Conrad that Mencken focused on some of the major literary developments of the day. These included new methods for portraying psychological states, the lessened importance of traditional characterization, non-linear plots, and the replacement of totalities with fragments. Although Mencken did not describe these phenomena in terms common today, he managed to create a critical vocabulary which allowed him to begin to describe and, more importantly, to explain the intricate workings of new literary techniques to his readers. In these explanations Mencken would often employ musical metaphors; he was a pianist and played with the Saturday Night Club for most of his life. As his biographer Fred Hobson records, Mencken considered music to be the most perfect art form and regretted that he did not have a greater talent for it (41). His use of music as a metaphor for describing Conrad’s technical innovations appears most prominently in his review of *Chance*, which appeared in the *Smart Set* for March 1914. This review is characteristic in that it is not so much a review as it is a precisely constructed lesson. In this case, Mencken’s pedagogy has a

very precise goal: to aid his readers in understanding how to read and appreciate Conrad. More broadly, this is a very early lesson in how to read modern literature.

In this article, "The Raw Material of Fiction," Mencken explains that over time the basic materials of fiction have not changed, even if some of the forms and styles do not appear familiar. He begins by introducing the reader to the idea that melody is the key component of music and story the basic material of fiction. He notes that in some cases this raw material is so perfect "in substance and in pattern" (153) that the basic story or unadorned melody provide perfect satisfaction with no need of embellishment. As examples of this phenomenon he cites Twain's short story the "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and "Stille Nacht," explaining of these "they are as primitive as Aesop's Fables or the first book of Genesis, but nevertheless it is unimaginable that any reinforcement of their naked simplicity could improve them, or even fail to spoil them" (153). He notes, however, that such pure melodies and stories are rare and that as a result most authors are forced to take stories that cannot stand alone as works of art and to reconstruct them (153).

In order to explain how a melody, or a story, may be transformed into art, Mencken uses the example of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony:

The opening movement of the greatest orchestral work ever written . . . has nothing at the bottom of it save a little melody of two tones, one of them three times repeated—a melody so childishly simple that one has to stretch the meaning of the term to call it a melody at all. And yet, out of that austere material, Beethoven constructed a piece of music so noble and so beautiful, so rich in

imagination and so lofty in style that it remains today, after more than a century, a masterpiece that no other man has ever equalled. (154)

As with his earlier references to Twain and to "Silent Night," Mencken uses a familiar, nonthreatening example from the past in order to explain how art is constructed.

This introduction to his main subject occupies almost a full page and a half of Mencken's review. The amount of space that Mencken devotes to this carefully detailed explanation of how fiction is produced indicates his awareness of the extent to which his readers would need to be prepared for what he will say in his review of *Chance*: "All of which may serve as overture to a few discreet remarks upon the subject of Joseph Conrad, an artist who falls far short, perhaps, of the Beethoven stature, but is still a fair match for—well, let us say Brahms" (154). Having made Conrad the equal of one of Europe's greatest composers, Mencken goes on to explain the nature of Conrad's compositions: "Conrad belongs to the second class of storytellers that I mentioned a moment ago. That is to say, his actual story, thrilling though it may be, is always a great deal less important than the way he tells it" (154). Mencken thus not only ties Conrad closely to Beethoven and Brahms in terms of stature as an artist, a controversial enough claim, but makes it clear that as a writer Conrad does with words what a composer does with music. This stress upon the method of production leads into the next transition in Mencken's carefully planned lecture.

In the next section of this review, Mencken expands upon his earlier assertion that for Conrad what mattered was not the story but the manner of its telling. He provides an example of what he means through a description of *Typhoon*, in which he contends that

although the story has many exciting elements—a storm, a battle among the crew—that the drama and effectiveness of this story result from the developments in the “mind of Captain MacWhirr” (154). At this stage of the review Mencken thus moves from a discussion of story and melody into a discussion of how these things, despite being the raw material of music and fiction, might be secondary. Mencken indicates that the interaction of psychological elements could be more dramatic and more material to the overall effect of the story than conventions of plot and action.

Such an assertion contradicted most of what was standard in Conrad criticism at the time. Over and over again, reviewers in England, and those few who noticed Conrad in America, stressed that despite the annoying difficulty of Conrad’s technique if you ignored or otherwise got past the barriers which he threw in the reader’s way, an entertaining story remained. The review of *Lord Jim* which appeared in the *Daily News* in December of 1900 was fairly typical in its assertion that while the story was confusingly told, “apart from these faults, which are, after all, merely defects of style, the story is powerfully enthralling” (Sherry 124). The *TLS* review of *Youth, Heart of Darkness*, and *The End of the Tether* in 1902 similarly chides him for the damage which he has done to his tales of the sea through the “precious” manner in which he wrote these tales (Sherry 137). This tendency to separate the matter of the story from the manner of its telling, and to condemn the latter, also appeared in Robert Lynd’s review of *Chance* in the *Daily News* in January 1914. Lynd described Conrad’s tediously slow plot development: “It is as though, instead of showing us an inhabited house, he bade us observe van after van coming up to the door and disgorging the furniture” (Sherry 271), concluding that if

Conrad had chosen to tell his story “in the ordinary way” he might have reduced the length of the novel by half (271). These were standard criticisms of Conrad’s work in the teens. Accordingly, Mencken was radically departing from much criticism of the time by suggesting that while the story may be the raw material of fiction, it might, in fact, be less important than the manner in which the author was telling it.

Mencken elaborates upon this controversial premise in the next section of his review:

As I have said, the mere story, to such a novelist, is of secondary importance. The thing he demands of it is not that it be novel and enthralling in itself, but that it lend itself readily to artistic development. . . . Just as Beethoven, in the Fifth Symphony, began a fragment of tune so primitive that it scarcely had any separate existence at all, so Conrad is in the habit of using the most commonplace materials of melodrama. (154)

Having argued that for Conrad the story is secondary to style, Mencken takes his argument one step further by declaring that in Conrad’s fiction the story itself was usually clichéd.

Mencken describes how Conrad had employed the hackneyed fable of the “white man who sheds his civilization when thrown among savages” no fewer than five times, noting that Conrad’s “primary material is conventional blood and thunder, and in other hands it would probably make us smile” (154). He thus moves his readers through a logical progression that takes them from the idea that the story is the raw material of fiction to the fact that Conrad’s stories are clichéd, even silly. Mencken thus shifts the

focus of his review away from plot, a major difference between his review and most others of the period. He does not shy away from the description of Conrad as a great teller of tales, the most common description of Conrad in both countries over his entire career (see, for e.g., Sherry 53 and 356). This description of Conrad as a great storyteller was one of the most persistent strains in his critical reception, and Mencken too describes him in this way. Where Mencken differs from most reviewers of the period is that he follows his description of Conrad as a “true genius spinning yarns” with the qualification: “But not, of course, simple yarns—not yarns as yarns are ordinarily understood. The fascination of a Conrad story lies, not in its merely narrative elements, but in its interpretative elements” (156). In contradiction of most of Conrad’s reviewers at the time, Mencken thus argues that way the tale has been written, and not the tale itself, deserves the most praise.

The next section of the review exemplifies Mencken’s early understanding of some of the primary developments in literary modernism. He begins this section with the seemingly paradoxical suggestion that in his novels Conrad helps his readers to “see” what is “least upon the surface” (156). Mencken describes the visible unseen in these novels as “the subtle play of forces in the dim region of human motive and emotion, the inordinately tangled reactions between will and environment, the blind and irresistible play of the cosmic currents” (156). In noting Conrad’s concern with the psychological Mencken was not alone; many reviewers noted Conrad’s interest in the human psyche. It is the next sentence which departs from much of what had been written: here, Mencken describes Conrad as “a psychological polyphonist, an explorer of strange disharmonies, of

startling progressions, of inexplicable overtones” (156). This description might as easily be applied to Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.

In acknowledging that the “disharmonies,” not the harmonies, are what make this novel a work of art, Mencken helped a popular audience to understand one of the main innovations of literary modernism. He used the metaphor of music to explain something beyond explanation—art that is intentionally “inexplicable.” Through his reference to “strange disharmonies” he captured both the fragmentary nature of this art and the “startling” effect of its unexpected juxtapositions. These statements are, I believe, early stabs at what Marianne Moore would later summarize as the necessity for modern art to embrace the “raw material . . . in / all its rawness and / that which is on the other hand / genuine” (“Poetry” 41). While Mencken acknowledged Conrad’s ability to master the raw material of fiction, he also recognized that there was another factor at work—something which was more properly “the genuine.”

Mencken’s struggle to explain this new literary effect, his heavy reliance upon musical metaphors, indicates the lack of available terminology with which to describe such effects in *literature*. Mencken was certainly not alone in this regard. Reviews of Conrad’s work tended to invoke metaphors, a means of describing something new before a critical vocabulary for modernism had properly developed. The most common metaphor for Conrad was that of a careful artisan. So the 1900 review of *Lord Jim* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* characterized him as an architect (Sherry 123); the 1902 *Athenaeum* review of *Youth* characterized him as a clockmaker (Sherry 137-38); and in his 1914 review of *Chance* in the *Nation*, Edward Garnett described Conrad as a weaver. More literally, and

less charitably, this idea of Conrad as a weaver also appeared in an American journal, the *Critic*, in 1901. In their review of *Lord Jim* they described the plot as “a fat, furry spider with green head” spinning a web “with side tracks leading, apparently, nowhere, and cross tracks that start back and begin anew and end once more” (Sherry 127). Sometimes Conrad’s disparate metaphorical professions combined in single reviews, so that in John Masefield’s review of “Youth” and “Heart of Darkness,” for the *Speaker* in 1903, Conrad is described both as a tree planter and a spider (Sherry 141-42).

Through such imagery, between the turn of the century and 1920, reviewers constantly implied that Conrad’s stories might be understood if they were only taken apart, unwoven, or pruned. While all these reviews acknowledge Conrad’s skill as a craftsman, in one way or another they still tended to revolve around an analysis of his plot, agreeing that it was either well-constructed and brilliant or well-constructed and confusing. As I have indicated, where I believe Mencken’s review departs from many of these reviews is in the fact that his metaphor does not contain the same concentration upon plot. Mencken does not deny the importance of a good story and in fact chides Conrad for allowing the plot of *Chance* to “lose direction and clarity” (156); but, in stressing Conrad’s “strange disharmonies,” his “startling progressions,” and his “inexplicable overtones” (156), Mencken shifts the focus away from the common perception that the key to reading Conrad was to figure out how the various plot elements intertwined. Instead, Mencken indicates that there’s something about these stories which not only cannot be untangled but was not meant to be. He insists that the effect of Conrad’s style flows from its revelation of the “inordinately tangled reactions between will

and environment" (156). This is no knotted web, or unweeded garden, or clock in need of fixing; Mencken's description of the novel makes it clear that the inordinate complexities of this structure are inextricable from its meaning. As with the interplay of themes in Beethoven's Fifth, the form is the function.

In this appreciation of Conrad's method in terms of musical composition Mencken was, in fact, explaining the modernist project in words synonymous to Pound's own explanation of the new literature. Although Pound was discussing sound, not method, it is significant that he employed a similar musical metaphor in 1912 in the introduction to *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti*, where he described the possibilities for modern poetry by explaining that "when we know more of overtones we will see that the tempo of every masterpiece is absolute, and is exactly set by some further law of rhythmic accord" (xxi). Pound further contended that the rhythm in a single line of poetry "connotes its symphony, which, had we a little more skill, we could score for orchestra" (xxii). Owing to Mencken's own musical knowledge, his use of musical metaphors in his description of *Chance* was likely a personal choice; however, it should be stressed that he was almost certainly familiar with this description of modernist literature. Mencken had reviewed Pound's *Sonnets and Ballate* in the *Smart Set* for April 1913.

There is no question that to some extent both Mencken and Pound attempted to explain the technical experiments of literary modernism in the same terms. They both saw, and tried to explain, the fact that the new literature would no longer rely as much upon plot as upon style. Both Mencken and Pound thus attempted early explanations in careful, albeit metaphorical terms, for the changes taking place in modern literature. Although

Mencken has often been portrayed as a critic incapable of understanding the basic revolutions of modernism, he not only understood them but also explained them to his readers. His motive was a popularizing one, and it is important to stress that when he found an author he thought was worth reading, he not only recommended that writer to his audience, but where the writer might be considered difficult, he also gave his readers the necessary tools to help them understand that writer. This, too, was uncommon.

The review of *Lord Jim* which appeared in the *Daily News* in December 1900 was typical of many Conrad reviews throughout the early teens in its assertion that “the obstructions set in the way of the reader are many” and that Conrad confronts his readers with a narrative which wanders “back and forth, up and down, . . . in a fashion that can hardly be described as lucid” (Sherry 124). The *Times Literary Supplement* expressed a similar concern with the fate of the reader in their review of *Nostramo* in 1904. This review argued that Conrad unnecessarily tortures the reader: “What we maintain is that a writer of Mr. Conrad’s genius . . . should not have to ask us to accompany him, backwards and forwards, through such a labyrinth of South American politics and the careers of so many persons” (Sherry 165). They grimly conclude that “many readers will never survive it” (Sherry 165). The main concern for these reviewers, as with many others, was with the unnecessary confusion Conrad created for his readers. Many simply concluded, as did the *Manchester Guardian* in a review of Conrad’s stories 1902, that “it would be useless to pretend that they can be very widely read” (Sherry 134; see also 93 and 111).

The uniqueness of Mencken's response to Conrad's writing is particularly apparent in his insistence that anyone might read and enjoy these novels and that everyone should. Mencken acknowledged the complexity of Conrad's prose and the difficulty of his stylistic techniques, but he did not use these as a reason to condemn the novels or to insist that they might not suit the common reader. His response attempted to educate his readers into an awareness of the techniques that Conrad employed and his reasons for employing them. First, he let them know that they would likely be confused by some of the new literature, as he himself had been. In a column on *Lord Jim* in the *Smart Set* for January 1912 he wrote: "The first time I read 'Lord Jim' it exasperated me, the second time it fascinated me, the third time it staggered me. It is, in a sense, unique in English fiction. It is Dumas and Stevenson raised to the dignity of Athenian tragedy" (154). Into this statement Mencken neatly incorporates the idea that this fiction may require not only careful reading, but rereading in order to be understood. But he clearly indicates that the effort is well worth it. In his review of *Chance* he went even further in encouraging the common reader.

In essence, he proposed the first *Coles Notes*: "As it is, the Conradian neophyte must read [*Lord Jim*] twice to get at its true greatness—once to gather in the bare substance of the story, and once to search out the extraordinary twisted and elusive paths of its inner content" (156). He argues that the difficulty of reading Conrad would be lessened if his publishers set forth "the author's principal materials in advance" (156). In effect, Mencken proposes that introductory notes should be appended to Conrad's works in order to explain the plot and main themes in advance. He explains that such notes

might help “Conrad’s publishers to that popularization of him which they plan” (156).

Such comments indicate Mencken’s particular interest in finding ways to introduce worthy but difficult art to those who might not otherwise learn to appreciate it.

The championing of difficult art that Mencken undertook in his early reviews of Conrad’s novels anticipated his later attitude toward Pound and the other moderns. In his reviews of modern literature he attempted to explain to his readers the significance of what they were reading and what made it different from the literature that they had seen before. This was particularly true of Mencken’s reviews of Pound’s work, although it also appeared in his reviews of other modern poets. Mencken recognized the newness of Pound’s literary project in his very first review of Pound’s work. In his review of *Provença* in the *Smart Set* for April 1911, Mencken noted that there were plenty of flaws in this volume but overall that it was “one of the most striking [volumes] that has come from the press in recent years” (166). He adds that Pound is “a poet with something to say and with the skill to say it in a new way” (167). The following year, one of Pound’s poems would appear in the *Smart Set*, thus making it not only one of the first magazines to praise him in his homeland but also one of the first to publish him.

Mencken’s second review of Pound’s work appeared in his spring poetry column in April 1913. It was a short but immensely favourable review of Pound’s translations of Guido Cavalcanti. Mencken wrote: “Next time we meet, by the way, I hope that Mr. Pound will be on hand with some of his own compositions. He is an excellent translator, but a far better poet” (151). As Pound would later write in a letter to Scofield Thayer, on 9 October 1920, “Mencken and *that* Wright were the America that discovered me, . . . the

Smart Set under their imperium was the first American publication to show me any favour” (Sutton 157). The magazine had, indeed, not only published Pound’s early work but had provided positive criticism to go with it.

The praise and publication of Pound at this time was by no means an uncontroversial matter. Pound was condemned in several American venues as the head of a group of poets interested only in destroying the traditions of art (see Homberger 98-107). Typical of the norm was Lewis Worthington Smith’s article “The New Naivete” in the April 1916 *Atlantic Monthly*, which described Ezra Pound as the embodiment of the “egotistic self-consciousness” that is a “primary motive in the new movement [in poetry],” a movement which wishes to be “endowed so that they may escape the need of writing to please the public” (491-92).

One of the main problems in promoting the new literature was that there did not exist a critical vocabulary capable of describing it. As Homberger indicates in his overview of Pound’s reception history, “Few critics in 1908 talked in terms of craft of artistry, or thought of poetry as something consciously made, whose procedures should be subject to careful scrutiny: critics were looking for ‘sentiment,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘vision,’ ‘sincerity,’ and ‘taste’” (6). Mencken’s third major contribution toward the acceptance of modern work was his offering a critical vocabulary which attempted, however crudely, to grapple with problems of form, and the importance of technique, even over subject matter.

Through his reviews of Conrad’s work, Mencken reinforced his praise of Pound and the other moderns by providing a critical context in which to appreciate their work. So, for example, in the issue for May 1915—the same issue of the magazine which

contained James Joyce's *Dubliners* stories, "The Boarding House," and "A Little Cloud"—Mencken described Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* as "stanzas of irregular metre and length" which resulted in a "true poetry, albeit as gnarled and unadorned as the pioneers it celebrates" (154). This appreciation of Masters's "gnarled" poetry was followed with a review of the Imagists.

Mencken explained the objectives of these "rebellious ladies and gentlemen" by quoting Amy Lowell on their desire to do away with all the restrictions of old forms and to find "new and striking images, delightful and unexpected forms" (154). He quotes her at length on the subject, so that there is no confusion for his readers about what she means:

Take the word "daybreak," for instance. What a remarkable picture it must once have conjured up! The great round sun, like the yolk of some mighty egg, *breaking* through cracked and splintered clouds. But we have said "daybreak" so often that we do not see the picture any more, it has become only another word for dawn. The poet must be constantly seeking new pictures to make his readers feel the vitality of his thought. (154)

Having thus summarized the substance of the Imagist movement, and its aims, Mencken writes, "A sound enough idea, and, what is more, it actually seems to be producing excellent poetry" (154). He recommends the volume *Des Imagistes* to his readers, in particular the poems by Amy Lowell, Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, and Ezra Pound. He also recommends Lowell's *Sword Blade and Poppy Seeds*.

In such reviews, Mencken took somewhat obscure poetic theory and translated what these poets were trying to accomplish into colloquial terms. Typically, his description of their poetic project was conveyed with verve: “The aim of poetry is ‘to heat-up an emotion until it burns white-hot’—and that sort of heating up is not to be done in corsets, hoop-skirts, straight-jackets. Give the poet room!” (154). Often, such reviews would overlap with the content of the magazine so that both content and commentary acted together to exemplify the modernist project.

This type of conjunction between content and criticism occurred in the issue for October 1915, which contained Pound’s poem “Her Little Black Slippers,” and Mencken’s review of Willard Huntington Wright’s *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*. In his review Mencken described the historical overview provided by Wright in terms which should have been familiar to the magazine’s regular readers and which were similar both to Pound’s introduction to *Sonnets and Ballate* and to Amy Lowell’s prefaces to *Some Imagist Poets*. Mencken explains that the various movements in modern art, from Cubism to Futurism, have essentially the same goal: they seek to “rid painting of its old subservience to decoration and story-telling, and to stand on its feet as a pure art, like music” (154). Again, as with his review of *Chance*, through his review of Wright’s book, Mencken teaches his audience what to expect from modernism: “novel and exquisite harmonies, of complex and yet inflexibly orderly polyphony, of rich and ingenious instrumentation, and of dynamic variety. There is no more meaning or purpose, in the conventional sense” (154). With regard to the importance of form, in particular, Mencken stresses the “intrinsic beauty of the arrangement of lines, masses and colors” (154).

It should be remembered that in 1915 Mencken was co-editing the *Smart Set*, the man responsible for suggesting that art should be judged by the arrangement of its masses and colours was also responsible, that same month, for printing Pound's lines:

At the table beyond us;
 With her little black slippers off;
 With her little white-stockings'd feet
 Carefully kept from the floor by a napkin. . . . (134)

While this poem is clearly not one of Pound's best, it exemplifies Mencken's point. The significance of this poem lies in its colour contrasts: in the image of the black shoes and the white stockings.

Mencken's reviews between 1915 and 1919 demonstrate a continued connection to Pound's modernist projects, even after Pound had switched his main allegiance to the *Little Review* and directed fewer pieces to the *Smart Set*. The main indication that Mencken retained an interest in what Pound was up to appears in the number of times he reviewed books by authors patronized by Pound. Even when he didn't like a modernist volume, as was the case with his review of Alfred Kreymborg's *Others* in May 1916, he still acknowledged the importance of discussing the project, and even of promoting it. Mencken notes, "searching it diligently, I can find nothing properly describable as poetry, but all the same it is diverting stuff, and the pother over it will do some good" (311). His *Smart Set* notices of the modern poets included praise for Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems* (*Smart Set* Feb. 1917, 396) and even, despite his later opinion of him, for T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock*. In his poetry review column for June 1918, Mencken provided a very

brief, but extremely favourable, review of Eliot's work, declaring that "Eliot is extremely exhilarating" (143). He notes that this volume has been heavily promoted by "Dr. Pound" (143). A similarly brief but favourable review of Joyce's *Chamber Music* appeared in the *Smart Set* in April 1919; Mencken describes the poems as "caressingly melodious" and attributes this effect to Joyce's Irish heritage ("Notes" 141).

A Progressive Publication

Although Mencken is not now associated with the promotion of the "moderns," these reviews indicate how closely he followed the developments occurring in modern literature, whether in painting, prose, or poetry. While Mencken himself openly confessed many times that he did not consider himself a good judge of poetry—and even titled one of his *Smart Set* review columns "Notes of a Poetry Hater"—he still both published, and explained, many of the modern trends in poetry in the *Smart Set*. Most of the time he defended the "new poetry," although he was also capable of friendly mockery when he thought the poets were taking themselves too seriously. Of Pound, in 1919, he wrote: "Pound is so steadily and heroically indignant that he usually leaves one with the notion that all poetry is evil, including even the kind he advocates" ("The Coroner's" 139). But such jabs were rare. In general, Mencken supported and promoted the new experiments in poetry, and both he and the *Smart Set* were recognized in that capacity at the time.

By the end of 1913, this magazine's association with literary modernism was well-enough known that it was beginning to be noticed by American journalists. A comment in the *Boston Transcript* assessed it as follows: "The *Smart Set* during the past year or so has been gathering laurels unto itself as a unique magazine for those who desire to keep

abreast and ahead of modern literary currents” (“Writers and Books” 9). This comment was reproduced in the *Smart Set* in March 1914, under the heading “Gathering Laurels”; this was the same issue of the magazine that contained D. H. Lawrence’s short story “The Shadow in the Rose Garden.” A similar assessment appeared in the *St. Louis Mirror* on 13 February 1914. In an editorial titled “Literature and Morals” the editorialist declared that under the editorship of Willard Huntington Wright the *Smart Set* had become “the most advanced publication of its sort in the world” (Clippings). The magazine was gaining a reputation for modernity.

Such sentiments were corroborated by Ezra Pound in a letter to Harriet Monroe in 1918. Pound provided this summary of the magazine:

I dont scorn the S.Set crowd, for I remember that Wright did his best with the magazine. . . . No other American magazine of our time has made as gallant an effort. Not that Wright’s ideas are mine, but he was going the limit, as he saw it, and he was accepting the stuff on its literary value as he understood it, and damning the public’s eyes. (*Pound/ The LR 202*)

Although it was less colourfully worded, the *New York Globe* provided a similar assessment of this magazine’s relationship to modernism in 1919, declaring that “Mencken is undoubtedly one of the first men of letters of the land. Just now he and George Jean Nathan edit the Smart Set. And with a certainty unmistakable the publication is taking its place as the foremost progressive contribution to modern literature in the world” (Clippings). This magazine that is not now associated with the promotion of literary modernism was, nevertheless, recognized by its contemporaries as a venue for the

publication and promotion of modern literature—as a magazine at the centre of the literary
fray.

The *Smart Set* and Nativism: The Example of Joyce's *Dubliners*, 1915

In his recent overview of mass-market magazines in turn-of-the-century America, Richard Ohmann argues that these magazines regulated the “ways culture was to be received” (159). He suggests that mass products tend, by their nature, to mold and define the social and cultural expectations of their audiences. Indeed, this ability of mass-market magazines to establish and promote their own cultural agendas was recognized very early in their history. In the *New York Evening Post* on 27 February 1918 an article titled “What Is the Matter with Our Fiction?” argued: “As for the fiction of our magazines, which are the real creators of our literary tastes, Mr. Holt aptly emphasizes the fact that the stories they purvey are published with an eye to the advertising patronage accruing from big circulations rather than the aesthetic interests of the cultured reader.” As this article indicates, commentators in the early 20th century recognized that mass-market magazines occupied a vital, if often abused, position within the cultural marketplace. They realized that these magazines were the creators of “literary taste.” It is within this commercial and cultural context that I wish to explore the significance of the fact that James Joyce’s first published work in America appeared in the pages of a mass-market magazine, the *Smart Set*.

Joyce’s connection to the *Smart Set* was established by Ezra Pound. On 15 December 1913, in his first letter to Joyce, Pound explained that he collected manuscripts for two American magazines, *Poetry* and the *Smart Set*. He indicated that the *Smart Set* wanted “top notch stories” and encouraged Joyce to submit something to them (Ellmann, *Letters* 326 vol II). As a result of this letter, in May 1915 “A Little Cloud” and “The

Boarding House” appeared in the *Smart Set*.²² What made the appearance of these two stories in a commercial magazine particularly remarkable is hinted at in the same article in the *New York Evening Post* when its writer criticizes American mass-market magazines for their disregard of foreign fiction:

Mr. Mencken, in his piquant way, speaks of seeking comfort in reading the literature of “less pious countries.” But how many of our literary reviewers follow his example? How many of them seem to have any notion of what the world has done and is doing in their line? Mr. Mencken and a scattered handful of others are the exception that confirms the rule. (“What Is”)

This neglect of foreign literature in American mass-market magazines was one indication of the period’s intense nativism. As the definition of “nativism” suggests, during this period in American literary and social history the interests of the “native” population were actively protected from the intrusion of “strangers,” both in the literal sense, from the intrusion of immigrants, but also in more abstract terms, from the intrusion of foreign literature.

In *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, John Higham notes that between 1905 and 1915 Americans witnessed the arrival of more than 650,000 immigrants from Europe every year, adding “at no time in the nineteenth century

²² Mencken’s letter to Joyce of 20 April 1915 indicates he would have liked to print more stories from *Dubliners*, but he was under the impression that it was shortly to be published, preventing him from printing more: “Dear Mr. Joyce: Two of your stories *The Boarding House* and *A Little Cloud* are in the May *Smart Set*. I am having two copies of the number sent to you by this post. We were unable to take more because the American publisher of ‘*Dubliners*’, Mr. B. W. Huebsch of 225 Fifth Avenue, New York, planned to bring out the book at about this date. . . . I think you are fortunate to get into the hands of Mr. Huebsch in this country. He is one of the few intelligent publishers in New York” (Gilbert, *Letters* 79).

had such numbers crossed the Atlantic” (159). More specifically, historians tend to agree that in a society politically and culturally dominated by Protestant immigrants (particularly the Boston elite) the arrival between 1820 and 1924 of over 4.5 million Irish, most of whom were Catholic, led to strained, if not overtly hostile, relations (Purcell 31-33). Indeed, in April 1915, one month before Joyce’s appearance in the *Smart Set*, the circulation of the vehemently anti-Catholic journal *The Menace* reached a high point of 1.5 million readers (Higham 200).

Within this historical context, Mencken and Nathan’s decision to publish James Joyce’s *Dubliners* stories was something of a literary manifesto. In effect, their decision to publish these stories, in conjunction with their editorials, informed their readers that they ought to notice not only what this young man was doing but what others like him were doing. In brief, they invited their readers to ask, as this columnist asked, “what is the matter with our fiction?”; and they invited them to ask this question with knowledge of “what the world has done and is doing.” By so doing, in pre-war America, Mencken and Nathan used their magazine as a sort of literary Ellis island, introducing foreign voices to its shore; many of those voices were Irish, one of them belonged to Joyce.

American Nativism

In early 20th century America, Irish immigrants were regarded with particular suspicion. In addition to the prejudices which arose against them in response to their Catholicism, they also faced a negative backlash from the fact that they tended to settle predominately in the cities, places associated with crime and labour unrest. Lawrence McCaffrey argues in his overview of Irish immigration to America that in turn-of-the-

century America, agrarianism had an almost mythic status: "The farmer was the quintessential citizen. At best, cities were a necessary evil. Jeffersonian liberals, populists, and Republicans all treasured the rural lifestyle and viewed cities as alien and evil" (54). Both Irish and Jewish immigrants suffered through their identification as urban settlers, an association which, at the time, developed into the "association of an alien place with alien people" (McCaffrey 54). Moreover, the strong Irish political presence in many cities in the East and Midwest confirmed nativist opinion that both the cities and the Irish were un-American dangers (McCaffrey 54). According to McCaffrey this tendency to perceive the Irish as un-American interlopers with no part in the founding myths of the nation, did not diminish until, at least, the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 (39; see also Purcell 33).

This anti-Irish sentiment included a belief that Irish immigrants threatened American culture. According to Higham, feelings of cultural protectionism reached a high point in the 1890s and then again in 1914 (158; 266). In each case he notes that the most intense flare-ups of nativism in the United States were linked, not surprisingly, to periods of national crisis: "Sectional cleavage came to a head in the 1850s, class cleavage in the 1890s. World War I confronted an unprepared nation with the shock of total war" [ii]. He argues that a general sense of displacement in each of these periods contributed to an overwhelming loss of confidence in the "homogeneity of American culture" [ii] and that Americans reacted by rallying against "symbols of foreignness" [ii]. The universal need to find stability and unity in periods of upheaval and uncertainty led to overtly political debates regarding the place of the "foreigner" in American literature and in American life.

In 1892, in a poem published in the *Atlantic*, its former editor, the highly respected intellectual Thomas Bailey Aldrich, expressed ideas which would remain representative of the prevalent attitudes regarding immigration issues right up to the declaration of the restrictive Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Moreover, through his wide-ranging portrayal of the threat posed by immigration, in this poem he indicates how something specific and concrete could, within heated rhetoric, be equated with something more abstract—the invasion not only of foreign people but of foreign *ideas*. From this excerpt from his poem, *Ungarded Gates*, it is not difficult to see how the arrival of immigrants was transformed into a threat to American culture. His final stanza reads, in part:

Wide open and unguarded [*sic*] stand our gates,
 And through them passes a wild motley throng –
 Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
 Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
 Malay and Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
 Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
 Those bringing with them unknown gods and rites,
 Those tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
 In street and alley what strange tongues are these,
 Accents of menace alien to our air (57)

Purcell says of this poem: “The new nativists were not simple-minded, uneducated working-class people who feared Catholics and therefore all foreigners, but rather, as Aldrich illustrated, they were people who feared and loathed the influence of cultures and

foreign ethnic groups that might accelerate changes taking place in American society” (76-77). It is worth noting that the “Kelt” are here listed among the feared: people who, if possible, should be kept on the other side of well-guarded gates.

The “ungarded gates” of this poem are a culturally significant metaphor. Aldrich’s idea of guarding the gates encompassed the lobbying for greater restrictive measures engaged in by organizations such as the Know-Nothings, the American Protective Association and, later, the Ku Klux Klan, but it also extended into the exceedingly more genteel, but no less ideologically motivated, gate-keeping apparent within popular culture. In *Selling Culture*, Richard Ohmann clarifies the protectionist role of the mass-market magazine in early 20th century America: “Magazines served the important function of introducing new ideas, perspectives, attitudes, styles. . . . [They] exercised a framing, agenda setting, gatekeeping role (358-59). In his analysis of stories published in some of the most popular ten and fifteen-cent magazines, Ohmann indicates that the gate-keeping role of these magazines is evident in the fact that few stories in these magazines dealt with ethnic minorities. When such characters did appear, it was rarely in the role of hero or heroine; instead, they tended to remain comic extras.

Generally, when Irish characters appeared in mass-market fiction they were portrayed as stock criminals, maids, or drunkards. Occasionally immigrants were permitted a more central role in the story, but it was only occasionally. Ohmann’s survey of the fiction in *McClure’s*, *Munsey’s*, and *Cosmopolitan* from 1895-97 and 1902-03 revealed only two examples of stories in which wealthy characters fell in “love with poor immigrants” and married them (320). One of these two stories, “The Great Northeastern

and the Cow Girl" (*Munsey's Sept.* 1903), involved an Irish immigrant. In this story "Kathleen Reilly is a seven-year-old urchin with a brogue when she stirs an apparently enduring affection in an aristocratic boy by knocking him cold with a stone after he insults and dares her" (320). When the hero meets her again, eighteen years later, "Kathleen has been transformed in speech, manners, appearance, and mind by four years of college" (320). She still has her Irish temper—she's characterized as a "good fighter" (320)—but the other refinements gleaned through college, including the loss of her brogue, render her a fitting mate, fitting because less stereotypically Irish and more stereotypically "American."

The situation had not improved by 1915 when Joyce's stories were published in the *Smart Set*. Only a month after Joyce's *Dubliner* stories appeared in the *Smart Set*, *Harper's* contained a story which exemplified Irish stereotypes in fiction from the turn of the century had not been modified; this story, William Foster's "Herdsman of the Deep," appeared in *Harper's* in June 1915. The story concerns an American who signs up as part of a cattle crew. He will escort a herd of cattle on a ship which will take them from Boston to Liverpool. He is joined on this trip by a cast of characters which includes "Switz," "Liverpool," and "Reddy Ryan." These three men, as may be inferred from their names, represent the ship's European destination. "Switz," is a quiet character who is particularly kind to the cattle. He does not speak to his fellow workers. "Liverpool" is not bright, but generally well meaning; he speaks with a heavy Liverpool accent: "E 'ave care" and so forth. "Reddy" Ryan does not generally speak to his co-workers, but when he does he uses expressions such as "Ar, ye blatherin' pup ye" (91). According to the common stereotypes in mass-market fiction at the time, it is taken almost for granted that

the Swiss character is reticent, and somewhat mysterious, the English character is voluble and friendly, while “Reddy,” the Irish character, is a “drunk” (90) and a “bully” (91) who is always looking for a fight (91). Accordingly, when for no reason he starts to abuse “Liverpool” and then, after Liverpool leaves, approaches another group of men hoping to cause “a fight” (91), no motivation for his action is given, or required. “Switz” is so annoyed by “Reddy’s” behaviour that, out of character and to everyone’s surprise, he hits him (91). While all of the men in this story are identifiable as “foreigners,” both the English and Swiss characters are portrayed as different but acceptable, while the Irishman is shown as a belligerent drunkard who ceases to be a problem only when he lies “flat on the deck, with blood trickling from under his mustache” (91).

Such stereotypes were so persistent in mass-market fiction that the trends outlined by Ohmann in turn-of-the-century fiction were essentially unchanged in the 1940s. In their 1940 study “Majority and Minority Americans: An Analysis of Magazine Fiction,” Bernard Berelson and Patricia Salter examine how American minority groups were being portrayed in popular fiction. Their examination of short stories in several mass-market magazines, including the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier’s*, the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and *Cosmopolitan* from 1937 and 1943, reveal that although “minorities” made up 40% of the American population, they were only present in 10% of the fictional population of the short stories (173). In contrast, they note that the majority of all the characters portrayed in magazine fiction were “white Protestants with no distinguishable ancestry of foreign origin” (174). Berelson and Salter label this group of characters “The Americans” since “that is the stereotypic designation for this type of ‘unadulterated’ person” (174).

In contrast to these “unadulterated” Americans, they note that the most commonly stereotyped racial groups were African-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Irish-Americans (179). The common stereotype employed in the portrayal of Irish characters was their tendency to be emotional. As an example of this tendency they provide the following quotation as a typical example: “Ellen—who, being a Celt, was easily moved—flew out of the kitchen, saw a fraction of David’s face, and burst into a flood of tears” (180). The characters identified as “others” tended to be portrayed in “disparaging” terms and almost always possessed jobs that were on a lower socio-economic level than the American characters (179). Berelson and Salter argue that the relegation of characters from visible minorities to worse occupations than the “American” characters implied that they “belonged there” (182). In addition, Berelson and Salter indicate that “the others” were portrayed far more often than the “Americans” in “illegal and ‘suspect’ occupations” (183). In sum, Berelson and Salter declare that in mass-market fiction the “American” characters “made more money, lived more comfortably, had better occupations, gave more orders. In these stories, the world belonged to them, and they ran it” (185).

The heterogeneity of these stories was often reinforced in these magazines by the editorial articles that accompanied them. It should be remembered that most of the general monthlies of the time printed nonfiction articles along with their fiction. If the “Americans” ran the world in the short stories in these magazines, they also did so, more overtly, in the editorials that appeared in the same issues. Trends in these editorials have been documented by Rita Simon and Susan Alexander in *The Ambivalent Welcome: Print Media, Public Opinion and Immigration* (1993). This comprehensive overview details

the portrayal of immigrants in the American print media over 110 years, from 1880 to 1990. Simon and Alexander include a large sampling of monthly mass-market magazines in their survey, including the *North American Review*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Of the first two of these magazines, Simon and Alexander note that the majority of the 50 articles on immigration in the *North American Review* between 1880 and 1940 favoured immigration restrictions, mainly because they felt that these new immigrants, unlike the ones who came before, would be "less able to assimilate into U.S. society" and therefore "more likely to contribute to the population of lunatics, paupers, criminals, and subversives" (233); they describe the *Saturday Evening Post* as "the most anti-immigrant magazine in the survey" (234).

In the quality magazines theory was most closely linked to practice since these magazines included among their readers and contributors the officials who drafted national immigration policies (Simon and Alexander 233). Simon and Alexander note that until the 1920s, most of the articles in *Harper's* concerning immigration were first-person, romanticized accounts about settling in America (121). The magazine's editorials were, thus, slightly patronizing but relatively benign. In contrast, most of the immigration articles appearing in *Scribner's* were "pro-restrictions" (123), and the "vast majority" of immigration articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* were "negative in tone" (126).

Typical of these, Simon and Alexander cite an *Atlantic* article from 1896 titled "The Irish in American life" which explained that "A Celt is notoriously a passionate, impulsive, kindly, unreflecting, brave, nimble-witted man; but he lacks the solidity, the balance, the judgment, the moral staying power of the Anglo-Saxon" (289). This article,

in fact, was sympathetic to Irish immigration. Nevertheless, the author argues that “the best results from Irish immigration will probably be found where the Irish blood has been mingled with that of the native American” (300). He argues that this assimilation will help Irish art since “The Celt, though artistic by nature, is almost never a good artist. He has the sense of beauty—that is the gift of nature; but the sense of form, which is only in part the gift of nature, and which depends upon a trained judgment, upon self-discipline, upon hard continuous work, he lacks” (300).

Such editorials were still appearing in the *Atlantic* in 1915, when Mencken and Nathan were publishing stories by Irish authors in the *Smart Set*. Significantly, in 1915 these articles were still suggesting, as they had in the 1890s, that immigrants posed a threat to not just to America’s people and its economy but to its culture. In “The Modest Immigrant,” Agnes Repplier argued that “the immigrant seldom brings in his intellectual baggage anything of use to us”; rather, immigrants were liable to “retard [American] social progress, and thrust [it] behind the more uniformly civilized nations of the world” (308). The Irish were given considerable attention in this overview of the threat posed to America by its “foreign-born” (See 305-06). Since the stories published in these magazines were being chosen, or at least approved, by the same people who were publishing, and even writing, negative editorials on immigration, it should not come as a surprise that many of the stories which appeared in mass-market magazines between 1890 and 1915 were heavily biased in favour of “American” characters, and relegated “the others” to small, stereotypical roles.

The ideology behind this trend culminated, after Wilson's declaration of war in 1917, in the idea of "100% Americanism." As Higham records: "By converting the negative term 'unhyphenated Americanism' into a positive and prescriptive one, writers and orators of the war years created the expression '100 per cent Americanism'—never before had the urge for conformity blended so neatly with the spirit of nationalism" (204-05). Joyce's appearance in the *Smart Set* thus occurred during a period of intense, increasing nativism. His writing appeared in the pages of a commercial magazine at a time when most of the gate-keeping mechanisms of American society were working to keep such things out.

James Joyce

So far, I have suggested that in pre-war America immigrants, actual and fictional, were not welcome. The threat posed to American cultural uniformity by the "foreign" people living in their midst was overtly controlled through agitation for greater government restriction of immigration levels and more covertly established through the comfort and control of a fictionalized nation of homogenous people. Essays, poems, and fiction in both the general family magazines and in the "quality group" tended to support this ideal of cultural uniformity. In contrast, Mencken and Nathan published Joyce's *Dubliners* stories, fiction which dealt specifically with the accurate portrayal of *Dubliners* as seen by one of them.

Joyce's realism in the *Dubliners* stories was essential to their socio-political effect. Unlike portrayals of Irish characters typified by Foster's "Reddy" Ryan in the "Herdsman of the Deep," Joyce's stories attempted to provide an accurate portrayal of working-class

Dubliners. As Michael Faherty argues in “Heads and Tails: Rhetoric and Realism in *Dubliners*,” the effect of these stories is one of “realism or naturalism,” even though Joyce signals throughout that the “external omniscient narrator is not in control” (377). So, for example, Faherty cites the passage in “A Little Cloud” in which Chandler takes “four or five sips from his glass” (“Little Cloud” 132). Faherty argues that such lines are central to understanding the particularly strong sense of authenticity created by these stories. This sentence contains the mundane details of Chandler’s behaviour, but, more importantly, it completely removes an omniscient narrator: why “four or five”? Is the narrator not certain? In general, Faherty suggests that except for the endings of the stories, at which point the tone shifts to one of strong authorial intervention, Joyce goes to great pains to record only what the characters themselves, or their fellow Dubliners, might have noticed (Faherty 377-78).

This technique of extreme objectivity even extends to the fact that in “A Little Cloud” Joyce does not describe the interior of the bar until “Little Chandler’s eyes have adjusted to the bright colors and lights” (Faherty 379). Faherty argues that this removal of the narrative voice was consistently, and conscientiously, employed by Joyce; in his revisions of his early drafts Joyce edited out sentences which tended towards either narrative intrusion or “sentimentality” (381-82). Although the *Dubliner* stories each end with an abstract, rhetorical flourish by the author, the content of the stories generally establishes a tone of “sober normality” (Faherty 385). Realism was, in itself, a rare commodity in mass-market magazine fiction. As previously noted, in *On Native Grounds* (1942) Alfred Kazin argued that “the thin ranks of American realists [had] looked to the

Smart Set for the work of their fellows” (78). But in the context of portrayals of Irish characters in mass-market fiction, the importance of these stories is that Joyce’s almost obsessive objectivity provides believable Irishmen.

The characters of these stories are well-defined individuals, not stereotypes. In fact, in their individuality they are capable of mocking standard Irish stereotypes (Faherty 383); as an example of this phenomenon Faherty cites the passage from “A Little Cloud” in which, as he walks, Little Chandler thinks to himself: “the English critics, perhaps, would recognize him as one of the Celtic school by reason of the melancholy tone of his poems” (“Little Cloud” 130).²³ The individuality of these characters extends to differences in their idiom; the vocabulary and syntax of each story is calibrated to the level appropriate to the characters in each story (Faherty 381). So, for example, the language and style employed by the narrator of the “Boarding House” has been “[toned] down” to a level appropriate to Mrs. Mooney and her daughter Polly (Faherty 381); the narrator’s speech is thus almost indistinguishable from that of the story’s characters. The narrator records: “Mrs. Mooney was a butcher’s daughter” (“Boarding” 93); the same directness appears in Mrs. Mooney’s thought: “He had simply taken advantage of Polly’s youth and inexperience: that was evident. The question was: What reparation would he make?” (94). As a result of Joyce’s attention to the realism of these stories, instead of being confronted by the standardized Irish characters—with their “Ar, ye blatherin’ pup ye’s”—of

²³ Mencken may have missed the irony in this allusion since he fell prey to the same sort of generalizations. In his review of Joyce’s *Chamber Music* in the *Smart Set* for April 1919, Mencken attributed the “caressingly melodious” nature of these poems to Joyce’s Irish heritage (141).

most American mass-market magazine fiction, the *Smart Set's* readers were confronted by individuals, in objective settings, whose speech and thoughts seemed "real."

These stories not only included non-stereotypical portrayals of Irishmen but were also *by* one of them. As the *New York Evening Post* article quoted at the beginning of this chapter indicates, American mass-market magazines were not only neglecting the inclusion or accurate portrayal of foreign characters, they were also ignoring foreign fiction. The two were closely related. During a period of cultural protectionism neither foreigners nor their literature was particularly welcome. The rarity of European fiction in American magazines at this time is revealed in the frontispiece for the *Little Review* in December 1920, on which Margaret Anderson declared, "Remember: the *Little Review* was the first magazine to reassure Europe as to America, and the first to give America the tang of Europe." Since the *Smart Set* had been publishing European fiction since 1913, a year before the *Little Review* was founded, this claim is not correct, but it does indicate that even as late as 1920 there was still resistance in America to foreign fiction, and it was still considered an oddity to publish European fiction in an American magazine.

Richard Dolmetsch indicates that among American magazines the *Smart Set* was unequalled in its publication of foreign authors (120). Through a comparative index of the foreign contents of the *Dial*, the *Little Review* and the *Smart Set*, he reveals that between 1914 and 1923 the *Smart Set* published more foreign authors than even the little avant-garde magazines (Appendix D 167-70). In fact, he contends that owing to the *Smart Set's* large percentage of foreign contributors and to its sizable circulation, there is reason to suggest that "more Americans came into contact with more European writing in *The*

Smart Set than in any other periodical of general circulation in the decade before 1923” (121). He demonstrates that Mencken and Nathan published no fewer than 303 contributions by foreign authors (109); a large percentage of these were Irish. The *Smart Set*’s Irish contributors included the playwright Lord Dunsany, Oliver St. John Gogarty (the original for “Buck Mulligan” in Joyce’s *Ulysses*), Padraic Colum, James Stephens, Leonora M. Ervine, Frank Harris, and the Irish-American critic Vincent O’Sullivan (115-16).

That the publication of such authors was considered a threat to American culture is revealed through a series of articles that appeared in the *Boston Transcript* in 1916. These articles conflated the threat of actual immigrants, the related threat of foreign literature, and also the threat posed by the *Smart Set* through its introduction of foreign literature to American audiences. As these articles make clear, American cultural protectionism in the pre-war years extended to include anything “foreign”—whether people or literature. The article for 24 June was typical. It began:

Now that we are clearing up our minds as to what Americanism is, it appears that there is a literary Americanism, and it may be that an American aesthetics will be developed. To meet the full crest of Americanism, there must be sympathy in our emotions and even in our tastes—no hyphenated symbolism must be allowed to get itself mixed up with our patriotism. The Irish-descended mayor of Boston—that far-sighted chief magistrate of ours, who recently favored mooring the interned German steamships in the lower harbor—had provided a store of sprigs of green for the marching militia on the way to Framingham. But this attempted hyphenation

of the Fighting Ninth was repudiated on the spot by its responsible commanding officer. ("Listener")

In this passage the sneering condemnation of an actual immigrant, the "Irish-descended mayor of Boston," is thus directly linked to American culture and, more specifically, to American literature.

Later in the same article, the writer repeats this conflation of immigrants with foreign literature: "The literary Americanism is most signally and loyally shown in the *Dial*, the Chicago literary fortnightly In the midst of the great foreign population of the Middle West it does not yield an inch to the hyphenate" ("Listener"). Immigrants (the hyphenates) were linked to the erosion of culture in the literary magazines, so that, according to the logic of this article, the *Dial* was a respectable magazine because it did not "yield" to these people or to their literature. In contrast, the editorial suggests while the *Dial* "holds to the primacy of the old gods of New England in literary affairs" the same cannot be said of the *Smart Set*.

According to this writer, the *Smart Set* introduced a corrupting, New York-based influence into American culture: "The high-flavored fare spread by the Menckens and Nathans and Hunekers, the joy of Bohemian restaurants and young literary circles of Manhattan, does not captivate the Lake metropolis" ("Listener"). This comparison between the respectable *Dial* and the reprehensible *Smart Set* includes a discussion of the immorality favoured by foreigners in their fiction and in their entertainment. They describe such material as "the 'fleshly,' which the hyphenates so relish in foreign fiction and drama (easily read by them, of course, in the original tongues, they being either Russian or

German or Jews themselves)” (“Listener”). The distrust of foreigner, and foreign fiction, thus extends especially to foreign fiction in the original language. Since the *Smart Set* contained an untranslated French story in every issue, it is not surprising that in this article the magazine is dismissed as the “polyglot school in New York” (“Listener”).

The threat posed by the *Smart Set* through its association with foreign literature was also addressed in articles appearing in February and April 1916. Both of these articles made accusations similar to the above. In the article of 18 April 1916, the editorialist particularly censured Mencken for praising young writers and foreign fiction: “Youth, it seems, as well as a nose for the noisome in foreign fiction and plays, is another requirement of the Mencken standard” (“Listener”). In response to Mencken’s criticism, they mock his conclusion that there is a general lack of American “acquaintance with foreign literature and foreign criticism.” They counter this assertion with the comment that “The trouble apparently is, that there are not as yet, a sufficient number of Menckens and Nathans . . . to go round among the American press” (“Listener”). To Mencken’s assertions that Americans should be better informed about foreign literature they contend that Mencken himself is a hyphenate (as a German-American) and therefore liable to make that sort of pronouncement. They conclude that such criticisms give cause for “genuine alarm” as “our old American literary gods [are] punched and knocked about in this way”; they note that Grace Ellery Channing may have had a point in her poem “New England” when she declared “Keep our country Ours” (“Listener”). It would be difficult to provide a clearer example of how American nativism conflated people and literature: nothing “foreign” was welcome.

Since the *Smart Set* was held up for particular ridicule in such reactionary articles it is reasonable to assume that it was perceived as one of the primary promoters of what the *Transcript* had labelled “polyglot pornography” (“Listener” Feb. 1916). That the *Smart Set* came to be so strongly associated with the promotion of European literature had something to do, as these articles indicate, both with what was actually published in the magazine and with Mencken and Nathan’s support of such literature in their editorial columns. However, these critics were also annoyed by Mencken and Nathan’s association with the “joy of bohemian restaurants and young literary circles of Manhattan” (“Listener”). This comment is an important addition to their other, more straightforward criticisms of the magazine since it does not draw attention to the specific contents of the magazine itself. Instead, it associates its editors with a certain lifestyle. In so doing, the editorialist indicates the importance of the magazine’s reputation beyond its actual contents.

This reputation for bohemianism was specifically cultivated by Mencken and Nathan in the magazine’s pages since it was this particular image which would best oppose their magazine to the provincialism that was keeping foreign writers out of many other American magazines. In the teens, cosmopolitanism was invoked as the opposite to nativism. This was the case, for example, in Randolph S. Bourne’s *Atlantic* article “Trans-National America,” which was published in that magazine in July 1916. In this article Bourne argued that Americans should accept immigrants as “threads of living and potent cultures, blindly striving to weave themselves into a novel international nation, the first the world has seen” (95). He believed, however, that this ideal of multiculturalism would not

be accepted with ease: “no reverberatory effect of the great war has caused American public opinion more serious solicitude than the failure of the ‘melting pot.’ The discovery of diverse nationalistic feeling among our great alien population has come to most people as an immense shock” (86). He concludes that perhaps it is left to the “American of the younger generation to accept this cosmopolitanism, and carry it along with self-consciousness and fruitful purpose” (93). Bourne thus suggests that cosmopolitanism was the key to racial tolerance, a liberal ideal that would welcome cultural variety in America.

With reference to the publishing history of the *Smart Set*, this distinction between cosmopolitanism and nativism is an important one since it was a distinction actively invoked by the magazine’s editors. Mencken and Nathan firmly associated themselves with the trappings of cosmopolitanism, in opposition to nativist ideals. Their magazine was specifically designed to attract and keep readers who would consider themselves cosmopolitan. It accomplished this end by inviting and publishing foreign submissions, by writing controversial editorials in support of foreign literature, and, finally, by appealing directly to the sophistication of their readers. In their editorials and through their publishing decisions, Mencken and Nathan invited their readers to realign their cultural expectations: a realignment designed to include a knowledge and appreciation of foreign literature.

Within this cultural and historic framework, it seems likely that Mencken and Nathan’s publication of “A Little Cloud” and “The Boarding House” in the *Smart Set* was not only an aesthetic decision. Their publication of this work, and the work of other Irish writers, combined with the contents of their editorials to form a protest against nativist

thinking, a protest which they expected their readers to share. Both the magazine's increased circulation²⁴ during this period and the attention its editorials received in newspaper articles indicate that this protest *was* shared by a growing body of readers and a growing body of critics; most importantly, both groups noticed.

In October 1911, Nathan wrote an article for the *Bookman* titled "Why Manuscripts Are Rejected." At this time he was the *Smart Set's* theatre critic in addition to his regular freelance work for other magazines, including *The Bookman*. He was not yet a magazine editor, but he was clearly familiar with the magazine trade. As his title suggests, in this article he indicates to prospective writers why they might expect to have their manuscripts rejected. His first reason, naturally enough, refers to the quality of the manuscript, but after that his advice hinges upon the economics of running a successful magazine, noting that "the business side of a publication is of quite as much importance as the literary side (despite the cries of "Treason, treason!")" (145). Accordingly, he advises the writer to be familiar with the editorial policy of the magazine to which the manuscript will be submitted. By way of illustration he wrote:

If a magazine has made a pioneering financial success of itself by printing only the "happy ending" species of fiction (however much you, individually, may rail at such fiction), and if its group of readers have indicated by their constant purchase of the publication that they desire such tales, it would be childish business policy for said magazine to change its tested order of things and purchase and print stories with sombre endings. (145)

²⁴ The net sales of the *Smart Set* in January 1915 were 35,285; in July they were 45,637 (*My Life* 56). Joyce's appearance in the *Smart Set* thus occurred during a period of *increasing* circulation.

Nathan was, thus, fully aware of the potentially negative, even fatal, impact upon the economic health of a magazine which resulted from going against business sense in the choice of manuscripts.

Indeed, he concludes his comments with a concession to the extraordinary power of the buying public in determining what it is possible for magazine editors to publish: "It is not given to the editors of to-day to mould the tastes of their readers. To a preponderant degree 'What Our Particular Public Wants' is the unwritten sub-title of every magazine published, every breathing, living, successful magazine, that is" (145). He acknowledges that the commercial side of the magazine trade will mean that some manuscripts of exceptional merit will not be published. "Why?" he asks. He answers: "Because they are rejected by the taste (equivocal, deplorable, maybe!) of the American public. *Magazine literature, in America, reflects the current taste of the people.* It does not, cannot lead that taste" (146). Nathan is unequivocal concerning the fate of any successful magazine that tries to change the taste of the people who read it. But he allows himself a small window for the rescue of exceptional manuscripts through his reference to our "particular public."

In establishing the cosmopolitanism of their magazine, which would form the image that they projected on their "particular public," Mencken and Nathan depended upon the distancing techniques available to them through humour. They revelled in hyperbole and they managed, through sheer showmanship, to get away with some very blunt criticisms, not only of American culture but of their readers themselves. A typical example of this sort of attack appears in Mencken's *Smart Set* review column for July

1915. In the course of a single paragraph in this review he managed to insult the intelligence of almost every American reader, provide a quick synopsis of American literary history, defend post-impressionism and naturalism, criticize American education, and praise foreign literature. And he entertains. This single paragraph was, for Mencken, a typical *tour de force*:

One might throw a thousand bricks in any American city without hitting a single man who could give an intelligible account of either Hauptmann or Cézanne, or of the reasons for holding Schumann to have been a greater composer than Mendelssohn. The boys in our colleges are still taught that Whittier was a great poet and Fenimore Cooper a great novelist. Nine-tenths of our people—perhaps ninety-nine-hundredths of our native-born—have yet to see their first good picture, or to hear their first symphony. . . . Of the two undoubted world figures that we have contributed to letters, one was allowed to die like a stray cat up an alley and the other was mistaken for a cheap buffoon. (“Prometheus” 446)

Mencken adds to this barb that he recommends James Huneker’s novel *New Cosmopolis*, but notes that his advice will probably be ignored since “this Huneker is a foreigner, and hence accursed” (446). Mencken’s awareness that American readers would be biased against an European writer, or in Huneker’s case an American with European roots, was in this article, as elsewhere, an issue which he treated unflinchingly.

Both the increasing circulation of the magazine and the number of newspaper columns across the country which reproduced Mencken and Nathan’s barbs and witticisms on a regular basis indicate that their tactic of teaching their readers by mocking them was a

success. As an article from the *Cleveland Plain-Dealer* from 27 January 1917 indicates their readers were aware, even as they laughed, that they were the butt of the joke:

‘A Book of Burlesques’ is the latest contribution to artistic hilarity of that most pungent of contemporary critics, H. L. Mencken. As is his habit in the literary criticism which is his regular occupation, he makes a target in this book of American Philistinism; and he roasts all sides of that sacred institution impartially. Here we find the most savage satire, tempered by nothing but humor. A knowledge of our foibles is the armory of the author, and his shafts are barbed.

One defies even the galled jade to wince without laughing as he does it. (Clippings)

Nathan’s tactics were very similar. Both men denied, and would always deny, that they strove to shape their readers’ tastes. Nevertheless, in their rhetorical style, both men accomplished what they denied attempting.

There is little question that these editors accepted and printed foreign literature in their American mass-market magazine at a time when such things were considered irregular, even distasteful. But, by the same token, there is little doubt that the extravagant rhetoric of both men was attracting readers. As Harris Merton Lyon wrote in the *St. Louis Mirror* in 1916: “Mayhap you know this Nathan’s work; it appears monthly in the Smart Set. If you do not, go with thy quarter and join. His dramatic article is worth the price of admission all by itself and right ahint [*sic*] him bourgeons and blossoms one Mencken . . . Mencken is worth another quarter all by himself” (Clippings). As these newspaper reviews suggest, it is likely that one of the factors that allowed Mencken and

Nathan to print foreign fiction without losing readers was their ability to charm even as they abused.

As Richard Ohmann indicates in *Selling Culture*, the primary audience for the mass-market magazines consisted of members of America's new, influential, professional-managerial class. He argues that the mode of address common in the ten and fifteen-cent monthlies indicated a "cultural ambivalence in the audience, which wanted both to be taught and to be addressed as already knowing. This was a class feeling its way into Culture, not fully settled there" (245). Since the *Smart Set's* readers included both students and working professionals (doctors, journalists, musicians, professors) it is not surprising that its editors adopted a form of address similar to the one which Ohmann describes; Mencken and Nathan simultaneously taught their readers and acknowledged their cultural sophistication. They were often abusive, but their direct addresses to the reader often also consisted of pure flattery. The best example of this type of flattery was in the magazine's masthead, which changed monthly. This magazine was always labeled on its front cover as "magazine of cleverness"—which was already a flattering address—but throughout their editorship Mencken and Nathan toyed with various other expressions both on the cover and on the magazine's first page. So, for example, in February 1916 the front cover read "The Magazine of the Connoisseur"; in April 1916 the inside front cover read "The Magazine for the Civilized Minority"; and for many years it was simply, "The Aristocrat among Magazines." Perhaps most pertinent to the present examination, in June 1916 the cover read, "The Only American Magazine with An European Air."

That this mixed appeal worked to attract readers from the influential professional-managerial class is indicated in an article from the *New Republic* from 10 November 1917. In this article titled "What Shall He Read?" the writer explains that he is a civil engineer who wishes to go into training for an "executive position" (Clippings). He says that he does not know much about "politics, bonds, stocks, investments, financing corporations, economics, commercial law [etc.]" and he wonders if the editors of the *New Republic* would be able to suggest some appropriate books. The teaching function of mass-market periodicals at this time could not be stated more clearly. With reference to literature he adds: "In my own defense I will say that I like to read good english composition and am rather catholic in my tastes. For example: New York Sun editorials, H. L. Mencken's articles in the *Smart Set*, J. B. Kerfoot's book reviews, the works of William J. Locke, also the *New Republic*." He makes it clear that his familiarity with Mencken's opinion is something that makes him a sophisticated reader. Although, as the articles in the *Boston Transcript* indicate, his familiarity with the *Smart Set* also makes him a member of the "polyglot school in New York" and open to accusations of enjoying the "fleshly" in literature.

The Books of the Irish

Publishing Joyce during such a period was, as Ellmann rightly suggests, a brave decision (384). Ellmann does not provide a specific explanation for his use of the term "bravely" in characterizing Mencken and Nathan's choice, although the tempestuous publishing history of the book would suggest that he refers to the taboos violated by Joyce's blunt realism and, especially, the sexual frankness of these two stories. He would

certainly be correct in considering Mencken and Nathan's decision brave based solely on the content of these stories. However, I would add that this decision was additionally courageous owing to the generally conservative approach of American mass-market magazines towards both foreign literature and portrayals of foreigners. Mencken and Nathan employed humour, bullying, and the trappings of cosmopolitanism to distance their readers from the conservative opinions prevalent at the time. As the *New York Evening Post* article quoted at the beginning of this chapter indicates, the concept of the "cultured reader" came to be associated with the reading of foreign literature and, more specifically, with a knowledge of Mencken's criticisms.

Although Joyce appeared in the *Smart Set* only once, his *Dubliner* stories became part of Mencken and Nathan's ongoing argument in defence of foreign literature, both in what they published and in what they wrote as the *Smart Set's* editors. Through their magazine they indicated to a large audience of American readers that they ought to notice what the Europeans, and even more specifically what the Irish, were doing. Indeed, numerous *Smart Set* reviews were devoted to the promotion of Irish writers and playwrights.²⁵ It should, therefore, come as no surprise that in Robert Deming's overview of the reception history of *A Portrait of the Artist* he notes: "American reaction to the novel seems, in retrospect, more generous [than the European reaction]" (11). He adds that proof of this generosity is evident in the reviews of "James Huneker, Francis Hackett,

²⁵ See, for example, "Getting Rid of the Actor" Sept. 1913; "The Cult of Dunsany" July 1917; "The National Letters" Feb. 1918; and "The Broadway Dramatic Criticism" Apr. 1918.

and H. L. Mencken" (11). It is worth noting that all three of these writers were contributors to the *Smart Set*.²⁶

Typical of his relationship to the promotion of Irish literature in March 1917, just a few months after the American publication of both *Dubliners* and *Portrait*, in his review column "The Books of the Irish" Mencken declared:

The tasters of books tell us . . . that no great literature is ever written in a tongue foreign to its makers; the Irish invade the language of the conqueror with Gaelic idioms and Gaelic modes of thought, and make a new English as sonorous and as savory as Marlowe's A school? A movement? Bosh! As well try to put Zola and Ellen Key or Nietzsche and Tolstoy into double harness. What we have here is not merely a school or a movement, but a literature. (138)

Most of this book review column was reproduced in the "Glimpses and News of the New Books" column in the *Chicago News* on Feb. 28, 1917. Mencken's support for Irish writers was thus promoted outside the magazine itself. Through their criticism and in what they published, Mencken and Nathan not only introduced a sizable audience to the idea that *Dubliners* had a right to bring their fiction to New York, they also helped them to bring it there. In this magazine, at least, *Dubliners* were welcome.

²⁶ Hunecker appeared in the *Smart Set* several times between 1915 and 1917; Hackett's contribution appeared in 1923.

American Modernism: Anderson, Lewis, and O'Neill, 1916-19

Between 1916 and 1919 the *Smart Set* exerted its most potent influence upon the American literary scene. During these years the notices accorded to Mencken and Nathan in the popular press more than tripled. By 1918 these men were so well-known that in a joint review of Mencken's *Damn! A Book of Calumny* and Nathan's *A Book without a Title* which appeared in the *New York Sun* on 28 July they were identified by reputation alone. The headline declared: "The Bad Boys! Just Hear Them Cut Up!" The first line of the review added that they were "the two bad boys of American letters." Only in the second sentence were they finally identified as H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan.

As indicated in the chapter on the *Smart Set* and sexuality, this reputation for being literary rebels began in 1913 with the reviews of Mencken, Nathan, and Wright's *Europe After 8:15*. Six years later their reputation had so solidified that the phrase "bad boys" amounted to their personal epithet. Both halves of this epithet are indicative of important trends in the reception history of the magazine: the *Smart Set* was perceived as a magazine which was both rebellious, "bad," and which appealed to members of the younger generation, the "boys." In fact, in the course of this review in the *New York Sun* the reviewer refers to Mencken and Nathan as critics "at whose feet the younger generation may well sit for a time" ("Bad Boys").

That the *Smart Set*'s iconoclasm was embraced by the younger generation is confirmed by the reminiscences of many members of that generation. One of these young readers later had enormous influence as a literary critic: Edmund Wilson. In a

reminiscence of this magazine, Wilson emphasizes both his youth at the time he began reading the magazine and his perception of its rebelliousness:

In the spring of 1912, just before graduating from prep school, I somehow happened to pick up a copy of the *Smart Set*, a trashy-looking monthly, and was astonished to find audacious and extremely amusing critical articles by men named Mencken and Nathan, of whom I had never heard. I continued to read the *Smart Set* through college, at first with a slight feeling of guilt, for it was making fun of everything respectable in current American drama and literature. (*Devils* 92)

Wilson notes that by 1912 a change in American literature was underway and that it was Mencken, in contrast to most critics of the age, who had attempted to “sift out what was valuable from the rubbish” for his readers (93). Wilson observes that Mencken guided his readers to what was best in America’s literary heritage—such works as *Huckleberry Finn* and *What Maisie Knew*—in addition to introducing them to the best work by new writers (93).

A similar view of the magazine appears in the tribute which the drama critic John Mason Brown wrote for the *New York Times* upon Nathan’s death in April 1958. In this article he stressed the attraction which this magazine, and these editors, had held for American youth in the teens and early twenties:

Pasted in the back of my copy of George Jean Nathan’s *The Critic and the Drama* I find, to my surprise, a review of it which I wrote for the [student magazine] *Harvard Crimson* in 1922. . . . Of course, I had followed him in print for years,

with the wonder, the delighted shock, and the admiration that all of us who were young then felt as we gobbled up his audacities in [the] *Smart Set*. (3)

Brown's reminiscence identifies this magazine's primary audiences "all of us who were young" and indicates its main resonance with them—its "audacities."

As both Wilson and Brown indicate, these critics knew how to amuse their readers and how to mock their critics. That their appeal to the younger generation was related to their particular brand of iconoclasm is noted by Brown when he stresses that "reviewers, as a whole, only cover performances; George Nathan, as a critic, gave them. He was a dazzling showman, and what he wrote was often more entertaining than what he wrote about" (10). His impression of Nathan's co-editor, H. L. Mencken, was much the same: "George, like his brother Katzenjammer, H. L. Mencken, delighted in upsetting any boat with a false dignitary aboard. He rejoiced in the mucker [*sic*] pose, loved to shock the conventional, and never tired of keeping his thumb to his nose" (3). Mencken and Nathan, thumbs to noses, entertained as they criticized, and any understanding of the relationship which they formed with the younger generation, both as contributors and as readers, rests with an appreciation of Mencken and Nathan's dual reputation as both serious critics and irreverent bad boys.

As the American drama critic Brooks Atkinson summarized the situation in his *The New York Times* obituary for Nathan: "with the First World War shaking America out of its provincialism, the time was ripe for a cultural upheaval. Thousands of people who were amused by Nathan and Mencken also believed in the fundamental common sense of what they were writing" (1). It is important to recognize this historical context for

Mencken and Nathan's literary and dramatic criticism: they were being read not only by America's younger generation, but by the first generation to know the shock of a World War. With their reputation as iconoclasts, begun long before the war started, by the time America was immersed in the social and political upheaval of the war they were already established as representative voices of disenchantment.

Thus far, I have suggested that in the *Smart Set* Mencken and Nathan established reputations as the publishers and promoters of European literature. Between 1908 and 1916, Mencken's articles on such topics as Conrad and the Imagists, and Nathan's articles on European dramatists, were accompanied in the magazine by the published work of Lawrence, Pound, Ford, Yeats, Lowell, and Joyce. Through their editorials and what appeared in the magazine they were educating their readers as to European literary trends. More specifically, this introduction to European literary experiments included the publication of Lawrence's Freudian realism, Pound's early poetic experiments using colloquial speech and contrasting textures, and Joyce's attempts to draw upon peculiarly Irish idioms, rhythms, and subject matter. By 1916 this magazine had thus made its readers aware of European literary currents, but to a great extent they had still done little to promote literary experimentation in America by Americans.

This situation was partly owing to the fact that a new, identifiably American, literary style had not developed to a significant extent. Mencken was careful to inform his readers of the cases where he believed that a uniquely American manner had developed. His articles were consistently full of praise for Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and, especially, Mark Twain. Later, once he had discovered their writing, both Theodore

Dreiser and Willa Cather joined his pantheon of authors who were cited as models for the younger generation of American authors to emulate. Nathan, on the other hand, had found no major American dramatists worth praising and, when citing models worthy of emulation, would consistently mention such European dramatists as Hauptman, Strindberg, Synge, Ibsen, Sudermann and Shaw. He had yet, however, to find an American dramatist worthy of his regular notice.

Between 1916 and 1919 that situation changed. During these years both Mencken (who had been calling for a new, distinctly American literature) and Nathan (who had been decrying the lack of an original American voice in the drama) found authors to champion. Mencken heralded the early writing of Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, while Nathan brought Eugene O'Neill to the attention of his readers. Anderson, Lewis, and O'Neill would not only have their early writings published in the magazine, but were promoted in Mencken and Nathan's editorials as three of America's best new writers. During these years, then, in contrast to the years between 1908 and 1915, Mencken and Nathan concentrated in earnest upon the American scene: after years of introducing their readers to the theory and practice of modernism in Europe, they were now positioned to do the same thing for the art being produced at home.

American Modernism

Mencken's championing of the work of native American talent between 1916 and 1919 was part of his ongoing campaign to encourage American artists to find, and develop, a uniquely American mode of expression. From 1908, when Mencken first became the *Smart Set's* book reviewer, this campaign had taken several consistent forms:

first, he found key American authors worth emulating and mentioned them, repeatedly, as models for the future direction of American literature; second, he promoted the idea of a distinct American language, different from both the written and spoken English used in Great Britain; third, he challenged the things he felt were hindering the development of native American literature, especially literary censorship. This final consideration will be discussed at length in the chapter that follows, on Willa Cather and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. The first two of these recurrent factors will be examined here, as an indication of the solid foundation for the development of American modernism that Mencken established in the *Smart Set*.

By 1916, as we have seen, Mencken was recognized in the popular press as a proponent of modernism and realism, as a key champion of new literature who defended modernism in opposition to the critical establishment. Between 1916 and 1919 this reputation was solidified in the popular press. Since the critical affiliation between Mencken and the moderns was increasing during this period, Mencken's personal reputation as a proponent of the "new" strengthened the *Smart Set's* status as a mass-market magazine for the moderns—and especially its potential to influence America's burgeoning avant-garde movements. The strongest indication of Mencken's perceived allegiance to the modernists was the persistent linking in period reviews of his name with Ezra Pound's, who was, by 1917, already seen as something of a spokesman for modernism (see Smith 491-92).

The link between Mencken and Pound was most often made in terms of their similarly belligerent critical styles, and the offensiveness (or at least nonconformity) of

their views; accordingly, a comment in the *Chicago News* in March 1918 made reference to the tendency for some readers to “hold their nose[s] in the presence of Pound and Mencken” (Clippings), while a letter to the same paper in May referred to “Ezra Pound bawling all over the place” and, in the next line, “H. L. Mencken strutting and squalling” (“One Reader”). The same letter condemned “all the fiddling little periodicals devoted to the ‘new poetry’” and mocked Amy Lowell’s ignorance of “poetic values” (“One Reader”).

In addition to Pound, the work of such modernists as Amy Lowell and W. B. Yeats were reviewed in conjunction with works by Mencken. An article in the *Chicago News* on 3 December 1917 recommended both Mencken’s *A Book of Prefaces* and Amy Lowell’s *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* as books “decidedly worth noting” (Clippings), while a book review in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* for June 15th, 1918 supplied the subtitle “Yeats, Mencken, Nathan” (“Ten New”). Perhaps most surprisingly, considering Mencken’s current reputation as a critic disassociated from the modernist movement, was an article in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* which linked him, indirectly, to the activities of the Vorticists. This article, titled “Mr. Knopf Discovers the Shy Vorticists: Who Somehow Don’t Seem to Justify Themselves in War Times,” condemned both Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound for distancing themselves from the war effort. It declared that Lewis and Pound were “tenth-rate artists and about one-tenth human” for producing such “noisome” art during the “great spiritual crisis” of the war (“Vorticists”). Mencken was linked to this “inane” artistic movement through a quotation from Pound’s

“L’Homme Moyen Sensuel,” a poem which actually incorporated both Mencken’s name and his oft stated belief that America was a nation of Puritans:

For Mencken states somewhere in this
connection:

“It is a moral nation we infest.” (“Mr. Knopf”)

The editorialist concludes in his comment on this line that America *is* a moral nation:

“Moral and clear-headed and peculiarly resurgent to the disapproval Mr. Pound and others of his ilk” (“Mr Knopf”), one of whom was clearly Mencken. Through such articles the relationship which Mencken and Pound formed between 1914 and 1915 was carried into the public sphere. Their literary allegiance thus extended much further than Mencken’s reviews of Pound in the *Smart Set* and Pound’s reviews of Mencken in the *Little Review*. By this time, the connection between them had acquired a shared reception history: the noisome Mencken and Pound were both considered moderns.

Many review articles on Mencken from this period revolved around the rhetoric of a battle between two critical camps: one in favour of the “new” literature and the other represented by the university establishment, protectors of the status quo. For example, in an article reviewing Mencken’s introduction to the Modern Library edition of Ibsen’s plays, the *Chicago Tribune* described him as a critic “in sympathy with” and “conscious of the present tendencies in literature” (“Comment”), and linked him to such “enthusiastic, alert young men” as Floyd Dell (the former editor of the *Chicago Post*’s “Friday Literary Review” and current editor of the *Masses*), and W. H. Wright (former editor of the *Smart Set*, who, at that time, was writing literary reviews for the *Los Angeles Times*). These

critics were listed in opposition to such “dull academics” as Paul Elmer More and Stuart Sherman.

Similarly, an article in *Chicago Examiner* noted that for years Mencken had “hacked at the dead but tenacious hands which rule this age: has swung his ax steadily at the sentimentalists who have enmeshed Americans for decades” (Beffel). One of the clearest embodiments of this “two-camp” trend in Mencken’s critical reception appeared in the *Albany Knickerbocker* on July 21st, 1918. In this article they referred to a “battle royal” then taking place between the “sheep and the goats of American criticism” (Clippings). The sheep were described as “sober, serious, pedantic, professional gentlemen who view and review our literature through a dense fog of ethical prepossessions and inflexible, cocksure convictions as to what is good for us” (Clippings). In contrast, the goats were characterized as “a joyous, swashbuckling, pagan crew, untrammled by ethical convictions, fighting tooth and nail to make it safe for art to walk abroad” (Clippings). Paul Elmer More (literary critic for the *Nation* and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters), Stuart Sherman (a professor of English at the University of Illinois, and one of Mencken’s most outspoken opponents), and Irving Babbitt (a professor at Harvard) were listed as the sheep. H. L. Mencken was listed, along with other non-academic literary critics, as a provider of “distinguished service on the side of the goats” (Clippings). With respect to the *Smart Set* itself, the magazine, like Mencken, was perceived as welcoming of literary experimentation; the *New York Globe* declared in January 19, 1918 that its editors encouraged “stylists” and would publish in the work “of any one who does a literary stunt that is not smug” (“Discussing”).

The important thing to note about the *Smart Set's* reputation during this period was its effect upon American writers. The *Smart Set's* pose as a radical magazine—opposed to the literary “sheep”—had always earned it young readers. The main distinction was that now, between 1916 and 1919, this reputation was also beginning to attract America's most radical young writers. Sinclair Lewis's “I'm a Stranger Here Myself” and Sherwood Anderson's “The Story Writers,” “The White Streak,” “I Want to Know Why” and “Unlighted Lamps” were published in the magazine in August 1916, January 1916, July 1918, November 1919, and July 1921 respectively. Eugene O'Neill's “The Long Voyage Home,” “Ile,” and “Moon of the Caribees” appeared in the magazine in October 1917 and May and August 1918. These experimental plays and stories are typical the kind of literary departures which the magazine had encouraged since Wright's editorship in 1913. The difference was that for the first time in the magazine's history these modernist experiments were primarily the work of American, not European, writers.

Sinclair Lewis

Sinclair Lewis was, among American writers of the time, the one most deeply influenced by Mencken's repeated assertion that there could not be a truly national literature unless American writers recognized the unique American idioms and themes which surrounded them. Mencken explained his interest in the peculiarities of the American people and of their language to the *Smart Set's* readers. This theme appeared most often in his praise for Theodore Dreiser's novels. In the years leading up to 1916, Mencken had become firmly associated with Dreiser, the major writer he championed most often in his review columns.

Mencken's first *Smart Set* review of Dreiser's work was of *Jennie Gerhardt* in November 1911. Mencken had been waiting for years to promote Dreiser: "*Sister Carrie* had been published (and suppressed) in 1900, eight years before I began to write book reviews for the *Smart Set*, and he published nothing else save a few magazine pieces until the appearance of *Jennie Gerhardt* in 1911, so there was not much chance for me to whoop him in the regular course of my critical business" (*My Life* 124). That situation changed with Mencken's review of *Jennie Gerhardt*. He gave his review the unambiguous title "A Novel of the First Rank." In this review Mencken praised Dreiser for his ability to accurately portray the American scene, calling it the best American novel since *Huckleberry Finn* (153). He compared this novel to *Anna Karenina* and *Lord Jim* in its "stark simplicity," and its "profound sincerity" (153). This comparison to European novels is not coincidental; Mencken subsequently declared in this review that Dreiser has successfully adapted "European" methods to his depiction of "the life we Americans are living" (155). This novel was, in other words, exactly the type of work that Mencken had hoped to see, and wished to promote. This book demonstrated in practice something which he had always claimed was possible—the ability for American authors to adapt European literary innovations to their own needs, and to use those innovations in the creation of an identifiably national literature.

Mencken's assertion that American literary modernism would develop out of European literary modernism was an opinion greeted with scorn. The *New York Post* sarcastically commented, "it is seldom given to a critic to discover and proclaim a novel of the first rank, but no less is the happy fortune of H. L. Mencken" (Clippings). The article

went on to note that Mencken had declared this novel a greater work than *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or anything by Fenimore Cooper. Mencken's dismissal of the American 19th century literary tradition in favour of European modernism was not a popular sentiment. Mencken's own assessment of the critical reception which his review of *Jennie Gerhardt* enjoyed was that it earned increased notice for both Dreiser and himself, even if much of that attention was "not friendly" (*My Life* 25).

Mencken's championing of Dreiser's brand of gritty American realism was part of what branded him as a literary radical, a critical bad boy. A review of Mencken's *Book of Prefaces*, which contained a chapter on Dreiser, in the *Springfield Republican* for October 11th, 1917 declared that Mencken was part of a group of "so-called 'radicals'" owing to his defence of "realism, stuff of life, egoistic morals, [and] sex" in literature ("Egoistic"). They claimed that Mencken promoted Dreiser's work because he appreciated Dreiser's "habit of dwelling on the sensual phases of human nature" ("Egoistic"). By 1917, Mencken had been combating such narrow interpretations of realism for years. As early as June 1911, he had titled one of his *Smart Set* review columns "The Horse Power of Realism." As he makes clear in his memoir, he was well aware that popular and academic opinion did not accord with what he was arguing, either in his support for realism or his specific support for American authors:

It was, of course, uphill work, slugging for such men in the prewar years, for the Hamilton Wright Mabie and Henry Van Dycks were still dominant in American

criticism, and it was not until 1910 that any American critic of respectable standing . . . [praised] even Mark Twain without reservations. (*My Life* 25)

In 1917, the *Springfield Republican* was not alone in its condemnation of realism in literature, especially as it pertained to sexual matters.²⁷

Mencken's practical support for Dreiser's brand of realism—a peculiarly American adaptation of European literary trends—was reinforced in theory through his *Smart Set* articles on America and Americans, particularly a five-part series which Mencken contributed to the magazine in 1913, titled “The American.” The titles in this series were: “The American” (June), “The American: His Morals” (July), “The American: His Language” (August), “The American: His Ideas of Beauty” (September), and “The American: His Freedom” (October). Mencken's examination of the American character in these articles placed special emphasis on the American distrust of art and artists. So, for example, Mencken declared that most Americans did not view Walt Whitman as a great American poet; rather Mencken argued that Whitman's contemporaries had not thought of him as the national laureate, but only as “a man who took long chances with the postal laws” (“Beauty” 93).

Mencken ascribed this lack of American appreciation for art to the same factor on which he would pin most defects of the American character—their Puritanism. As a result of this world view, Mencken declared that to Americans all art, unless it was clearly instructive, was considered immoral. In these columns, Mencken portrayed the typical

²⁷ The role of the *Smart Set* in combating literary censorship will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

American as intolerant, ignorant, fervently religious, and possessed with the importance of material goods and social status. Mencken was particularly hard on the American middle class, whom he portrayed as both puritanical and cruel. Mencken would later become famous for the label that he would apply to his vision of the American middle class: the *booboisie*.

Mencken's portrayal of the American middle class contributed to what, in 1920, would become Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. Lewis's biographer, Mark Schorer, is specific about the influence which Mencken had upon Lewis's satire of the American people: Schorer contends that Mencken's portrayal of the "*boobus Americanus*" provided Sinclair Lewis with the necessary terminology with which to "take [his] literary pot shots at American culture" (290). Schorer suggests that Lewis may have been primarily influenced by Mencken's essay "Puritanism as a Literary Force" which appeared in Mencken's widely-read, and widely-reviewed, *Book of Prefaces*, which was published in 1917. The problem with that theory is that Lewis's first distinctively Menckonian satire of the American people had already been published by 1917. And, significantly, it had appeared in the *Smart Set*.

There is no question that Lewis knew about the magazine since he had been published there multiple times in his early career. In 1907, when Lewis was still a student at Yale, he had three poems published in the *Smart Set*: "The Ultra-Modern" (July), "Dim Hours of Dusk" (August), and "Disillusion" (December). Moreover, in what must surely be the strangest intersection of the history of this magazine with one of its authors, in 1908, when Lewis was in Panama, without enough money to secure a passage back to

New York, he showed his letter of recommendation from the *Smart Set*'s then editor Charles Towne to the purser in order to secure a stowaway passage from Panama to New York (Schorer 124-25). Given this early exposure to the magazine, it is likely that Lewis had seen Mencken's extensive series on "The American." Certainly, Lewis's first satire along the lines of *Main Street* was in accordance with Mencken's portrayal of the *Booboisie*, and it appeared in the *Smart Set* in August 1916.

When Lewis submitted "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" to the magazine, he was already a successful professional writer. He had been published in such popular magazines as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Redbook*, and *The Woman's Home Companion*. His first big sale had occurred in 1909 when he sold "They That Take the Sword" to *Redbook* for seventy-five dollars (Schorer 144). In 1916, he was able to sell a serial, *The Innocents*, to the *Woman's Home Companion* for a thousand dollars. He had not yet attained anything like the fame that would follow the publication of *Main Street* in 1920, but he was a recognized writer and enjoyed financial success. The fact that "I'm A Stranger Here Myself" ended up in the *Smart Set* (for which they paid seventy dollars—less than he was able to earn in 1909), was in keeping with a general pattern which developed in the magazine under Mencken and Nathan's editorship.

Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis represent two distinct trends among the authors who contributed to the *Smart Set*. Although Anderson was forty in 1916 when his work first appeared in the *Smart Set*, his situation was analogous to many of the younger authors published in the magazine at that time, in that he was both unknown and experimenting with new literary techniques. Lewis, on the other hand, was representative

of the successful professional writers who sold their stories to the *Smart Set* after they had been rejected by the larger, better-paying magazines, usually owing to the subject matter and literary innovation of their stories. With Lewis, as with such writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather, Dorothy Parker, and Somerset Maugham, the fiction that ended up in this magazine was among his best. It was not quality which had precluded its publication elsewhere.

When Lewis submitted "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" to the *Smart Set*, it had been rejected by four magazines, one of them the *Saturday Evening Post* (Schorer 230). Although Mencken and Nathan could not afford to pay the wage that Lewis was used to receiving, they did provide a public venue for his most innovative fiction to date. Lewis's biographer calls "I'm a Stranger Here Myself" Lewis's "first sustained work recognizably written by the author of *Main Street*" (230). This story embodies two major transitions in Lewis's work: for the first time he tried to reproduce the accents of Midwestern speech with an accurate ear, and attempted to portray "provincial American types" without "sentiment" (Schorer 230). As such, in both style and subject matter this story set the pattern for the satirical novels to come. The story involves a couple from God's Country, one of the Northern States, who decide to see the rest of the country. Their main reason for wanting to travel is that the wife in this couple, Mrs. Johnson, was "defeated for the presidency of the Wednesday and Chautauqua Reading Circle" by a woman who had been to California (41).²⁸ They decide to go to one of the "Picturesque Resorts of Our Own

²⁸ Regular readers of the *Smart Set* would have known that such clubs were one of Mencken's favorite targets; for example, in his article "The American" he had declared: "Nowhere will you find a people with so much time for the fripperies and futilities of fraternal orders, Christian Endeavour Societies, "pleasure" clubs, idle visiting, interminable card playing, precinct politics and other such time-wasters" (92).

Land” (41); once there they find others from God’s Country and spend their time engaging in all the activities which they had enjoyed at home, with people who were from their State. They congratulate themselves on how rational they are being about their travel plans and, especially, their avoidance of “these sporty places” (43).

When they return home, Mrs. Johnson provides this summary of their trip: “We’ve seen every inch of the South and the East, now, and no one can say that we haven’t been unprejudiced and open-minded—the way we’ve gone into the flora and fauna, and among industries and all—but I must say that we haven’t seen a single place that begins to come up to Northernapolis” (48). The story, as a description of their travels, does not have much of a plot. This, too, was an innovation for Lewis. It had been his habit to take careful notes about people and places, but then to manipulate his notes into a formulaic situation—“either melodramatic or sentimental” (Schorer 237). This story was an early attempt to let his notes speak for themselves (Schorer 237). In theme, structure, and language, this story marked a fictional departure for Lewis, one which four mass-market magazines had been unwilling to accept.

Lewis was influenced by Mencken in his portrayal of the stereotypical Americans who inhabit “I’m a Stranger Here Myself.” In addition to absorbing Mencken’s theories about the *Booboisie* from the *Smart Set*, he was also exposed to Mencken’s thoughts about the distinctiveness of the American idiom, as opposed to the British. Mencken’s famous book-length description of *Americanese*, *The American Language*, was published to both great acclaim and considerable controversy in 1919. But the ideas which informed *The American Language* had appeared regularly in his *Smart Set* columns long before the

publication of this book, beginning with his column "The American: His Language" in the *Smart Set* for August 1913.

Mencken's claim that there was such a thing as "American" English was, as with his other articles in his "The American" series, reviewed in several period newspapers. An extensive review appeared in the *Newark News* for 6 September 1913 explained that in a recent issue of the *Smart Set* that H. L. Mencken had declared that there was such a thing as "Americanese" ("Author"). They claim for Mencken that "probably no such detailed analysis, as is to be found in Mr. Mencken's essay, ever has been made before of the peculiarities of speech in America" ("Author"), and they note that Mencken includes slang in his definition of Americanese. They then reproduce Mencken's declension of the second person plural, in American english, for their readers "Yous, your (yourn), yous" ("Author"). Mencken's series on "The American" also attracted notice in the following papers: "Give America Time" *Los Angeles Examiner* 3 Nov. [1913], *New Orleans Times Democrat* [n.d. likely Nov. 1913], "Our American Titled Classes" *Ithaca (NY) Journal* 16 Sept. 1913, and "The American A Born Cursader" *Waco Times Herald* 17 June 1913. The furore in 1919 over *The American Language* was intense, and extensive, and would have been difficult for anyone reading an American paper that year to miss.

Beginning with "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," Lewis attempted to capture this American idiom in his fiction. In *Main Street* Lewis paid tribute to this influence. Mencken appears on page 263, a fact that Lewis brought to Mencken's attention in the inscribed copy given to him. In the novel Mencken is listed among the "young American sociologists, young English realists, [and] Russian horrorists" whom Carol was reading

(263). Carol's reading list also included Anatole France, H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson—each of whom was praised regularly in Mencken's *Smart Set* review columns (263). In the novel Lewis expanded upon the ideas first developed in "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," and in so doing he employed new ideas and new techniques in an attempt to depict, what Mencken had called, "the life we Americans are living."

Sherwood Anderson

Later in the same year in which Lewis's story appeared in the magazine, Mencken and Nathan provided a venue for another writer associated with the American literary renaissance,²⁹ Sherwood Anderson. Anderson made his first submission to Mencken and Nathan in 1916. At that time he was generally unpublished outside the pages of the "little" magazines; his stories had primarily appeared in such avant-garde literary magazines as the *Little Review*, the *Seven Arts* and the socialist journal the *Masses*. In 1913, the John Lane Company agreed to print his first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, but it was not published until October 1916; his first short story was not published until June 1914. Accordingly, Anderson's first publication in the *Smart Set* occurred nine months before the publication of his first novel and at a time when only a limited number of his stories had appeared in print, most in magazines with very limited circulations.

The first of Anderson's stories to appear in the *Smart Set* was "The Story Writers." This story drew attention to Anderson's own artistic concerns at the time and as

²⁹ Although the phrase "American Renaissance" is generally associated with the mid-19th century, it was used by critics in the early 20th to describe the changes taking place in their own era. See, for example, C. E. Bechhofer's book on the literary movements of the 1920s, *The Literary Renaissance in America* (1923). This book was dedicated to Sinclair Lewis.

such is a precursor, in theory if not in execution, of the stories that would later be collected in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The premise for this story involves two men who wish to write stories, but feel that they are prevented from writing anything worthwhile because they have never witnessed a major traumatic event such as a train crash or a lady committing suicide, or have ever done anything particularly exciting or passionate in their lives. The one is a lawyer, who has what he considers a rather boring domestic life with a wife and family. The other is the owner of the local grocery store who, as the lawyer discovers, “also nursed in his apron-covered bosom a love of the art of words” (244). They both bemoan that their lack of interesting life experiences since, as they both agree, “a man should stay true to life” (245). Meanwhile, as they decry the fact that they have not witnessed anything that would make good material for fiction, the interest contained in everyday events is forced upon them at every turn, a fact which they choose to ignore.

The story is a clever, but somewhat heavy-handed, satire and as such certainly not an indication of the style which Anderson would develop soon after in “Hands,” which was written in the fall of 1915 (Townsend 107). However, the presence of this story in the *Smart Set* served the important function of introducing its readers to Anderson’s fictional method and beliefs. This theory, as it was roughly laid out in “The Story Writers,” would later be honed in *Winesburg, Ohio*. In these later stories, Anderson would challenge the traditionally melodramatic subject matter of popular mass-market fiction, by finding drama in every-day events and in the thoughts and actions of ordinary working class Americans. In “The Story Writers” Anderson had argued through his plot

that the thoughts and actions of ordinary, working class Americans were as much the stuff of fiction as romantic escapades and narrow escapes; in his later writing he would prove it.

Anderson's belief that average people who lead average lives could be the focus of strong fiction was not a very popular, nor a very economically viable stance. In a 1938 letter written to an aspiring writer who had asked for his advice, Anderson explained that his early stories had not conformed to the type of story popular at the time—the O. Henry brand of story with an obvious plot and a pat ending—and as such had not been easy to sell: “I could not give the answers, and so for a long time when my stories began to appear, at first only in little highbrow magazines, I was almost universally condemned by the critics. My stories, it seemed, had no definite ends” (*Letters* 404). Anderson was well aware of the commercial unviability of his stories at the time. In the first story which he sent to the *Smart Set* he had his author-narrator muse that the men who rejected his stories “were editors of second-rate magazines anyway and at best had not daring enough to publish the work of a new man” (243). As with Pound's earlier mockery of mass-market magazines in “Phasellus Ille,” that a story containing such a criticism appeared in the *Smart Set* demonstrates the sympathy that Mencken and Nathan had for the avant-garde writers whose work was rejected by the larger magazines. Indeed, Mencken and Nathan continually demonstrated themselves to be “daring enough to publish the work of a new man.”

With Anderson, as with many of the *Smart Set*'s authors, the welcome which Mencken and Nathan provided to up-and-coming authors through publication in their magazine was often reinforced through praise for their work in their review columns. This

was certainly the case with Anderson's fiction. His first *Smart Set* story appeared in January 1916, and Mencken's first review of Anderson's work appeared in October. Mencken reviewed Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Son* in the same issue of the magazine in which he reviewed Dreiser's nonfiction travelogue, *A Hoosier Holiday*. He began this review with praise for Dreiser's ability to capture reality in all its dark complexity, noting that Dreiser had adopted Conrad's dictum which was "by the power of the printed word, to make you hear, make you feel—it is, above all, to make you *see*" ("Creed" 139). It is fitting that such an introduction should have been provided to Anderson's work since as his biographer, Kim Townsend, has noted, Anderson's later expression of his artistic credo—to "try to develop, to the top of my bent, my own capacity to feel, see, taste, smell, hear" (*Letters* 404)—is remarkably similar to Conrad's dictum in the preface to the *Nigger of the Narcissus*, which Mencken cited in this review (Townsend 114-15).

The indirect connection between Conrad and Anderson in this review was merely fortuitous, but the explicit connection between Anderson and Dreiser was not. Mencken called *Windy McPherson's Son* a novel of "unmistakable promise" (144), comparing it to Dreiser's "the Titan" because, as he explains, "the essential conflict of the drama is within the man himself" (144). Although Mencken found some parts of the novel to have been "managed weakly," he recognized the work of "a true artist" and concluded his review of this book, and indeed his entire review column for that month, with the assertion: "I suspect that we shall hear much more about this Mr. Anderson" (144).

This laudatory review of *Windy McPherson* was followed in December of the following year with a positive review of Anderson's second novel, *Marching Men*. In this

review Mencken argued that the novel showcased too many “dubious sociological ideas” but praised its realism: “[Norman McGregor] is brilliantly projected against a background as real as the landscape you see out your window. There, and not in the last chapters, is the proof that Mr. Anderson is a novelist with something to say” (“Critics” 143). Part of what Anderson had to say, at this point, had to do with his prior exposure, in 1913, to Chicago’s intellectual group, the “Fifty-seventh Street circle,” which included such figures as Floyd Dell, Ben Hecht, and Margaret Anderson (Townsend 90-93). His next *Smart Set* publication, “The White Streak,” demonstrated the strength with which his interest in psychology now imbued his fiction.

This story appeared in the magazine in July 1918. By this time, Anderson had become somewhat better known, a fact that is indicated by the appearance of his name on the front cover of the magazine. Since Mencken and Nathan generally published unknown writers, they did not usually employ the common marketing technique of listing their contributors on the front cover (one of the few major exceptions to this rule was the cover for Oct. 1919; see fig. 5). In this case, they broke with standard practice and listed James Branch Cabell, then fairly well-known for his satires of southern gentility, Lilith Benda, who was a regular contributor to the magazine, and Sherwood Anderson, on the front cover (see fig 6). Inside, they again broke with precedent by listing Anderson’s other publications above the “The White Streak”: they introduced it as a story “by Sherwood Anderson[:] Author of ‘Windy MacPherson’s Son,’ ‘Marching Men,’ etc.” Anderson was not yet all that well-recognized, but Mencken and Nathan clearly recognized his potential.

In "The White Streak" a young man is sickened by the fact that life may be reduced to our animal needs, that people are concerned only with clothes and food. He begins to despise all the people around him and "something like a revolution went on in his soul" (27). In his search for meaning he finds the cousin of his wife strangely representative of something missing from his life, from all lives, in her serene silence. He finds himself attracted to her, but he never actually makes any overtures to her; instead he finds himself in her room hugging the "white streak" of her soft dress against his cheek (28). He has no other interaction with this woman, and he becomes thereafter a respectable man of his community who works as a commission merchant, buying and selling food. Later in life, however, he sees a boat on the water and the memory of the white streak returns to him: "For a moment his mind, that for years has been quite normal and sure of itself, is confused" (29). The memory soon passes, but "for several days after that night at the office he is somewhat more tender and thoughtful in his attitude toward the fat, grey-haired old woman who is his wife and toward his daughter in school when she comes into his mind" (30). As often happened in the *Smart Set*, the tools for understanding such a story were supplied by Mencken in his review column.

In addition to reviewing fiction, Mencken increasingly reviewed nonfiction texts in his book review column. As a result, his examination of current trends in thought, politics, and culture often formed an accompaniment to the fiction that appeared in the magazine. Mencken thus supplied a rather detailed critical and social context in which to understand and appreciate the kinds of trends appearing in the fiction that they published. Certainly, with reference to Freudian psychology, Mencken could not have been much

more thorough in his explication of at least the most salient points to the magazine's readers. Not his only mention of Freud in the magazine, his most extensive review column on the subject, aptly titled "Rattling the Subconscious," appeared in the magazine two months after the publication of Anderson's "White Streak."

In this review column, Mencken provided one of his characteristically colloquial, entertaining, and accessible explanations of a complex topic. He argues that the subject of psychoanalysis is rarely discussed without a "snicker" owing to its association with sexuality. But he argues that despite the snickers he is sure to provoke by raising the subject at all, there is some soundness to the theories being propounded by Freud and Jung, among others. He explains that these men are intent on showing people the "true genesis and character of our ideas" (139). As usual with his columns, he acknowledges the generally held belief on a subject—in this case the idea that Freud is a fraud—and sympathizes with those who might hold such a view. Having reassured his audience that he understands they may be thinking such things, he goes on to explain why they may wish to modify that view.

In this case, Mencken declares that psychoanalysis is not "transcendental pishposh," but rather that it rationally exposes the causation behind all human thought and action (139). Once he has asserted the legitimacy of psychoanalysis, he explains the specifics of Freudian psychoanalysis: "it is Freud's notion that this subconscious of yours is full of . . . obliterated memories—that it is a sort of cold-storage warehouse for all the things that you have thought in the past and then put out of mind" (139). He follows this colloquial explanation with the statement: "the fact that a good many such throttled

memories must be sexual in character is so obvious that it scarcely needs statement" (139). In sum, he outlines the fact that our ideas are determined by both conscious and unconscious causation, so that our thoughts are the result of both our environment and of the "natural desires which that environment opposes" (140). Only two months before, the same magazine had printed a story in which the narrator sees a boat on a river and, upon being reminded of the "white streak" of his wife's cousin's dress, becomes "confused" (29). As with the intersection between Mencken's explanation of Conrad's modernism and the publication of modernist writers in the magazine, this review column provided a context for understanding the content of the stories that were appearing in the magazine.

Anderson published two more stories in the magazine, the widely anthologized "I Want to Know Why," which appeared in the magazine in July 1918, and "Unlighted Lamps" which was published in July 1921. Mencken's review of Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* appeared in August 1919. As usual, Mencken did not merely praise this book, he also provided a context for its reception. He explained to his readers in no uncertain terms its significance within the history of American literature. He declared that this book occupied a "category all its own," that there had been "nothing quite like it" in American literature and that it was, indeed, literature of a "new order," something "quite new under the sun" (140). He recognized, then, in no uncertain terms that Anderson had made it new, that this was modernism. Mencken explained to his readers what it was that made it new, describing it as "a new order of short story, half tale and half psychological anatomizing, and vastly better than all the kinds that have gone before" (140). He even,

amazingly, pinpointed its lineage within a modernist tradition: “Here is the goal that ‘The Spoon River Anthology’ aimed at, and missed by half a mile” (140). For someone who so continually mocked the pedagogues, Mencken was a remarkable teacher. Certainly, in this article as elsewhere, his readers were left with the knowledge of how this book differed from all American books before it, and exactly why that difference was so important.

By the following month Mencken was including Anderson’s novel in an impromptu canon of American literature which he developed for the magazine’s readers as part of that month’s *Répétition Generale*. Headed “Don’t Throw this Away!,” this column proclaimed that the following books were “worthy of places on a civilized man’s bookshelf”: Theodore Dreiser’s *Jennie Gerhardt* and *The Titan*, Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*, Ring Lardner’s *You Know Me Al*, Edith Wharton’s *Ethan Frome*, Frank Norris’s *Vandover and the Brute*, and Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (42). Within a two month period he had, thus, both proclaimed the significance of Anderson’s work within the history of American literature and canonized it.

Anderson had four stories published in the *Smart Set*, and he was the subject of numerous *Smart Set* book review columns. After Mencken and Nathan left the magazine in 1923, his association with them continued; his work appeared in both *The American Mercury* and Nathan’s *American Spectator*. Later, in his memoirs, he was clear, however, that it was the *Smart Set*, and not the later magazines, which was linked to his early professional career. He recorded that when he was with the Chicago intellectual crowd of Ben Hecht, Burton Rascoe, and Carl Sandburg in 1913, the *Smart Set* had been the journal that they followed:

We all gathered around a big table and indulged in literary talk. At that time Henry Mencken was our great hero. We all read the old *Smart Set* and later Mencken and Nathan's *Mercury*. Many of us had got letters from Mencken. . . . 'Well, I had a letter from Henry Mencken today.' You said it casually off-hand but, in your heart, you felt that it was like being knighted by a king. (369)

Anderson's memoirs are notoriously unreliable, and the tone of his letters do not match the tone of his reminiscence, but if he was not always as fond of Mencken as this memoir indicates, he was well aware of the importance of Mencken's opinion at that time. At the beginning of his career when the *Smart Set* published "The Story Writers," Anderson was likely as thrilled as he maintains.

Even in his letters, where Anderson is much more negative about Mencken, there is no question that he was aware of the magazine and, moreover, that it was at the centre of the American literary renaissance. In April 1918, he wrote to Van Wyck Brooks that "New York as a city seems to have become a definite thing with a style of its own. Mencken and such fellows must get a little tired of their own smartness" (*Letters* 30). The next month he added, even more bluntly, "One cannot surrender to the cheaper inclination in writing, to win perhaps the secondary approval of an ass like Mencken as his reward" (*Letters* 37). That the opinion of an "ass like Mencken" was nevertheless important to him is revealed in a letter to Jerome and Lucile Blum two years later in which he says of Mencken's *Smart Set* review column for December 1920, "Mencken was out with rather fulsome praise of *Poor White*" (*Letters* 64).

Twenty years after his first publication in the *Smart Set*, Anderson included Mencken and Nathan specifically in a letter to Maxwell Perkins in which he described the American literary renaissance of which he had been a part:

As you know, I came into writing in a curious period, just before the World War. There was a kind of Robin's Egg Renaissance that produced Lewis, Dreiser, Sandburg, O'Neill, the *Little Review*, *New Republic*, *Seven Arts* magazine, the crowd about the old *Masses* etc. All the figures of that time I came to know personally. I imagine this Rudolpf [a character he was working on], myself really, come in among these men as I can, with just such a background, working for years among them, knowing personally the New York crowd of the time, Mencken, Nathan, and the others. (18 June 1936 *Letters* 354)

Anderson, who on occasion thought Mencken too smart, still recognized that he and Nathan, the bad boys of Manhattan, had established a significant reputation for themselves, and, moreover, were an active part of the cultural changes then taking place. Indeed, Anderson is perfectly justified in such an assertion. Mencken played a significant role in the early careers of both Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson.

Eugene O'Neill

During the same period, George Jean Nathan was instrumental in paving the way for the critical reception of Eugene O'Neill. Although George Jean Nathan is no longer as well-known as H. L. Mencken, it should not be assumed that while they co-edited the *Smart Set* he languished in the shadows while Mencken enjoyed ever increasing amounts of publicity. A review in the *Salt Lake City Tribune* of Mencken and Nathan's mock dual

biography, *Pistols for Two*, which had been written by them under the pseudonym Owen Hatteras, indicates the extent of their joint reputation at the time. This review referred to Mencken and Nathan as “two extraordinary literary luminaries” and suggested that they exploded the notion that “two stars keep not their motion in one sphere” (“New Method”). As this article’s main metaphor reveals, in the early heyday of Hollywood—when the notion of “celebrity” was still relatively new—both of these men were recognized as “stars.”

Nathan, like Mencken, was widely quoted in the popular press and his opinion was given considerable weight. In June 1917, in a review of Nathan’s book of theater criticism *Bottoms Up*, the *New York Mail* praised his efforts as a drama critic: “Nathan has for years devoted his energies to exposing the stupidities and the absurdities of the contemporary theater” (“Slapstick”). But by this point even Nathan’s quips, not just his reviews, were earning an audience beyond the immediate readers of the *Smart Set*. New York papers such as the *Telegraph* reported Mencken and Nathan’s sayings “worthy of reprinting” and in September 1917, for example, reproduced Nathan’s “widely quoted” opinion of theatrical managers: “[A newspaper reviewer] asked him if it was true that a disgruntled theatrical manager named Gest had alluded to him as a ‘pinhead.’ ‘That,’ replied Mr. Nathan, ‘is on the face of it absurd. ‘Pinhead’ is a word of two syllables” (Leonard). Nathan was a man recognized for his criticism and his cleverness. From this critical vantage point Nathan appointed himself one of the earliest, and most vocal, proponents of the then almost completely unknown Eugene O’Neill.

If any American critic was positioned to popularize O'Neill's work, it was Nathan. His *Smart Set* review articles were as often an education about what was wrong with the American theatre as they were reviews of individual plays. Nathan's primary accusation was that unlike their European counterparts, American playwrights lacked the talent, or the imagination, to escape simple formulaic settings and routine dialogue. A typical commentary on the clichés of the drama appeared in Nathan's aptly titled review column "Theatrical U. S. A.—An Unimagi-Nation" which appeared in the *Smart Set* in January 1913. In this column he mocked *The Argyle Case*, a mystery which he characterizes as "about No. 27,852,621 in the series of detective tales in which the murdered man's body has been discovered in the library" (148). Nathan quips: "I have wondered and speculated in print for many years as to the mysterious circumstance that causes men invariably to be murdered in libraries" (148). Such observations on the clichéd elements in American drama were one of Nathan's favorite rhetorical devices; a later variation on this technique appeared in his regular "Répétition Générale" feature "Great Moments from Rotten Plays," which highlighted the worst scenes in contemporary American drama.

Nathan's most persistent argument was that there were no new ideas in American theatre because American audiences refused to embrace anything which challenged the status quo. A typical criticism of this sort appears in Nathan's theatre review for January 1914, aptly titled "Why our Drama Is Backward." Nathan begins this review by recording that "In the American mind, comparative originality of viewpoint and seriousness of intention are ever held to be incompatible of association" (145). In the conclusion to this

article, Nathan places his harshest and undoubtedly most controversial point regarding the backwardness of American drama, within the seemingly dry, academic form of a footnote. Nathan used humour in his criticism as a simultaneous method of entertainment and effective attack. His entire footnote appeared as follows: "Last month I quoted from memory the following bit from the play 'Today': 'Gee, you say that guy's not old! Why, Bo, he pulled a stroke when Washington crossed the Delaware.' I am indignantly assured by one of the authors that the words 'Gee,' 'Bo' and 'guy,' were not in the dialogue" (152). The insertion of the single adverb "indignantly" indicates that if American theatre is backward, part of the reason may lie in the fact that its authors are proud enough of such dialogue to be indignant at its being misquoted.

Through such columns Nathan not only revealed his own awareness of the power of humour in criticizing the current American drama, and in getting away with that criticism, but demonstrated his skill in conveying such criticism in an entertaining and memorable manner. Both Mencken and Nathan taught their readers as they criticized, but did so in such a manner that their columns were without question the most popular part of the magazine. In its extreme form, the popularity of their columns was recognized even by critics of their magazine as a whole. A letter to the *New York Tribune* in January 1919 pondered, "There are a certain number of cosmic problems, if not more, and one of them is to wit viz: what to do with the Smart Set after reading Messieurs Nathan and Mencken?"; the response provided by the paper, in the form of the headline given to this letter, was: "Wrap Up Your Old Razor Blades in It and Drop the Package Down the Grand Canyon" ("Wrap"). Such opinions were, of course, not shared by all of the

magazine's readers. Indeed, a review of the magazine in the *Winston Salem Journal* in December 1917 criticized the magazine for its "Smart Alexy" attitude, but praised its publishing decisions: "[it] has the backbone to print that which fulfills its idea of literature of the class it wants, which is a very good class" ("Smart Set").

In May 1917, Eugene O'Neill sent Mencken and Nathan two plays which had been turned down for publication by the avant-garde little magazine *The Seven Arts*. O'Neill was, at that time, almost completely unknown. His first staged play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, had been performed at the makeshift wharf theatre in Provincetown by the newly formed amateur theatre group the Provincetown Players in July 1916. The following year, the Provincetown Players rented space in New York; *Bound East for Cardiff* premiered there in November 1916 (Gelb 318). A limited number of reviewers, including Heywood Broun of the *Tribune*, gave the Players their first taste of real publicity. In his brief notice of O'Neill, Broun described *Bound East* as a play of the sea which was "rich" in the "Kipling vein" (qtd. in Sheaffer 370). O'Neill's short story *Tomorrow* was published by the avant-garde little magazine *The Seven Arts* in June 1917, but they rejected his plays *The Long Voyage Home* and *The Moon of the Caribees* (Gelb 329). Ironically, this magazine rejected two of the plays which the *Smart Set* was to accept, even though its declared operating principle was to support writers without deference to "current magazine standards" (qtd. in Sheaffer 382). The *Seven Arts* folded after only a year but even before its dissolution, owing to their rejection of two of his plays, O'Neill was left looking for another place to publish his work.

O'Neill sent the rejected plays to the *Smart Set*. In their biography of O'Neill, the Gelbs conjecture that O'Neill may have decided to send these plays to the *Smart Set* owing to the appeal of its "iconoclasm" (339). A letter that O'Neill sent with the plays indicates his familiarity with the magazine. He admitted that he had never seen anything like his plays in the magazine, but he added that he would appreciate hearing Mencken's opinion of them, even if Mencken was unable to publish them (26 May 1917 "Mencken Collection" NYPL). Not only were both plays accepted, but Mencken and Nathan both sent him letters expressing their personal praise of them (Gelb 339). This letter from Nathan began an extended correspondence between the two men, a correspondence which would, within a few years, develop into a close, lifelong friendship.³⁰

The first of O'Neill's plays to appear in the magazine was *The Long Voyage Home*. It was published in the issue for October 1917 and performed the following month by the Provincetown Players. Nathan's review of O'Neill's *In the Zone* appeared in his review column for January 1918. There was nothing understated about his praise. Nathan titled his article "The Chewing Gum Drama" and began with one of his characteristic rants against both American drama and American theatre audiences. Having fulminated against the predictable, unimaginative state of most Broadway drama, he suggests the following corrective: "For playwrights of the Carpenter school, the various amateur organizations like the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players are slowly, but certainly, making to substitute playwrights of skill and vision and quality" (134). As an

³⁰ O'Neill's 130 letters to Nathan, which date from 1919 until 1949, have been published in the collection "*As Ever, Gene*": *The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to George Jean Nathan* (1987).

example of the improved breed of playwrights coming out of these little theatre groups he recommends Eugene O'Neill.

Nathan not only cites O'Neill as worthy of particular praise but guides his reader to where they might find examples of his work. He mentions that one of O'Neill's plays had already been published in the *Smart Set* and adds that his dramatic work can be witnessed by attending the Comedy Theatre, where they were then performing *In the Zone*. After praising the Provincetown Players, and mentioning the *Smart Set* and the Comedy Theatre as places to find O'Neill's work, he reviews *In the Zone*. He opines that the basic materials of the play were those of "melodrama" but adds that "the approach to these materials and the vivid human portraiture with which they are invested transform them into something at once intriguing and distinguished" (134).

Nathan's review of *In the Zone* was distinct from the few other reviews that appeared. The anonymous review of the play that appeared in the *New York World* praised its "suspense" and summarized the plot ("New Season"). Other than its appreciation of the "tense" nature of this play, this article did not provide any other evaluative framework through which to appreciate O'Neill's drama. Such reviews demonstrate just how acute Nathan was in his recognition that it was not the basic material of the play, no matter how tense, but the approach to these standard materials that transformed the play into something else, something infinitely more important.

In conclusion, Nathan heralds O'Neill as the man who may change the nature of American theatre, destroying the "chewing gum" drama for good: "O'Neill, they tell me, is still a youngster, but if I mistake not he is one of the most promising men come in several

years the way of the American theater” (134). This was an opinion which he would repeat, with even more conviction, in reviews throughout the rest of the year. During 1918, Nathan’s praise for O’Neill’s work was accompanied by the publication of two more of his plays in the *Smart Set*. *Ile* appeared in the magazine in May, and *The Moon of the Caribees* in August. Of his early one-act plays, O’Neill stated on several occasions that *The Moon of the Caribees* was his favorite (Gelb 327; Sheaffer 383). He characterized it as his “first real break with traditions” (qtd. in Gelb 327). This play is almost without a story; it thrives, instead, on atmosphere.³¹

A month before *The Moon of the Caribees* appeared in the magazine, Nathan was promoting its virtues in his *Smart Set* review column for July, “Wine, Woman and Song.” This play was introduced within the context of Nathan’s review of the May bill of the little theatre group, the Washington Square Players. Nathan condemned the Players for performing Wilde’s *Salome*. He did not find the performance itself particularly riveting, but his main criticism was that the Players chose to perform a well-known play instead of encouraging the sort of “exploratory interest” which should be the province of a little theatre (135). He claims that their unwillingness to seek out fresh new plays was particularly inexcusable in light of the fact that they had “in their possession and at their disposal Mr. Eugene O’Neill’s excellent ‘Moon of the Caribees’” (135). That Nathan was aware that the Washington Square Players had O’Neill’s play in their possession indicates how closely he was already concerning himself with the playwright’s affairs; that

³¹ The Gelbs describe the primary innovation of this play as O’Neill’s “disregard for plot or action and its concentration on the creation of a pure, poetic mood”; in their opinion O’Neill’s experimental use of mood in this play prefigured such plays as “The Glass Menagerie” (327).

O'Neill was likely the source of this information indicates how much he was willing to accept the aid of this well-known critic. Despite Nathan's efforts on O'Neill's behalf, the Washington Square Players did not perform *The Moon of the Caribbees*.³² Eventually, *The Moon of the Caribbees* was staged in New York by the Provincetown Players in December 1918.

After criticizing the Washington Square Players for not performing O'Neill's *Moon of the Caribbees*, Nathan devoted another column of this same review article to O'Neill through his review of the Greenwich Village Players' performance of O'Neill's *Ile*. He does not blame the failure of the performance on O'Neill but on the faulty interpretation of his play. Nathan was teaching this distinction between playwright and performance to his readers, for this was not a common distinction at the time. Nathan began his review by drawing his readers' attention to the fact that they might have read this play in the *Smart Set* (it had appeared there in May). Mencken and Nathan, as nascent celebrities, rarely missed an occasion to promote themselves and their magazine, even as they promoted their favourite writers. As a result, such reminders in their review columns that a meritorious work had appeared in the pages of their magazine were common. (Mencken, for example, used his review of James Joyce's *Dubliners* in 1917 as an excuse to remind his readers that two of Joyce's *Dubliner* stories had appeared in the magazine.) While such comments were clearly self-serving, they also gave the magazine an ongoing extra-textual relevance: external events and publications were constantly being linked back to events within its pages.

³² During the summer of 1918, owing primarily to problems arising from wartime conditions, both the Washington Square Players and the Greenwich Village Theatre ceased to exist (Sheaffer 431).

In this case, the magazine's readers were asked to associate Nathan's review of an actual performance of O'Neill's work with the memory of what they had read: "This O'Neill play, as readers of the *Smart Set* may recall, pictures the interminable gray, of the cold seas" (135). Nathan re-emphasizes this point about the play's atmosphere by quoting directly from O'Neill's lengthy explication of the play's scene, as it had appeared in the *Smart Set*: "'one of those gray days of calm' read the stage directions, 'when ocean and sky are alike dead'" (135). In a comment which O'Neill could not help but have appreciated, Nathan stressed that these stage directions were vital to the entire character and success of the play, that the play's atmosphere was its most important factor; without it "the whole effect of the play topples and goes to pieces" (135). Nathan then proceeds to condemn the Greenwich Square Players for unaccountably switching the play's time from one o'clock in the afternoon (as stipulated in the stage directions) to twilight. Nathan notes that as a result, this bleak play about obsession and madness which was meant to be performed in a gray light was, instead, "pea-green" (135). Nathan is adamant about the fact that while the twilight effect might have been prettier than O'Neill's intended grey, by using it the Players had destroyed the essential character of the play and the mood upon which its theme relied (135).

Nathan's careful explanation of how the transposed time-frame of the play had destroyed its effect was not characteristic of how the play was generally received. Burns Mantle in the *New York Mail* was typical in his attention to the plot. Indeed, in contrast to Nathan he praises it as "another of those atmospheric bits" (6). Reviews that specifically characterized the play as either tense or dramatic appeared in the *New York News Record*,

the *New York Call*, and the *New York Drama Mirror* (Miller 375-76). Whether positive or negative in their assessment of this play, most of the critics who reviewed it drew specific attention to the effect of the play in performance and not, as Nathan had done, to the playwright's intentions.

While Nathan acknowledged the importance of the mechanics of the theatre, its actors and producers, the main focus of his reviews was on the playwright. He, therefore, does not conclude his review with attention to the Players, but to O'Neill: "This O'Neill, as I have often observed, is a man of striking ability, the most striking, indeed, that has come the way of the American theatre in some years" (136). Nathan reports that he has seen O'Neill's first full-length play, "Beyond the Horizon," in manuscript and characterizes it as a play which reveals the "lightning of the true artist" (136). Through such attention to his work in performance, Nathan drew considerable attention to O'Neill's early work, and left no doubt in the reader's mind as to its importance. By the end of the next theatrical season, Nathan declared that not one new play he had seen had revealed even "one-thousandth the dramatic skill of even a beginner like Eugene O'Neill" ("Thirty" 137). Only one year after O'Neill's first publication in the magazine, and two years after his first performance in New York, Nathan was already using him as the standard by which all other drama was judged.

In his dissertation "George Jean Nathan and the Emergence of Modern American Drama Criticism" (1991), Thomas Connolly argues that Nathan was the "first modern American drama critic" because his "first allegiance was to criticism itself, not to the theatre" (ii). The first part of Connolly's argument rests upon the idea that Nathan

changed both the way in which drama was perceived and the manner in which it was reviewed; the second, related point contends that Nathan was instrumental in reminding drama critics of their responsibility to write knowledgeably about all facets of the drama, and not just what they saw on the stage. While Connolly's evidence rests primarily on Nathan's books, and not on his *Smart Set* criticism, the main critical trends that Connolly identifies in Nathan's books on the drama were clearly evident in his *Smart Set* review columns.

Nathan's move away from the "genteel tradition of drama criticism" that focused on acting, to a modern focus on the playwright is clearly exhibited, for example, in his *Smart Set* review column for June 1918, "The Popular Play." This article appeared in the magazine one month after the *Smart Set* publication of O'Neill's *Ile*. In this review, Nathan exhibited the same pedagogical instinct that Mencken exemplified in so many of his book review columns. While most end-of-season drama reviews of the time would, understandably, have focused on an overview of the season, perhaps commenting on the best plays, in this article Nathan preceded his overview of the season's best plays with what is, in essence, an essay on the art of playwriting.

He explains, in an entertaining and accessible manner, that the peculiar difficulties confronting the playwright, in comparison to other types of artists, render play writing a particularly difficult art: "Where the novelist, the painter or the composer faces one rule, the dramatist faces a dozen, eight of which are intrinsic to his art; and all of which are at best half-crazy" (133). Having explained the constraints which the theatre itself places on the playwright's art, Nathan argues that there are two kinds of playwrights: the artist

playwright, who at least tries to fight against the “stage’s stupid ritual” and the popular playwright who “hoists the milk-white flag immediately . . . before he can see, even remotely, the whites of the enemy’s eyes” (134). He portrays the art of playwriting as a battle in which the main difference between “first-rate” and “tenth-rate” plays in the theatre has to do with the willingness of the playwright to take on the whims of the theatre, to take chances. But Nathan argues that even a playwright with the right artistic spirit faces incredible odds since “the medium of expression, however good the intentions of the performer, is too primitive, too greatly curtailed, too insufficient” (134). As a result, he argues that all drama, “good or bad, is an art in handcuffs [*sic*]. And the degree in which it differs is merely the degree in which the wrists of its creator are limber” (134). The theatre itself, then, according to Nathan, was an encumbrance to the artist, not an aid, even in the best circumstances.

Later, Nathan would be amused by the extent to which O’Neill shared this view of the theatre. Writing in 1932, he recorded how O’Neill avoided performances not only of his own plays, but of any plays. Nathan recalls that the only time he actually heard O’Neill admit to having gone to a theatre was when *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* was performed in Russian in Paris. According to O’Neill it was the best version of any of his plays that he had ever seen. Nathan challenged him by exclaiming that O’Neill knew no Russian and asked him how had he been able to arrive at such a judgement: “He looked at me pityingly. ‘You should have seen the way Tairoff’s wife, in the role of the girl, brushed those books off the table in that scene in the last act!’ he replied with grave seriousness” (“Intimate” 33-34). At any rate, having just seen his grey afternoon turned into a pea-

green twilight, if O'Neill saw Nathan's essay on the art, and frustrations, of the playwright, he likely agreed with its contents. More broadly, of course, through such commentaries Nathan reminded his readers of the stages between the composition and execution of a play and of the necessity to remember that a complex amalgamation of the whole was what was presented to them in the theatre.

As Connolly indicates in his thesis, two of the main reasons for the lack of sophisticated popular theatre criticism at the time related to the power of the theatre syndicates, who often demanded positive reviews from newspapers and magazines in return for advertising patronage, and to the fact that the idea of the professional theatre critic was just beginning to develop. Into the early years of the 20th century, most of the people who reviewed plays were journalists assigned to that position, but who might write any number of other things as well and who were unlikely to remain theatre critics for any length of time. Connolly records that Nathan himself started out in that sort of situation. The difference was that Nathan decided to devote himself to theatre criticism, and guided his own freelance work in that direction before being hired to work for the *Smart Set*. Nathan was the *Smart Set's* sole drama critic for 15 years; he was thus inevitably exposed to a great number of plays. This experience gave him the room to develop theories about what exactly it meant to be a drama critic and what a drama critic should be required to do.

Some of his thoughts on this issue appeared, for example, in his *Smart Set* column for February 1916, "The Commercial Theatrical Mismanager." In this column Nathan outlined the standard practices of most drama critics, and indicated how those practices

were actually harmful to American drama: “The critics, instead of courting progress and infusing new life into the bones of the drama, are forever yelping ‘you can’t do this,’ ‘you can’t do that,’ and are constantly doing their little, if ineffectual, best, to keep the theater in status quo” (145-46). He felt, and indeed explained in his columns, that drama critics not only had a responsibility to promote good native drama but also were accountable if their actions resulted in the suppression of artistic talent, arguing that many of them “grossly [debased] the popular taste by caddying to that taste” (“Broadway” 133). He felt that there should be a critical standard, and that theatre critics had a responsibility to set it.

The publication of O’Neill’s work in the *Smart Set* was thus accompanied by a running commentary on the state of American drama and of drama criticism, in addition to Nathan’s persistent promotion of his work. Nathan, like Mencken, taught his readers. He explained, to critics and lay people alike, what they should look for in the drama and how they should judge it. Moreover, as Connolly has argued, he shifted the focus of drama reviews away from the performance and onto the playwright, thereby allowing for greater intellectual analysis of what appeared on stage. Nathan’s beliefs concerning the role of the drama critic in advancing the state of the drama were promoted by him both in the magazine, and in practice. Nathan acted as an emissary for O’Neill’s plays with the Broadway managers of his acquaintance and was, in fact, instrumental in arranging the sale of the first O’Neill play to be performed on Broadway (Gelb 340). When O’Neill died, in 1953, Nathan was mentioned as his early champion and lifelong friend in the obituary that appeared in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. One of the subheadings in this obituary described O’Neill’s death as “Nathan’s Loss” (“American”).

A Literary Renaissance

The role which the *Smart Set* played in publishing and promoting American modernism between 1916 and 1919 is revealed by the fact that almost every issue of the magazine in 1918 contained either reviews of, or work by, the writers who proved to be major figures in American literature. It is worth outlining these contents in brief to give an idea what the magazine's readers were seeing on a monthly basis: the January issue contained Nathan's praise for Eugene O'Neill; February, Mencken on the Irish Literary Renaissance; March, Mencken on Twain, Conrad, and Anderson; April, Nathan on Continental drama; May, O'Neill's *Ile*; June, Mencken's praise of T. S. Eliot; July, Anderson's "The White Streak" and Nathan's review of O'Neill's *Moon of the Caribbees*; August, O'Neill's *Moon of the Caribbees*; September, Mencken on Freud; October, Djuna Barnes's superb short story "Renunciation"; November, Nathan on O'Neill and Mencken on Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*; December, Nathan on Continental drama. The names appearing in the issues for 1919 are equally impressive: that year, work by Dunja Barnes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, and Sherwood Anderson appeared in its pages. It is important to keep in mind that these writers were appearing mere issues apart from one another. They were even, occasionally, in the same issue: for example, in an amazing double-header, the *Smart Set* for October 1919 contained both Dreiser's "Sanctuary" and Cather's "Her Boss" while the November issue contained Anderson's "I Want to Know Why" and Fitzgerald's "The Debutante." Viewed in retrospect, the magazine is a who's who of American literature. Even in the months in which no writers

who subsequently became famous appeared, Mencken and Nathan kept their readers abreast of current developments in drama, literature, and culture.

The irony of Mencken and Nathan's prescient publishing decisions is that even while they were publishing the writers who would later be considered key figures in the American literary renaissance, both critics continued to voice their doubt about the likelihood of an American literary renaissance. Mencken summarized an opinion often expressed by both men when he wrote in 1919 that despite months of "prayerful regurgitation" of the hope there might be an "imminent flowering of beautiful letters in America," he remained sceptical that America had any "national literature at all," or that she soon would ("Mainly" 138). This sort of statement helped to earn both critics the status of men renowned for their criticism of American letters. According to the *Buffalo Commercial* in October 1917, Mencken was "the ablest of our literary critics" because his criticism was "pungent, entertaining, and 'constructively destructive'" (Clippings). A review of Nathan's book of theatre criticism, *Bottoms Up*, which appeared in the *New York Mail* in June 1917, similarly declared that Nathan had been devoting his energies for years to "exposing the stupidities and absurdities in the contemporary theatre" ("Slapstick"). Both men were thus seen as agents of change. Even as they were helping that change to take place, they continued to attack and expose the things that they felt were keeping American literature from attaining a definable national character.

Their debunking was paired, however, with their examples of how things might be different. Their criticism was, therefore, not simply empty condemnation. Even Mencken, who did not believe that American literature could rise above the current prevailing

“pishposh,” was happy to point out examples of writers who were producing work which at least indicated better things to come. In his *Smart Set* column for March 1919, Mencken declared that Willa Cather was one of the few American writers who had shown what American literature could do. He found hope for the future of American letters in *My Ántonia*, which he called one of the best novels that any American [had] ever done, East or West, early or late” (141). He praised Cather’s sense of the American landscape and of its people. Moreover, he admired the technical innovation represented by the relative plotlessness of this novel and especially her modernist attention to point-of-view (141). He declared that the “singularity” of her writing would be given a lasting place in American literature.

Four months later, Nathan declared to the magazine’s readers that O’Neill’s *Moon of the Caribbees* was one of the four best plays of the season, the only four which he argued, possessed the “sound merit” to be so declared (“Potboiler” 133). These critics had a reputation for tearing apart their enemies and any literary traditions which they felt should have been abandoned with the 19th century, but their criticism was moderated, somewhat, by their praise. As the *New Republic* summarized the situation the following year, “The American public is being slowly led to recognize and cultivate American aesthetic preferences, far more deliberately than was the past generation of Americans,” a fact which they attributed to H. L. Mencken’s criticism on behalf of “the struggling and unknown, or little known” (Clippings). Among the struggling and unknown authors encouraged and supported by Mencken and Nathan’s *Smart Set* review columns and in their publishing decisions between 1916 and 1919 were America’s first Nobel Laureates in

literature and drama. These critics had, indeed, both heralded and helped to usher in a new era in American literature.

Cather and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, 1920

In *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, Edward de Grazia explains that until Judge Woolsey's 1933 ruling in the censorship trial of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the test for obscenity in America was based on the British Hicklin doctrine, fashioned in 1868. The Hicklin doctrine deemed literature to be obscene if it had a tendency to "deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences"(xi). De Grazia argues that the American obscenity laws which developed out of this doctrine judged something to be obscene based on "the imagined effects books might have upon impressionable young girls" (xi). This "young girl" was a factor in 1920 when Willa Cather's agent, Paul Reynolds, could not find a popular magazine willing to publish her new short story "Coming Aphrodite!" (Woodress 315). Reynolds was having trouble placing this story even though Cather was already a successful popular writer whose work had appeared in such magazines as *McClure's*, *Century*, *Harper's*, and *Collier's*. In August 1920, this story was finally published in an expurgated form as "Coming, Eden Bower!" in the *Smart Set*. The *Smart Set* had a smaller circulation than the magazines in which Cather's work usually appeared, and it could only afford to pay less than she regularly received.

"Coming, Aphrodite!" was not rejected by the other mass-market magazines of the day for its lack of artistry or craftsmanship. Indeed, when it appeared in book form in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* later that year it was widely praised by the critics of the day as one of her best stories. The reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* declared: "If Willa Cather had written nothing except 'Coming, Aphrodite!' . . . there could be no doubt of her right to rank beside the greatest creative artists of the day" (24). That this

story was rejected by the mass-market magazines of the day was not owing to its craft, but to its subject matter. Paul Reynolds had trouble placing this story because of its frank portrayals of sexuality and seduction.

It is little wonder that Reynolds had trouble placing this story since Cather's choice of subject matter was quite likely as political as it was artistic. I believe that viewed in conjunction with her earlier criticism, Cather's specific choice of symbols, themes, and metaphors in this story was meant as a protest against the forces responsible for protecting and enforcing American obscenity law, in particular the legal power of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice and the literary criticism of William Dean Howells. As I see it, this story was Cather's creative protest against the legal and critical restrictions which limited the work of American authors to subjects appropriate for "young girls" to read. That such a protest eventually appeared in the *Smart Set* was likely not a coincidence, since Cather's views on both obscenity law and William Dean Howells's condemnation of sexual content in literature were shared by the *Smart Set's* two editors, particularly by H. L. Mencken.

William Dean Howells

The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was founded in 1873. That same year the U. S. post office declared the Society's secretary, Anthony Comstock, a "special agent," a title which allowed him to search the mails for obscene matter. Shortly thereafter these powers were codified by Congress in what was generally known as The Comstock Law. This law made it a crime "knowingly to send obscene publications through the mail" (De Grazia 4). In *Girls Lean Back Everywhere* De Grazia explains that

one of the most terrifying aspects of this law for authors and publishers was that it was almost impossible to provide a defence against it. As an example, De Grazia describes the 1902 trial of Ida Craddock for sending her book *Advice to a Bridegroom* through the mail. Although this was a trial by jury, De Grazia records that the jury was not, in fact, allowed to see Craddock's book or its contents: "The judge would not let the jurors see the booklet because it was 'indescribably obscene'" (5). Although they hadn't actually seen the evidence, the jury found Ida Craddock guilty "without leaving their seats" (5). De Grazia indicates that this sort of situation was "characteristic" of the way obscenity trials were conducted. His dry summary of the situation is that such behaviour made the defence against an obscenity charge "especially problematic," and since no evidence was actually entered into the record, it made an appeal a virtual impossibility (5).

The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was thus, from the beginning, an effective deterrent to anyone wishing to send "obscene publications" through the mail. The primary problem for writers was that within the terms of the Comstock Law there was no distinction between daguerreotype pictures of "women of questionable virtue" and works of literature (De Grazia 4). As Mencken would later record in his essay "Puritanism as a Literary Force," the Comstocks early and unequivocally placed the interests of morality before the interests of art: "I have before me as I write a pamphlet in explanation of [Comstock's] aims and principles, prepared by Comstock himself and presented to me by his successor. Its very title is a sufficient statement of the Puritan position: 'MORALS, Not Art or Literature.' The capitals are in the original" (253-54). Mencken notes that, at the very least, this position is completely unambiguous. The

position of author and editor in relation to the law is clearly defined, as he added: “there is no hypocritical pretension to a desire to purify or safeguard the arts; they are dismissed at once as trivial and degrading” (254). After recording Comstock’s amazing conviction rate during his lifetime, around 98.5 percent, Mencken notes that juries tended to acquiesce with Comstock in his lowly view of the arts (254).

There were, during this period, editors and critics who defended the sanctity of art. However, the most influential of them tended to agree with the definition of “decency” as it was embodied in the Hicklin doctrine and defended in the courts. Among the editors and critics who adopted strict views regarding literature and decency were Hamilton Wright Mabie, editor of *Outlook*, Edward Bok, editor of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*; and William Dean Howells, editor of the *Atlantic* monthly. One of the most influential theoretical defences of literature and decency was offered by Howells who was, in the 1890s, one of the most successful professional writers in America. In 1893 alone eight new writing contracts brought him nearly \$30,000 (Weber 7). He was so popular that in 1881, when one of his novels was serialized in *Scribner’s Monthly*, an astonished Emily Dickinson wrote the magazine’s editor, Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland, and inquired: “Doctor—How did you snare Howells?” To which Holland replied, “Emily—Money did it” (Bianchi 83).

The vehemence of some of the critical attacks upon Howells which appeared in books and magazines from the 1890s to the 1920s indicated the impressive critical influence acquired by the man and that more was at stake than critical opinion. As many commentators have indicated, this period was a “coming-of-age” for literature in America,

a period during which critics began to challenge the primacy of New England authors, editors, and magazines in setting national standards of taste and decorum. James Schroeter notes that “the American literary tone, insofar as we can claim to have had one at the time of World War I, was still largely set by the dying order—by Eastern-based editors and reviewers.” For half a century, the man most responsible for setting that “Eastern-based” American literary tone was undoubtedly Howells himself. As a prolific writer of plays and novels, as the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1871-1881, and then later as the author of the “The Editor’s Study” and the “Editor’s Easy-Chair” columns in *Harper’s* magazine from 1886-1920, Howells possessed a national audience of approximately 80,000 readers for his critical views right up until his death at 83 in 1920 (see Reed 120).

The “Dean of American Letters,” as Howells was known, was not directly responsible for the power and authority of Comstock’s New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, but his widely-read, and popularly echoed, sentiments regarding literature and decency provided intellectual respectability to the obscenity laws that Comstock enforced. One of the works which provided such intellectual respectability was Howells’s *Criticism and Fiction*, a compilation of his *Harper’s* editorials which was published in 1891, at the height of Howells’s personal renown. Here Howells argues that authors should recognize that “It is a question of writing, under cover of our universal acceptance, things for young girls to read which you would not be put out-of-doors for saying to them” (149). Not only did he argue that American authors should keep this audience—young girls—in mind when they wrote, but then, somewhat perversely, he adds

that they would not wish to write about inappropriate things anyway. He argues that, in fact, “serious” novelists “have no desire to deal with nakedness, as painters and sculptors freely do in the worship of beauty; or with certain facts of life, as the stage does, in the service of sensation” (153). Howells thus indicates that American novels were not prudish, but only polite, and that American authors did not feel restricted by this requirement of politeness, at least not if they considered themselves to be “serious” writers.

Later in this same essay, Howells asks why Americans may not write a “story on the lines of *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary*” (153): “At what moment did our fiction lose this privilege? In what fatal hour did the Young Girl arise and seal the lips of Fiction, with a touch of her finger, to some of the most vital interests of life?” (564). His answer to his own question is that “the Young Girl has never done anything of the kind” (564). Rather, he suggests “Generally, people now call a spade an agricultural implement; they have not grown decent without having also grown a little squeamish, but they have grown comparatively decent” (154-55). The dangerous, and untrue, implication in his statement is that American writers were constrained only by their own sense of decency, and not law, in refraining from writing about sexual matters; however, Howells’s supposedly rhetorical question about the reasons why American authors avoid writing about sexual matters has a factual answer. The “fatal hour” in which the “Young Girl” raised her finger and prevented American writers from publishing their own novels along the lines of *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary* was in 1873 with the creation of the Comstock Law. The

eyes of “Young Girl” were, in fact, the most potent weapons which Anthony Comstock and later John Sumner possessed in their arsenal against vice.

The literal, and not merely theoretical, danger posed by this metaphorical “Young Girl” was succinctly outlined by Jane Heap in the *Little Review* in December 1920. She had reason to become familiar with the role of the “Young Girl” in the enforcement of American obscenity law since at the time this commentary was published, she and Margaret Anderson had just been arrested and charged with publishing obscenity for their publication in the *Little Review* of the Nausicaa episode from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

The Society for which Mr. Sumner is agent, I am told, was founded to protect the public from corruption. When asked *what public?* its defenders spring to the rock on which America was founded: the cream-puff of sentimentality, and answer chivalrously “Our young girls!” so the mind of the young girl rules this country? (5)

The problem, as Jane Heap recognized, was that where artistic creation was concerned the hypothetical “mind of the young girl” did rule the country. Howells’s influential criticism on behalf of politeness in literature could only have exacerbated this situation.

Howells’s claim that serious authors recognized the need to call a “spade” an “agricultural implement” out of politeness (and not out of fear of the strict reprisals possible in American criminal law) remained influential long after it was written. This standard of literary propriety was still being upheld in the respectable intellectual journal *The Yale Review* in 1922. In his essay “Art and Decency” Grant Showerman argued, as Howells had argued in *Criticism and Fiction*, that in sculpture and painting there was

some excuse for the portrayal of “the fleshly facts of human life” (304) but that “in the case of letters we are on somewhat different ground” (305). Showerman does not cite Howells directly, but he uses Howells’s image of literature as a polite conversation between author and reader. Howells had written that “the guilty intrigue, the betrayal, the extreme flirtation even, [is] the exceptional thing in life, and unless the scheme of the story necessarily involved it, [. . .] it would be bad art to lug it in, and as bad taste as to introduce such topics into mixed company” (149). Thirty-one years later Showerman wrote: “We have agreed not only to keep these facts out of the reach of the senses, but not to speak of them, . . . This means that they are not proper material for conversation, and that they are not proper material for art” (309). Like Howells’s work, Showerman’s article rested on the premise that the issue was not one of law, but a question of politeness.

Showerman, in fact, argued that the principle of politeness in fiction should properly extend even beyond what the law was able to enforce. He wrote: “If we resort to the plea that we have made no breach in the law of the land, we are none the less under condemnation for breach of the law of taste. We are *not* to tell *all* the truth” (309). Showerman has, in fact, no sympathy for anyone wishing to challenge American obscenity law: “Principle is not law, but the basis for law. Principle declares the existence and the nature of the indecent and the immoral; the law prescribes what shall be its identification and treatment. If I am dealing with law at all, it is not the law of the statute-book, but the law of taste. But is the law of taste any less uncertain than the law of the courts?” (313). In this statement Showerman adopts a position similar to that taken by Howells in his

disingenuous dismissal of legal power of the “Young Girl.” Both men suggested that American authors should be constrained, first and foremost, not by the courts but by their sense of decency. This sort of literary theory in support of authorial self-censorship left authors without even an ideological defence for their choice of subject. They simply should have known better. These men thus supported the legal actions of the Comstocks even beyond what the Comstocks required.

Willa Cather

Among the critics and authors who directly attacked Howells’s interpretation of literary decorum were H. L. Mencken and Willa Cather. Both were significant opponents. By 1920, both writers were widely-read professional authors, well-respected by critics and fellow authors. Letters and reviews from the period indicate the growing regard of a younger generation of critics and writers, including such critics as Edmund Wilson and Carl Van Doren, and authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis. Since Cather and Mencken were almost the same age, Cather born in 1873 and Mencken in 1880, they were more familiar with the influence, and persuasiveness, of Howells’s critical opinion than were members of the younger generation. In 1916, Mencken and Cather clashed with Howells, and his principles of literary politeness, in the battle over the suppression of Theodore Dreiser’s *The “Genius”* by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice.

When Comstock’s successor John Sumner brought his considerable power to bear against *The “Genius”* he was still new at the job (Comstock had died in 1915). He was eager to prove himself and was given a chance to do so when he “received word from the Western Society for the Suppression of Vice in Cincinnati that a local clergyman had seen

'a young girl' borrowing *The 'Genius'* at a circulating library" (De Grazia 118). *The "Genius"* had been released only a few months after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, an important historical consideration owing to the fact that even before Sumner officially banned the book eight months later, critics openly attacked Dreiser both for his use of sexual subject matter and for his German-American heritage (De Grazia 114-15).

Dreiser's good friend, and fellow German-American, H. L. Mencken was quick to respond to Sumner's actions against *The "Genius."* Fred Hobson summarizes the situation in *Mencken: A Life*:

As soon as the novelist apprised him of the situation, he began to offer advice and to write hundreds of letters on Dreiser's behalf. Mencken also drew up a manifesto for other authors to sign and rounded up members of the Authors League of America to sign it. He financed most of the operation himself, later estimating that it had cost him at least three hundred dollars. Part of his fervour was stirred by the cause—Mencken abhorred censorship—and part because of Dreiser's particularly vulnerable position as a German American in a country of English sympathizers.

"A man accused of being a German has no chance whatever in a New York court at this time," he wrote his friend. (151)

One of the authors who agreed to sign Mencken's petition was Willa Cather. Cather was, along with H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, one of the more established authors to sign. By 1916, she had been the Managing Editor of *McClure's* magazine and was firmly established as a professional writer, reviewer, and journalist. She was already the author

of numerous poems, a collection of short stories, *The Troll Garden* (1905), and three novels: *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), *O Pioneers!* (1913), and *Song of the Lark* (1915).

When Mencken approached Cather for her aid in combating censorship, he did so as a critic already familiar with her work. In his first review of her writing, which had appeared in the *Smart Set* in December 1912, Mencken drew attention to the artistry of this newcomer's work. He wrote: "*Alexander's Bridge*, by Willa S. Cather, has the influence of Edith Wharton written all over it . . . the which remark, let me hasten to add, is not to be taken as a sneer but as hearty praise, for the novelizing novice who chooses Mrs. Wharton as her model is at least one who knows a hawk from a handsaw" (156). By 1916 his praise for Cather's work was unalloyed. In his review of *The Song of the Lark*, which appeared in the *Smart Set* in January, he wrote: "Miss Cather, indeed, here steps definitely into the small class of American novelists who are seriously to be reckoned with" (306). Later that year, when she signed his petition on behalf of Dreiser, his opinion of her as a person came to match his opinion of her as an artist. Of this period, Mencken wrote in his memoir: "I was always on friendly terms with Miss Cather, and had a high respect for her" (*My Life* 255).

It might be argued, of course, that part of the reason Cather was inclined to sign Mencken's manifesto was owing to such reviews. However, Cather's own views on censorship had been expressed clearly, in print, long before her first book and even before Mencken penned his first book review column. As a guest editor of the *Lincoln Courier* in August 1901, she contributed an article on the censorship which public librarians regularly engaged in when sharing stories with children:

They tell the story of the Trojan war, omitting the story of Helen's elopement; the story of Faust expurgated for the youthful mind; the story of Napoleon's energy, maintaining a careful silence as to his ambition. In short, these enthusiastic librarians simply abolish the elements of evil from literature for the benefit of the "pure young mind." This would be well enough if they could also banish it from the world in which these children must live. (*W&P* 853)

Her lack of patience with this sort of censorship was repeated by her in several different forms, but most often in terms of the duty of the artists to their art. For her, it was an artist's role to be true to his or her subject matter, not to be merely "polite." This was an idea that she expressed in both her criticism and her creative writing throughout her life.

For example, in an 1895 review of Ouida's popular novel *Under Two Flags*, Cather makes it very clear what she believes constitutes the book's real obscenity:

Preachers have cried out against the immorality of Ouida, and mammas have forbidden their daughters to read her, and gentlemen of the world have pretended to shudder at her cynicism. Now the truth of this matter is that her greatest sins are technical errors, as palpable as bad grammar or bad construction, sins of form and sense. (*WP* 276)

As this quotation indicates, Cather believed that art should be judged on its own terms, without any consideration for the suspected obscenity of the work. As her biographer James Woodress argues, this would have been a radical position for a man to adopt before the turn-of-the-century; it was an especially radical position for a woman to adopt, and to publish (Woodress 110).

In the early teens, Cather switched from her role as a reviewer to that of a professional writer and editor. But in her fiction she embodied the claims of her earlier criticism. From the publication of *O Pioneers!* in 1913 to the publication of *A Lost Lady* in 1923, Cather demonstrated through her choice of subject matter that she felt that love affairs were an appropriate subject for art. Cather's straightforwardly honest approach to the portrayal of love affairs in her fiction includes her sympathetic portrayal of the affair between Marie and Emil in *O Pioneers!* and her similarly understanding portrayal of the unrepentant Mrs. Forrester in *A Lost Lady*. She also made use of the subject of forbidden love in "Coming, Aphrodite!"

In this story, the artist Don Hedger lives alone with his dog Caesar in a New York garret. One day a new neighbour, the opera singer Eden Bower, moves in next door. The story consists of a series of erotically charged meetings between them. The eroticism of these meetings is accentuated by a series of scenes in which Hedger voyeuristically watches Eden Bower through a knot-hole in his closet door as she exercises in the nude. These meetings culminate in an affair and ultimately, for Hedger, in the neglect of his art. They fight over the direction that his art should take—towards wider popularity and fame or innovation and respect within the artistic community—and they part with mixed regrets. Both find what they thought they wanted: he influence and a good reputation, she money and fame.

Throughout this story, Cather's descriptions combine with her use of symbolism to indicate that her primary concern is with Hedger's calling as an artist. Throughout, she indicates that the primary sin of the artist is not his physical affair with a young single

woman, but his desertion of his artistic calling for something else. Although there is no indication that this love affair is a wise personal decision on either the part of Eden or Hedger, Cather does not provide any moralizing conclusion to the affair as an affair. Rather, her prose celebrates the archetypal depth and mystery of human desire. This is her highly erotic portrayal of the night Bower and Hedger become lovers:

[Two] figures, one white and one dark, and nothing whatever distinguishable about them but that they were male and female. The faces were lost, the contours blurred in shadow, but the figures were a man and a woman and that was their whole concern and their mysterious beauty,—it was the rhythm in which they moved, at last, along the roof and down into the dark hole; he first, drawing her gently after him. (243)

In this scene, Cather does not downplay the primitive Freudian danger and attraction of the “dark hole.” And, although Bower is compared with Delilah, Aphrodite, Eve, and the goddess Diana—all dangerous women who used their sexuality to ensnare and punish men—Cather does not conflate the threat posed by this particular woman’s sexuality with an overarching condemnation of sexuality. Indeed, her use of basic pairing of opposites (dark and light, male and female) underscores the naturalness of the “mysterious beauty” inherent in the scene.

As Alice Petry argues in her essay “Caesar and the Artist in Willa Cather’s ‘Coming, Aphrodite!’” the symbolism in this story illustrates the point that “the artist’s vocation is absolute” (310). Through her detailed analysis of Cather’s portrayal of Hedger’s pet Caesar, Petry arrives at the somewhat surprising, but ultimately convincing,

conclusion that in this story Cather uses Hedger's changing feelings toward his pet as a barometer of his attention to his vocation as an artist: "Hedger comforts, nurtures, indeed almost worships the dog as if it were the single most important thing in his existence" (308). Petry indicates that Hedger's later mistreatment of his dog, and especially the vicious beating which Caesar receives from him on the night that he and Bower become lovers, represents the fact that "as Cather herself believed, the truly creative individual cannot give himself entirely to both art *and* to an intense (read 'sexual') relationship with another person" (310). Accordingly, she argues that "it would appear that Cather is positing Caesar as not simply a dog, but as the symbol—more precisely, the incarnation—of what is *really* the single most important thing in Hedger's existence: his artistic sensibility" (309).

In making this point, Cather did not only use the symbolism of Hedger's relationship with his pet. In this story, Cather rather more forcefully asserted her opinion that the artist's vocation is absolute, by asserting her right as an artist to use subject matter which was not considered appropriate material for publication in the mass-market magazines, and which was also frank enough to be a potential legal target for the Comstocks. Moreover, her choice of subject matter challenged Howells's theoretical support for artistic self-censorship. I would argue, in fact, that Cather may have had Howells in mind when she chose the subject matter for this story. Her criticism reveals that she was familiar with the specific claims made by Howells in *Criticism and Fiction* and that she disapproved of them. Her defence of the artist against the claims of the "young girl," as they were outlined by Howells, could not have been more clear. In the

Courier in 1895 she expressed her alarm at the effect of such criticism upon censorship in the American theatre: "All we demand of a national literature is that it shall not injure our 'sweet young girls.' But just because Mr. Howells and Mr. Harrison have made American literature a sort of young ladies' illusion-preserver, I should like to see the American stage remain free from any such restriction" (KA 281-82). When Cather wrote this she was 22 years old. She was, in fact, herself a young lady and clearly resented the sort of protection of her innocence which Mr. Howells and Mr. Harrison advised.

As I have indicated, in *Criticism and Fiction* Howells had argued that although there was nothing preventing American novelists from writing something "on the lines of *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary*," they knew better than to dwell on such themes. He indicates in the same article that part of the reason American authors should avoid such themes is owing to the difference between European and American audiences: "if the novel were written for men and for married women alone, as in continental Europe, it might be altogether different. But the simple fact is that it is not written for them alone among us" (562).

In her 1895 article "Howells: My Literary Passions," Cather, who was a young unmarried woman, responded to the narrowness of such thinking by indicating her thorough acquaintance with European authors who were well-known for their portrayals of "guilty love":

Apropos of *My Literary Passions* which has so long strung out in the *Ladies' Home Journal* along with those thrilling articles about how Henry Ward Beecher tied his necktie and what kind of coffee Mrs. Hall Caine likes, why did Mr.

Howells write it? . . . We have all dwelt in the country where Anna Karenina [*sic*] and the Levins were the only people who mattered much. We have all known the intoxicating period when we thought that we “understood life” because we had read Daudet, Zola and Guy de Maupassant. (*W&P* 259)

Again, as with her comments on the *Century* quoted earlier, her criticism here of Howells’s literary criticism is combined with an understanding that Howells’s criticism was linked, in theory and in practice, to the magazines in which it appeared.

In other words, magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Harper’s*, which tended to act as “young ladies’ illusion-preservers” in their choice of articles and fiction, tended also to print criticism by Howells. As Grant Showerman would later argue, principle, as much as law, determines practice. In her review columns, Cather astutely recognized the connection between principle and practice in the popular mass-market magazines. She recognized that these magazines were both afraid to offend their readers (thus presenting articles on neckties) and eager to support their tame publishing decisions by printing critics like Howells, who outlined for their readers the necessity for politeness in art.

In “Coming, Aphrodite!” Cather provided a story that, like her earlier criticism, directly challenged several of Howells’s specific claims concerning literary “decency.” Since she was familiar with Howells’s criticism, it is very likely that she was aware of his claim that “serious” authors do not “desire to deal with nakedness, as painters and sculptors freely do in the worship of beauty” (564). Cather’s response, as an author who considered herself an extremely serious practitioner of the art, could not have been more

direct. She demonstrated in “Coming, Aphrodite!” that serious authors might, indeed, desire to portray nakedness as painters and sculptors do. In the scene in which Hedger first realizes that he can see into Bower’s room through the knot-hole in his closet, he sees his neighbour exercising in front of her mirror “wholly unclad” (221). Cather wrote:

Nudity was not improper to anyone who had worked so much from the figure, and he continued to look, simply because he had never seen a woman’s body so beautiful as this one,—positively glorious in action. . . . Hedger’s fingers curved as if he were holding a crayon; mentally he was doing the whole figure in a single running line, and the charcoal seemed to explode in his hand at the point where the energy of each gesture was discharged into the whirling disc of light, from a foot or shoulder, from the up-thrust chin or the lifted breasts. (221)

In light of her familiarity with Howells’s criticism, Cather’s specific claim that “nudity was not improper” to Hedger, as an artist, carries considerable weight.

Similarly, in the scene in which Hedger and Bower become lovers, Cather repeats her use of a painting, or drawing, as a guiding metaphor. She describes the lovers in terms of artistic composition: “Standing against the black chimney, with the sky behind and blue shadows before, they looked like one of Hedger’s own paintings of that period” (243). Accordingly, in both scenes, one dealing explicitly with nakedness and the other with “guilty love,” she indicates the seriousness and appropriateness of her subject matter through her pointed use of metaphors drawn from the plastic arts. In both scenes, she implicitly refutes Howells’s suggestion that such subjects are “bad art” (562) by presenting them, I would suspect quite deliberately, as “good art.” In her choice of symbols,

metaphor and, most importantly, subject matter, in “Coming, Aphrodite!” Willa Cather asserted that literature and art should not be reduced to an “illusion-preserver for young ladies.” Through writing this story she not only challenged the prevailing views regarding literature and decency as they were theorized by Howells and defended by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, but she also attacked the very basis of literary censorship—the protection of female readers—through the act of writing an explicitly sexual story, and writing it as a member of the sex which, according to Howells and Comstock, should not even be permitted to read it.

Puritanism as a Literary Force

As already indicated, in 1916 Cather embodied her belief in artistic integrity and her opposition to Howells’s attempt to reduce American literature to an “illusion-preserver for young ladies” by signing Mencken’s petition on behalf of Dreiser. When she signed this petition she was already familiar with Mencken’s work and opinions, and aware of his opposition to literary censorship. As Bernice Slote indicates in her introduction to *Uncle Valentine and Other Stories*, “Willa Cather’s relationship with the *Smart Set*’s editor, H. L. Mencken, began before [her publication in the *Smart Set*]. He had reviewed all four of her novels up to that time and considered *My Ántonia* one of the best of American novels. In their correspondence, with each other and with others, there are references to the reviews, Mencken’s books, and Cather’s current writing” (xiv). Although they had only limited personal contact with one another, by 1916 their written pronouncements were already acting in tandem.

Considering their shared opinion of the importance of artistic freedom, and their familiarity with one another's work, it is appropriate that in the same book review column in which Mencken praised Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (and which there is at least the possibility she may have read) he also praised a six volume set of books by Havelock Ellis, titled *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Mencken notes that although these volumes are "not immediately assimilable," they should be read "by the folk of Christendom" if, he wrote, "they are ever to shake off their abominable doctrine that the only decent way to discuss the most important of all the facts of life is by silly indirection and with nasty giggles" (*A Visit* 153-54). Similar defences of sexual subject matter, and by extension the artist's right to deal with such issues frankly and openly, were often the focus of Mencken's critical attention in his book review columns.

Mencken's attacks on the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice were an integral part of his book review columns even before his direct confrontation with John Sumner over Dreiser's *The "Genius."* In these attacks Mencken rarely missed a chance to explain not only the terms of the conflict, but also what was at stake. So, for example, in his book review column in April 1914, Mencken used a review of *Anthony Comstock, Fighter* by C. G. Turnbull as his starting point in a wide-ranging discussion of American culture. He begins his review by outlining the specific wording contained in "Title XLVI, Ch III, Sec. 3893," otherwise known as the Comstock Law. He informs his readers that the punishment for breaking this law is a "fine running up to five thousand dollars and imprisonment up to ten years" (146). Mencken then explains that it is not the spirit, but the wording of this law that is its most dangerous feature: "[There] is nothing in it to

indicate just what 'obscene' means. In this very literary blemish, however, lies all its critical horsepower" (146). He argued that the vague terminology of this law had two concrete results: "its menace is enormous" and "it rests upon American letters like a millstone" (146).

Mencken's concerns regarding literary censorship appeared repeatedly in his *Smart Set* commentaries. In 1917, those commentaries were combined and expanded into the 86 page essay "Puritanism as a Literary Force" which appeared in his widely-reviewed *A Book of Prefaces*. In this book, Mencken linked his attack on Puritanism to the influence of critics like William Dean Howells. In his chapter on "Puritanism as a Literary Force" he praises Howells, at first, for his persistent efforts to free American letters from romanticism and for his promotion of realism. But later, he argues that Howells inevitably betrayed his own promotion of realism through his inability to write honestly about sex:

Romance, in American fiction, still means only a somewhat childish amorousness and sentimentality. . . . The action of all the novels of the Howells school goes on within four walls of painted canvas; they begin to shock once they describe an attack of asthma or a steak burning below stairs; they never penetrate beneath the flow of social concealments and urbanities to the passions that actually move men and women. (275-76)

Mencken thus argued, as Cather had argued before him, that the critical and literary influence which Howells had long exercised over American letters had proven detrimental; polite literature lacks force.

Mencken later described *A Book of Prefaces* as his “most important book in its effects upon my professional career” (qtd. in Hobson 191). The book was praised by such divergent critics as Burton Rascoe in the *Chicago Tribune*; Ezra Pound in *The Little Review*; and Randolph Bourne, who provided a mixed review, in *The New Republic*. Each of these critics, and numerous others, highlighted Mencken’s attack against the Comstocks as the most noteworthy aspect of the book. In Pound’s overview of the book, he invited the reader to pay particular attention to Mencken’s essay on “Puritanism as a Literary Force,” even recommending this essay for use in “high-schools, wherein there is now current too little plain-written history” (12). In sum, he wrote: “[Mencken’s] book is at least enough to convince one that whatever America’s part in world war, and whatever the results to her, she is faced at home with a no less serious war for internal freedom, and for the arteries and capillaries of freedom, the mail-routes and presses” (12). Even the usually conservative *Boston Transcript* adopted a similar line. In their review, in which they only half-praised Mencken’s effort, they nevertheless wrote:

To attack the established scheme of things in the name of “law and order” is usually considered a praiseworthy act, but to attack, as Mr. Mencken has done, in the name of art and freedom, is a daring undertaking. He writes advisedly, however, as is proved by his pages of arraignment of the difficulties that are put in the way of artistic expression in the United States. (“A Book”)

Moreover, they added, “Few have dared to suggest so clearly the exact ways in which the present-day Puritans have laid a numbing hand on art and the manner in which their work has been done.”

However, it was not the praise so much as the criticism of this book that drew attention to it and to Mencken, and increased public knowledge of both. Fame rested more with the attacks. In the Los Angeles *Continent* Mencken was labelled “the most dangerous man in America today, intellectually considered” (qtd. in Hobson 192) and Stuart Sherman, professor of English at the University of Illinois, used several pages in the *Nation* to criticize Mencken’s view of American literature. Sherman’s article, written at the height of anti-German hysteria, stooped to impugning Mencken for his German heritage and to pointing out that “his quarrel with American criticism is not so much in behalf of beauty as in behalf of a *Kultur*” (“Beautifying”). Sherman’s article reappeared, in full, in the *New York Tribune*. By the end of 1917 John Beffel claimed, in the Chicago magazine *Living Men*, that “At the age of thirty-seven [Mencken] has come a long way in the few years since he wrote ‘The Philosophy of Nietzsche,’ and he is growing vastly in stature each year” (“Mencken Beats” 16). Many reviews of this book, including Pound’s and Sherman’s, made specific reference to Mencken’s co-editorship of the *Smart Set* magazine. His growing fame brought attention to the fiction and reviews which were published in the *Smart Set*, thus increasing the literary and cultural influence of the magazine.

Mencken’s *A Book of Prefaces* was published by Alfred Knopf, a young man who had just become Mencken’s regular publisher. In 1920, Willa Cather would publish her first book under the Knopf imprint. This book, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, was the collection of short stories that contained “Coming, Aphrodite!” As James Woodress makes clear in his biography of Cather, and Fred Hobson in his biography of Mencken,

both authors were attracted to Knopf primarily for his impressive business sense and his general industriousness and inventiveness. However, in November 1916, the *New York Globe* indicated another, very likely, motive for their defection to Knopf. This article was titled “Mencken Knopf-ed” and declared: “Knopf is a name that is coming to the front in literary circles. No doubt there are those who will contend that it has already arrived. This man seems to have as his creed, “The only books I shall publish are those by insurgents which no other publisher will have the courage to do” (“Knopf-ed”). As an example of Knopf’s literary courage, the article goes on to reveal that he is the publisher of Mencken’s *Book of Prefaces*. It argues that although Mencken is “one of our really big literary figures” the unconventionality of the book will limit its readership. However, they indicate that this book belongs “in every library, public or private, in the country. It is a force” (“Knopf-ed”). The article thus strongly supports both Knopf’s publishing decisions and his personal courage as a publisher. It is understandable that two authors who made a habit of challenging both Howells and the Comstocks ended up with this man.

In different mass-market venues—Mencken in the *Smart Set* and in his books of criticism and Cather in such journals as the *Nebraska Journal* and the *Lincoln Courier* and in her novels—both Mencken and Cather participated in the fight against the societal and legal forces which suppressed artistic freedom, and did so in the view of a wide, and expanding, audience. This was a period of increasing fame for both authors, and they used that stature to defend their views of literary freedom in opposition to the legally enshrined morality of the Comstocks. Both writers felt that the legally defined restrictions to art had no place in New York, or in America in general, and made a point of saying so in

whatever venues became available to them. It is little wonder, then, that Cather lent her support to Mencken's petition in 1916, and that in so doing both authors would find themselves aligned with a younger generation of authors and critics. Among the moderns who signed Mencken's petition were Amy Lowell, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, and Sinclair Lewis. In contrast, "those literary progressives of an earlier time, Hamlin [*sic*] Garland, Ellen Glasgow, and—as Mencken described him—that 'notorious coward' William Dean Howells refused to sign" (Hobson 151). That "notorious coward" was still, in 1916, a representative and spokesperson for the "young girl" and, thereby, the Comstocks. In his refusal to sign this petition, Howells indicated his continuing support for the legal and critical restrictions that limited American authors to subjects appropriate for young girls to read.

"Coming, Aphrodite!"

For publishers of mass-market magazines the legal and theoretical constraints which Howells and Comstock placed on artistic subject matter were compounded by financial considerations. As Richard Ohmann makes clear in *Selling Culture*, by definition mass-market magazines are produced "for profit" (16). Although a sizable audience is assumed, the number of readers is not fixed to a certain threshold. Rather, as Ohmann argues, what makes magazines into mass-market magazines is that they rely for their profit upon a dependable, identifiable audience. Ensuring the dependability of that audience was one of the primary factors in determining magazine self-censorship in America. As Ohmann notes, this self-censorship did not consist only of sexual matters but also extended to politics and religion. So, for example, an editorial in *Harper's* which

appeared in September 1902, argued that the magazine had always “excluded partisan politics and all subjects upon which readers were divided on sectarian lines in religious thought and feeling” (qtd. in Ohmann 254). This type of self-censorship was assumed in the large general monthlies, magazines such as *Harper's*, *Cosmopolitan*, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Munsey's* (see Ohmann 251-55), but it also influenced, to a certain extent, even the smaller, more specialized mass-market magazines such as the *Smart Set*.

Unlike magazines with circulations in the millions, the *Smart Set* had more freedom from the ideological constraints imposed by the desire of the large national monthlies to please, and avoid offending, the greatest number of readers possible. But even in this magazine some subjects were consciously avoided. Primary among these was any fiction or editorials to do with the war which resulted from their pro-German sympathies (see *My Life* 58). As Ohmann indicates, mass-market magazines generally indicated to their readers how they defined their own boundaries. The *Smart Set* indicated the relatively liberal permissiveness of its content through its strategy of marketing itself as a sophisticated literary magazine. Indeed, on the very first page, the pronouncements on its masthead indicated that it was a magazine for the urbane reader. The masthead most often proclaimed that this was an “aristocrat among magazines,” but it was sometimes used to shape and identify its audience in more explicit ways. So, for example, the masthead included such pronouncements as “A magazine of Distinction for persons of taste” (Aug. 1917), and a direct address to its readers which said “To cultured MEN and WOMEN of the WORLD it is the indispensable magazine because it represents the best in American life— social and intellectual” (Apr. 1917).

In each of these pronouncements, in conjunction with their editorials and their choice of fiction, Mencken and Nathan indicated that they depended upon educated, urbane, and reasonably liberal readers for their habitual audience. That their advertisers felt that they had, indeed, reached a reasonably affluent readership is indicated by the fact that their most common advertisements were for the Victrola gramophone and records, for rail and steamship vacations, and for prestigious hotels, including a regular full-page ad for the prestigious New York Ritz-Carleton Hotel, an advertisement which appeared in the most visible location in the magazine—across from the table of contents. In seeking a specific liberal, sophisticated audience the *Smart Set* was almost alone among the mass-market magazines of the period in consciously avoiding a large general readership—*Vanity Fair* being the other example. It could, therefore, afford to challenge the sexual taboos that the large general readership of the other mass-market magazines imposed upon themselves.

At the time, one of the most common indications of a magazine's limits and social taboos was the use of the term "family" in its descriptions of itself. As Ohmann notes, "Family" was code for "respectable" (252). There was a tacit understanding between authors and publishers that a magazine that bore this title had an understood constraint upon its literature. So, for example, Charles Hanson Towne recalled that *Cosmopolitan's* editor John Walker censored entire passages of Richard Le Gallienne's translation of the *Rubaiyat*. The reason Walker gave for his actions was that "*Cosmopolitan* was a family magazine, which was placed on the library table, [so that] it was not fitting that the youth of the land should be familiar with certain passages" (qtd. in Ohmann 253). It is worth

noting that the terms used by Walker to describe the editorial responsibilities of his “family magazine” were almost identical to the terms of the Hicklin doctrine, which judged literature to be obscene if it was likely to corrupt “those whose minds are open to such immoral influences”—or, to use Walker’s phrase, “the youth of the land.” It should be noted that in Towne’s anecdote the need to protect “the youth of the land” is evoked as the decency expected of a “family magazine,” and not in terms of the actual law which supported this practice. In other words, although the obscenity law was upheld through fear of reprisal, it was also the dominant ideology: the so-called “family magazines” and the censorship laws both confirmed one another in notions of rightness and “decency.”

The term “family magazine” thus indicated more than just a family readership. It was a recognized code for the kind of self-censorship governing a magazine’s content. That this term was an understood stamp of moral approval is indicated by the fact that this specific term was consistently mocked by Mencken in the pages of *Smart Set*. The code of decency which, in fact, is still linked to this term was used by Mencken in a pointedly satiric manner. Whenever he referred to the *Smart Set* as a “family magazine” he did so, quite specifically, with reference to publishing decisions which he knew did not fall under the “family” rubric. This happened frequently in the *Smart Set*, but two specific examples should suffice.

In Mencken’s positive review of James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, he noted that some of the stories from *Dubliners* had “already appeared in this favorite family magazine” (143). Mencken, here, is providing a tongue-in-cheek use of the term, as would be immediately obvious to anyone who had read the two stories from *Dubliners* which had appeared in

the *Smart Set*. In May 1915 Mencken and Nathan had published "A Little Cloud," and "The Boarding House," both of which contain frank portrayals of sexual struggles. In "A Little Cloud" the bachelor Gallaher encourages the unhappily married Little Chandler to think about "rich Jewesses" with "dark Oriental eyes . . . full of passion" (135); while "The Boarding House" deals quite explicitly with the seduction by Polly Mooney by one of the lodgers and the forced marriage which follows. Joyce's portrayal of the seduction in "The Boarding House" reads, in part:

It was not altogether his fault that it had happened. He remembered well, with the curious patient memory of the celibate, the first casual caress, her dress, her breath, her fingers had given him. Then late one night as he was undressing for bed she had tapped at his door, timidly. She wanted to relight her candle at his for hers had been blown out by a gust. It was her bath night. She wore a loose, open combing jacket of printed flannel. Her white instep shone in the opening of her furry slippers and the blood glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin. (96)

I have quoted this particular passage not only owing to its strong sexual suggestiveness, but also because it is, in many ways, similar to another passage which would appear some years later in the *Smart Set* and which would also, as with *Dubliners*, invoke Mencken's ironic defence of the moral, family character of his magazine.

In "Coming, Aphrodite!" Hedger first meets Bower as she is on her way to the bath: "Before the door, lying in wait for him, as it were, stood a tall figure in a flowing blue silk dressing gown that fell away from her marble arms" (218). The sexual possibilities, fraught with danger, which are presented in this portrayal of a half-dressed

woman who lies in wait for men are further emphasized by Cather later in the same passage. Here, she compares Bower to the goddess Diana: “her white arms and neck and her fragrant person seemed to scream at him like a band of outraged nymphs. Something flashed through his mind about a man who was turned into a dog, or was pursued by dogs, because he unwittingly intruded upon the bath of beauty” (219). The image of the naked goddess caught bathing heightens the erotic tension of what is already a highly charged meeting. This eroticism increases exponentially as the story progresses. Indeed, in her biography *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up*, Hermione Lee describes “Coming, Aphrodite!” as “one of the most erotic love stories Cather ever allowed herself to write” (162).

In this story, unlike *The Boarding House*, the act of seduction extends through several sexually fraught episodes rather than beginning and ending with the bath scene. In “Coming, Eden Bower!,” Cather increases the sexual ante with each pointedly erotic encounter. As Loretta Wasserman notes in *Willa Cather: A Study of the Short Fiction*, in this story “Cather’s particular achievement . . . lies in how she conveys the growing intimacy of Hedger and Eden. It is a mutual courtship, not a series of advances by the male: a primitive mating ritual” (39). She argues that both Hedger and Eden perform for one another, she in a dramatic balloon ascent (and partial disrobing) and he in the passionate recitation of the bluebeard-type tale “The Forty Lovers of the Queen,” in which an Aztec princess has her lovers killed after she has finished with them. Wasserman suggests that Cather’s use of intense visual images—Eden’s descent in the balloon, the death of forty men in a cold underground river, and so forth—acts as a narrative evocation of “erotic knowing” (41).

In December 1920, in his regular review column in the *Smart Set*, Mencken reviewed this story as part of his review of *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, praising Cather's skill unequivocally. He declared that it lifted itself "completely above the level of current American fiction, even of good fiction" (Schroeter 10). Again, as with his review of *Dubliners*, it is important to note the description of his magazine that Mencken provides in conjunction with his praise. He declared that one of the stories in this collection, "Coming, Aphrodite!," had been "published in this great moral periodical last August" (Schroeter 9). This obviously ironic self-description indicated to his readers that by publishing this story, the *Smart Set* had challenged the bounds of the permissible as it was represented by the self-characterized "family magazines." Moreover, such rhetoric was designed to confirm for his readers that they should consider themselves "cultured MEN and WOMEN of the WORLD," since they had been able to read and accept "the best in American life—social and intellectual" without quibbling about the propriety of passages in which barely clothed women are going to, or coming from, the bath.

Mencken's ironic rhetoric concerning the "family" nature of his magazine made two important distinctions: it indicated to the reader his or her civilized superiority for being able to judge literature on its aesthetic rather than its moral merits (a defence which, I have indicated, was not yet permissible in court) and it implied an important difference between mass-market magazines. By using such terms, Mencken indicated that not all mass-market magazines were equal in their approach to questions of literature and decency. For anyone who might miss his implied criticism of the magazines who genuinely marketed themselves as "moral" magazines with a "family" readership,

Mencken's use of the inflammatory adjectives "favorite" and "great" served to highlight the ironic self-description which followed.

Mencken's skilful use of indirect criticism was augmented, on many occasions, with direct attacks upon the "family magazines" by name. For example, in Mencken's review of Zoë Akins' play "Papa" he wrote: "Here we have not only a skilful playwriting, but also sound literature." He continued: "I use the word 'sound,' of course, in the civilized, or esthetic sense, and not in the American or ethical sense. Miss Akins' excellent comedy, judged by *Ladies' Home Journal* standards, is almost as immoral, and hence almost as reprehensible, as 'A Country Wife' or 'The Old Bachelor'" (154). Such criticisms were key to defining the boundaries of the permissible in the *Smart Set* in comparison to other mass-market magazines. As Pierre Bourdieu argues in his sociological study of distinction, every sort of taste "unites and separates" (56). In other words, all tastes are "the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes" (56). In sum, therefore, "in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation" (56). It is within these precise sociological terms that Mencken's establishment of the *Smart Set's* relatively liberal approach to literary content should be understood.

Viewed from the perspective provided by Bourdieu, such tactics should be seen as the establishment of "inevitable difference." In the *Smart Set*, it was the establishment of this cultured sophistication which provided an ideological bulwark against the standards of literary propriety common in most of the mass-market magazines of the day. The

cultivation of this attitude did not give Mencken and Nathan the freedom to risk the disapproval of the Comstocks, but it *did* allow them to risk the disapproval of their readers and advertisers. Through their economic support, the *Smart Set's* readers and advertisers indicated their tacit approval of fictional portrayals of half-naked women and of "guilty love." Indeed, it seems likely that the *Smart Set's* flagrant mockery of the subject matter approved of in the "family magazines" may have contributed to its relative success. Under Mencken and Nathan this magazine remained solvent for ten years.

Although Mencken and Nathan were willing to take some economic risks with their readers and advertisers in their choice of published matter, they were still subject to the legal limits defined by the Comstock law. Mencken explains the situation of the magazine publisher in "Puritanism as a Literary Force":

No one on the outside can imagine its burden as a practical concern. I am, in moments borrowed from more palpable business, the editor of an American magazine, and I thus know at first hand what the burden is. That magazine is anything but a popular one, in the current sense. It sells at a relatively high price; it contains no pictures or other baits for the childish; it is frankly addressed to the sophisticated minority. I may thus assume reasonably, I believe, that its readers are not sex-curious and itching adolescents Nevertheless, as a practical editor, I find that the Comstocks, near and far, are oftener in my mind's eye than my actual patrons. The thing I always have to decide about a manuscript offered for publication, before I give any thought to its artistic merit and suitability, is the question whether its publication will be permitted. (278)

Mencken thus indicates that although his magazine caters to adults of a certain assumed sophistication and economic status, and does not cater directly to young girls or young boys, it is still very much subject to prosecution by the Comstocks.

As he explains, the matter goes beyond the willingness of a magazine editor to print what he wants:

Magazines are perishable goods. Even if, after a trial has been had, they are returned, they are worthless save as waste paper. And what may be done with copies found in the actual office of publication may be done too with copies found on newsstands, and not only in one city, but in two, six, a dozen, a hundred. All the costs and burdens of the contest are on the defendant. Let him be acquitted with honour and invited to dinner by the judge, he has yet lost his property. (278)

Moreover, Mencken added: "The Comstock hiding behind the warrant cannot be made to pay. In this concealment, indeed, lurk many sinister things—not forgetting personal enmity and business rivalry" (279). As Mencken portrays the situation, the risk to the publisher in challenging the obscenity laws extended beyond the Comstocks into the vaguer, and potentially even more dangerous, domain of free market enterprise.

Although Mencken and Nathan had risked publishing "The Boarding House" in an unexpurgated form in 1915, they did not take the same chance with Cather's highly erotic story. Their motivation in censoring this story was likely owing to the atmosphere in New York at the time (between January 1919 and January 1920, the Post Office had burned three issues of the *Little Review* in which the serialized version of *Ulysses* had appeared). For Mencken personally, the motive may also have included the furore over the upcoming

censorship trial of James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*. In July 1918, the short story "Some Ladies and Jurgen," which became the basis for Cabell's controversial novel, had appeared in the *Smart Set*. This fact, along with Mencken's praise of Cabell's work, placed Mencken, once again as he had been in the battle over *The "Genius,"* in close personal and professional proximity to an author under attack by the Comstocks.

The textual variants between the *Smart Set* version of "Coming, Aphrodite!" and the version which appeared in book form later that year are outlined in the appendix to *Uncle Valentine and Other Stories*. In this appendix Bernice Slote distinguishes between those changes "relating to style" and "details of the narrative" and those she explicitly categorizes under the heading "sexuality." Slote lists ten changes under this term. The chief of these changes, as Slote notes, was that in the *Smart Set* version of "Coming, Aphrodite!" Eden Bower is "quite literally clothed for the censoring 'Comstocks'" (Slote xvii). Slote refers, here, to the scene in which Hedger watches Bower exercising, naked, in front of her mirror. In the *Smart Set* version she is wearing "a pink chiffon cloud of some sort" ("Coming" 151). The other fundamental difference between the two versions is that in the book version "the man and woman are unquestionably lovers and keep open the door that has separated their apartments" (xvii); this passage was eliminated in the magazine version. However, even after such clearly detrimental changes, Slote argues that the *Smart Set* version of Cather's story retained its primitive erotic essence (xix). Indeed, with the exception of the one excised passage and the addition of Bowers' *négligée*, the textual variations are remarkably slight. Even scenes as sexually intense as Bower and Hedger's meeting on the way to the bath and their rooftop rendezvous are left

essentially unchanged. In general, as Slote argues, the tone and intensity of the story were intact.

In such a situation, the more important consideration is, perhaps, not why Mencken and Nathan censored this story before publication, but why they accepted it at all. As Mencken records in "Puritanism as a Literary Force" "not a week passes that I do not decline some sound and honest piece of work" for fear that "some roving Methodist preacher, self-commissioned to keep watch on letters, will read indecency into it" (277). Other editors had the same fears. In 1921, Mencken wrote to Fielding Garrison that "Tom Smith of the *Century* told me the other day that [Cather] had lately sent him a very fine novelette, but that he had to pass it up because of some crim. con. in it. The Comstocks are in violent eruption, and the *Century* has been taking too many chances" (*Letters* 218). In the case of "Coming, Aphrodite!" Mencken had obviously felt that some risk was worth it; he decided not to reject this story, as others already had done (Woodress 315). He had a great deal of respect for Cather as an artist and described this story, in a letter to Cather's friend Louise Pound, as a "capital novelette" (*Letters* 183). Of Cather herself he wrote: "[she is] a much finer artist than she knows" (183). This was not a story which Mencken and Nathan were about to pass up.

Based upon the evidence provided in letters between Cather and her agent Paul Reynolds, James Woodress indicates in *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* that most of the changes made to "Coming, Aphrodite!" to prepare it for publication in the *Smart Set* were made by Cather herself in agreement with Nathan. Moreover, he writes: "Cather previously had refused to make changes to satisfy the *Century*, and Reynolds was

surprised when she was willing to bowdlerize the tale for Nathan" (315). Woodress attributes Cather's willingness to censor the story for its appearance in the *Smart Set* to her need for money for her upcoming trip to Europe. Considering how little Mencken and Nathan paid for this story, it does not seem likely that Woodress is correct in his assumption. The *Century* would have been able to pay her much more for an expurgated version. In the end, she may have appreciated the fact that by allowing her erotic story to be published in the *Smart Set* she had allied it with a magazine committed to free expression in art, regardless of subject matter.

The Tyranny of the "Young Girl"

In the same month in which "Coming, Eden Bower!" appeared in the *Smart Set*, the "Nausicaa" episode of Joyce's *Ulysses* appeared, unexpurgated, in *The Little Review*. The issue was immediately banned by John Sumner, and its publishers, Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, were taken to court. The series of trials, of which this was the first, over the publication and sale of *Ulysses* in the United States eventually contributed to the first major revision of the Comstock law. What Mencken and Cather accomplished through the publication of "Coming, Eden Bower!" in the *Smart Set* was of the same kind, but different species, from what Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap accomplished in *The Little Review*. Although Mencken and Cather's act was much less historically significant, it was part of the same general fight against the Comstocks. As Mencken had argued in "Puritanism as a Literary Force," the American predilection to judge everything by moral standards first, and artistic and literary standards second, if at all, had been inherited from their Puritan ancestors. The publication of this story in the *Smart Set* was just one of the

complicated confluence of events over many years which eventually contributed to a shift in public opinion.

The success and fervour of the anti-vice societies, and the subsequent success of Prohibition was, as Mencken would argue, a strong indication of the nation's unique and obsessive desire to police its own morals. Accordingly, it should be remembered that the battle which engaged both Cather and Mencken over a period of many years was, itself, many years in the making and would be many years in dispelling. It would be over ten years after the publication of "Coming, Eden Bower!" before John M. Woolsey, in the 1933 trial of Joyce's *Ulysses*, would remove the dictatorship of the "young girl" from American obscenity law. He removed the young girl by ruling that the test for obscenity should be literature's "capacity to arouse lust in the 'average person'" (De Grazia xii). It would be over forty years after the publication of "Coming, Eden Bower!" before Justice William Brennan Jr. would, in the 1964 court case over Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, introduce the idea that a work of art could be defended under the First Amendment on the basis of literary merit (De Grazia xii).

Within this social and historical framework, the publication of "Coming, Eden Bower!" in the pages of the *Smart Set* should be considered an act of defiance on the part of its owners, and quite possibly of Cather as well. Mencken and Cather used their writing in mass-market venues to argue for the need to remove any restrictions on artistic freedom. Through their writing both Mencken and Cather undermined the authority of William Dean Howells and Anthony Comstock. In much the same way that the petition which Mencken organized and Cather signed on behalf of Dreiser's *The "Genius"* was a

challenge against nineteenth-century Puritanism and a clarion call to the younger generation, many of whom signed it, the appearance of this story in the *Smart Set* was a testament to the fact that the tyranny of the “young girl” should have no place in determining the appropriate subject matter for art.

Fitzgerald's Tales for a Jazz Age, 1920

In the summer of 1919, when H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan met Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald for the first time, Fitzgerald was a young man of twenty-two and, as Mencken would later write, "so handsome that he might even have been called beautiful" (*My Life* 256). In June that summer, Mencken and Nathan purchased the short story "Babes in The Woods" from him for publication in the *Smart Set*—it was Fitzgerald's first professional sale (256). When this story appeared in the *Smart Set* in September 1919 it marked his first exposure to a reading public beyond that provided by Princeton's *Nassau Literary Magazine*; his professional literary career was thus linked, at the start, to these two men and their magazine.

The *Smart Set* was responsible for Fitzgerald's earliest professional sales, at a time when he was still unknown. In 1919, Mencken and Nathan bought Fitzgerald's "Babes in the Woods," "The Debutante," "Dalrymple Goes Wrong," "Benediction," and "Porcelain and Pink" (*Ledger* 525-26). Mencken and Nathan published these early works in the *Smart Set* during late 1919 and early 1920. "Babes in the Woods" and "The Debutante" appeared in the *Smart Set* in September and November 1919; the playlet "Porcelain and Pink" appeared in the *Smart Set* for January 1920; and the short stories "Dalrymple Goes Wrong" and "Benediction" appeared in the *Smart Set* for February 1920, the same month that Fitzgerald made his first professional appearance outside of the *Smart Set* with the publication of his story "Head and Shoulders" in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Fitzgerald's sixth sale to the *Smart Set*, the playlet "Mr. Icky," appeared in March 1920, the same month as the publication of *This Side of Paradise*. Mencken and Nathan brought his

stories and plays to the attention of their readers a remarkable six times in seven months, and all before the publication of Fitzgerald's first novel. Mencken and Nathan's support for Fitzgerald as a beginning author was substantial both in terms of their early exposure of his stories to their readers and in the critical support which they provided through their early, and successive, acceptances.

Like many of his generation, Fitzgerald was greatly influenced by what Mencken and Nathan were saying in their *Smart Set* columns, and how they were saying it. Fitzgerald not only began to use their ideas in his fiction, but even went so far as to imitate their prose styles, particularly Mencken's, and to make reference to them—directly and indirectly—in his novels. One of the most auspicious practical repercussions of this veneration was Fitzgerald's greater foray into fiction that criticized the American scene, even while balancing this criticism with scenes of humour and youthful exuberance. The question of influence is, naturally, a very touchy one, but in Fitzgerald's case there is ample evidence to suggest that even if he moved in this direction entirely on his own, the early stories in which he balanced social criticism with scenes of outlandish, even grotesque, humour were supported in two key instances by only two American editors, Mencken and Nathan.

Between the time of his first publication in 1919 and the start of his work on *The Great Gatsby* in the summer of 1923, the two novellas in which Fitzgerald condemned the nature of capitalism in America, and the ugly reality underlying the American Dream, were "May Day" and the "Diamond as Big as the Ritz." These stories, which Matthew Bruccoli numbers among the "more ambitious" of Fitzgerald's early stories (*Letters xx*), appeared

in the *Smart Set* in July 1920 and June 1922 respectively. What “May Day” and “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” bear in common with *The Great Gatsby*, and what most differentiates them from most of Fitzgerald’s other early stories, is Fitzgerald’s experimentation with realism and humour as tools of social critique.

“May Day” and “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” are both generally conceded to be among Fitzgerald’s best early fiction, not only by modern critics, but by Fitzgerald himself. In 1929 Fitzgerald pronounced that “only the ‘The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,’ ‘The Rich Boy,’ ‘The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,’ and ‘May Day’ ranked with the best modern short stories” (Kuehl 33). Although “May Day” and “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” were published at the height of Fitzgerald’s personal fame (following the wildly successful publication of *This Side of Paradise* in March 1920), he was unable to place either of them in the larger mass-market magazines of the day; these stories were published by Mencken and Nathan at a time when their content, in spite of the skill or personal renown of the artist, rendered them unsalable elsewhere, as has been noted by such Fitzgerald scholars as John Kuehl, James Miller, and Matthew Bruccoli. Mencken’s biases, and likely reasons for accepting these stories, have also been discussed, especially by Robert Long, Robert Sklar, James Tuttleton, and Robert Roulston. However, what still requires closer attention is the complex relationship of these stories to the magazine in which they were published.

James Miller’s criticism of these two stories is representative, especially when he submits that “May Day” and “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” marked “important steps in the development of Fitzgerald’s fictional technique” (*Fictional* 51). Miller argues that

in these stories Fitzgerald demonstrated “a growing consciousness of the importance of technique to theme . . . [and of] the possibilities of symbolism in conveying complex meaning” (*Fictional* 51); in sum, he suggests that these two stories “stand as a testimony to the fact that Fitzgerald was not dissipating his talent completely in writing for the popular magazines. In some of his short fiction, he was using experimental techniques, and these experiments, besides having interest in their own right, were to prove valuable to him in his longer works” (51). While Miller’s analysis of these two stories is both careful and penetrating, he does not address the fact that these stories correspond ideologically and even, to a certain extent, technically, to Mencken’s personal biases and also to the pose of the magazine in which they appeared.

“May Day”

In 1930, Zelda Fitzgerald sent a letter of reminiscence to Scott which summarized what life had been like for them in the late teens and early 1920s when they lived in New York; according to Zelda a large part of that life consisted of attending parties which were also attended by Mencken and Nathan. As Zelda described it, several of these parties took place in Nathan’s apartment or in the offices of the magazine: “There was Georges apartment [*sic*] and his absinth cock-tails and Ruth Findlays gold hair in his comb, and visits to the ‘Smart Set’ and ‘Vanity Fair’—a collegiate literary world puffed into wide proportions by the New York papers” (*Zelda* 451). The lack of seriousness implied in Zelda’s reference to the *Smart Set* as a “collegiate literary world” captures a notion of youthful abandon; and she was quite right to assert that this brand of irreverence, which was promoted both within and without the magazine, was noticed by the wider literary

community. Indeed, just three months before the publication of Fitzgerald's "May Day" in the *Smart Set*, professor and literary critic Percy Boynton indicated in the *Freeman* the general impression which American readers, whether supporters or critics, possessed of Mencken and Nathan's magazine. His article was titled: "American Literature and the Tart Set." The pun in the title conveys his criticism, but it also acknowledges an assumed familiarity with the magazine's name and the success with which Mencken and Nathan had cultivated a particular image precise enough to be captured in a simple pun.

In this article Boynton challenged the "tart set's" attack on college professors, arguing that Mencken and Nathan's main criticisms—that "American literature ought to be national, and that American writers and critics ought to be independent of old-world standards"—were not new. However, despite his insistence that there was nothing particularly revolutionary about the claims made by the "tart set," in his conclusion he provides a partial contradiction to his argument, and a qualified praise, when he claims that "Mr. Mencken and his associates appear to . . . be a recrudescence of the New York Bohemians of seventy years ago." Within the terms of this comparison he characterizes them as "very aggressive, very unconventional, and very clever," even "amiable." He concludes that these earlier Bohemians, who Mencken and Nathan resembled, had helped to "retrieve the balance of the times" (Clippings).

That same year, Fitzgerald incorporated each of these "tart set" traits—aggression, unconventionality, cleverness, amiability, and the spirit of the age—into his new short story, "May Day." That he himself was aware of this story's particular affiliation to the opinions expressed by Mencken and Nathan in the *Smart Set* is indicated by him in a letter to

Maxwell Perkins in March 1920, in which, while still working on this story, and before its sale, he refers to it as his “Smart Set novelette” (*Dear Scott* 29). In his initial stages of this work, in February 1920, he indicated his intention to Maxwell Perkins to “break up the start of my novel & sell it as three little character stories to *Smart Set*. I’ll only get \$40 apiece but no one else would take them, I don’t think” (28). These three character stories ended up being the single story “May Day.” That he ended up submitting this story directly to the *Smart Set* instead of to a larger mass-market magazine capable of paying more is surprising, even in light of Fitzgerald’s doubts concerning its saleability, when one considers how much time and effort Fitzgerald expended on this single story. This was the only story that Fitzgerald completed in the first half of 1920, and it had taken him nine months to write.³³ In those months he created a story which was structurally “the most innovative fiction” he had ever written “prefiguring books like *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) by John Dos Passos,” and for which “evidently Fitzgerald had no model for the technique” (Miller, *Fictional* 48).

Despite the time and effort that Fitzgerald spent on this story, he was undoubtedly correct in assuming that “May Day” would not be welcome in the larger mass-market magazines. As Robert Roulston argues, “few stories would seem less likely to have appealed to the [*Saturday Evening Post*’s] morally conservative, probusiness editor, George Horace Lorimer. After all, it opens with a parody of the Bible and ends with a suicide. In between are riots, debauchery, a sordid liaison, and a monstrous marriage. One character gets his leg broken; another is shoved from a window to his death” (“May

³³ Robert Sklar, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocoon*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1967): 71.

Day" 207). Roulston suggests that such fare was "patently closer to the tastes of H. L. Mencken, the iconoclastic editor of the *Smart Set*" (208). To this contention I would add the caveat that this story wasn't just closer to the tastes of the *Smart Set*'s two editors, it was a reflection of them: in this story Fitzgerald managed to adopt the controversial subject matter which Mencken and Nathan used their *Smart Set* editorials, along with some of their mannerisms. In tone and attitude "May Day" is very much Fitzgerald's "*Smart Set* novelette."

There is no doubt that by the time of the composition of "May Day" in late 1919 and early 1920, Fitzgerald had acquired a strong familiarity with Mencken and Nathan's views. Accordingly, before proceeding with an examination of how "May Day" reflected the ideology of the magazine in which it appeared, it is worth examining how Mencken and Nathan conveyed their wishes to their authors and how Fitzgerald responded to their stated agenda. One of the most explicit public statements made by these editors concerning the sort of experimental literature which they desired appeared in the *Bookman*'s 1916 symposium "Why Are Manuscripts Rejected?" In the entry on the *Smart Set* Nathan records the practical difference that their smaller readership makes in terms of what they can accept, arguing that the *Smart Set* does not have "a circulation of one million a month, and it never will have. This fact frees it from any necessity to take a hand in the uplift, or to pretend that it is made sad by the sorrows of the world" (281). To this basic outlook Nathan adds, "with this programme, it must be plain that we do *not* want the conventional sentimentality of the cheap magazines, the rubber-stamp stuff that presents old ideas, old situations, old points of view" (282). Nathan then provides a lengthy

“litany” of common plots which the beginning author should avoid, asking to be spared “stories about trained nurses, young dramatists, baseball players, heroic locomotive engineers, settlement workers, clergymen, yeggmen³⁴, cowboys, Italians, employees of the Hudson Bay Company, and great detectives” (280-81). Through this listing Nathan displayed his own creativity and stylistic charm and also his awareness of what was routine (down to a very detailed parody of the midnight-on-Christmas-Eve-repentance-and-reconciliation story). He thus demonstrated, in a clear comic manner, that unoriginal material sent to the *Smart Set* would not only be rejected, but mocked.

Mencken and Nathan ensured that their expectations were no secret to their readers and contributors. In 1916, in a pamphlet titled *A Note to Authors*, Mencken and Nathan reprinted almost the entirety of their response to the *Bookman* symposium, as part of an explanation of their manuscript requirements. This list of suggestions to their contributors was updated again in 1919 (*My Life* 197). In 1917, Alfred Knopf published an additional pamphlet titled *Pistols for Two*. This pamphlet, like their *Advice to Authors*, was designed both to promote the magazine and to emphasize its distinctiveness, and that of its editors. In *Pistols for Two*, as with the *Bookman* symposium and *A Note to Authors*, Mencken and Nathan accomplished this goal through satire, in this case of the biographies of such magazine editors and publishers as George Harvey of the *North American Review* and Robert Davis of the Munsey publications, both of whom are explicitly mentioned along with a series of other well-reputed magazine owners and editors. Instead of providing serious biographical information they instead provide a list of obvious

³⁴ safe-breakers.

trivialities, noting, for example, that Nathan “owns three watches, seventeen scarf-pins, and nineteen pairs of shoes” (9), and that Mencken “lunches at noon and dines at six. He never eats between meals” (28). They juxtapose such bland assertions with pointed self-promotion concerning, in particular, their knowledge and ability as critics. For example, they note of Nathan that “he knows more about the modern foreign theater than any other American” (9), and of Mencken that “He is an advocate of absolute free speech in all things—and exhibits the utmost intolerance in combating those who oppose it” (28). They conclude, as in their earlier pamphlets, with their advice to authors concerning the submission of manuscripts, and, again, their preferences are clear: nothing conventional is welcome. In a letter dated September 6th, 1920 Fitzgerald thanked Mencken for sending him a copy of “H. L. M. A Symposium” and noted that he planned to have it bound along with his copy of *Pistols for Two* (“Mencken Collection” NYPL).

Previous to its appearance in the *Bookman*, Mencken and Nathan’s satiric list of plots to avoid had also been published in the *Smart Set* in February 1915 under the title “Litany for Magazine Editors.” It would later reappear in Mencken’s widely-reviewed *A Book of Burlesques* which was published in 1916. Mencken and Nathan thus widely circulated their prejudices concerning short fiction. It is possible that Fitzgerald may have encountered their views in any of their pamphlets. It is particularly likely that he may have seen their *Litany for Magazine Editors* since it appeared in Mencken’s *Book of Burlesques*; in his 1921 *Bookman* review of Mencken’s *Prejudices: Second Series* Fitzgerald revealed his familiarity with the earlier text. It is unlikely, at any rate, that

anyone who knew these two men and their magazine even superficially could have escaped their infectious disregard for the formulas common to popular fiction.

Fitzgerald's ability to provide Mencken and Nathan with material appropriate to the magazine may have begun with his first submission to them, "Babes in the Woods." This story was one of Fitzgerald's early Princeton sketches later reworked for inclusion in *This Side of Paradise* as the meeting between Armory and Isabelle. In this sketch Fitzgerald both celebrates and mocks the young debutantes who are his heroes, introducing us to Isabelle with the remark: "She had never been so worried about her appearance, she had never been so satisfied with it. She had been sixteen years old for six months" (*First Fiction* 110-11). This spoiled heroine, who spends the first few moments of the story waiting to enter a party fashionably late, somewhat delayed by the fact that she "had to send back to the house for another pair of slippers" (111). She determines even before she arrives at the party that she will fall in love with a certain "Stephen Palms" since her friend Elaine had portrayed him as the only man in attendance worthy of her affections; accordingly, "Isabelle resolved, that if necessary, she would force herself to like him" (112). That the debutantes will themselves into love with one another is owing, as the narrator informs us, to "certain accessible popular novels" (115). In this story, Fitzgerald thus establishes the necessary romance and highbrow setting of popular fiction, even as he explicitly satirises the conventions of popular fiction within the story.

In the end, even the formulaic climax of the story—predictable romantic banter followed by turning out the lights and a quick kiss—is thwarted by the author, who allows

the hero and heroine to make it only as far as the predictable banter and turning out the lights:

“I don’t know—I don’t know whether or not you know what you—what I’m going to say. Lordy Isabelle—this sounds like a line but it isn’t.”

“I know,” said Isabelle softly.

“We may never meet again like this—I have darned hard luck sometimes.” (117)

The exchange ends with the remark, “Oh, what’s the use? You’ll go your way and I suppose I’ll go mine.” The narrator quips, “Isabelle was quite stirred” (117). Naturally, according to romantic convention she would be, but Stephen’s awkward pauses and delightfully weak expletives—“Lordy,” “darned”—render the exchange obviously unstimulating; Fitzgerald thus neatly intimates that if Isabelle is moved it is by the expectation of how she should feel rather than by genuine emotion. The lights go out, they lean closer and . . . their friends enter the room. Understandably, but not at all in accordance with the formula for popular fiction, Isabelle goes home alone to bed, nothing having happened, and Fitzgerald ends the story with the only line in the story which rings true, realism not romanticism: “‘Damn!’ muttered Isabelle as she explored the cold sheets cautiously. ‘Damn!’” (119).

There is no concrete proof that Fitzgerald deliberately reworked “Babes in the Woods” for Mencken and Nathan, or that he was even familiar with the magazine itself at the time the story was submitted to them; however, it should probably be noted that in *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, Matthew Bruccoli records that at fourteen Fitzgerald wrote a poem, now lost, called “Paris, the night + the Lure of the Dark” which, according to

Fitzgerald's *Ledger*, he submitted to the *Smart Set* in 1910. It was presumably rejected by the magazine (30). The title of the poem would seem to indicate that Fitzgerald may have had some early awareness of the liberal, if not slightly seamy, reputation enjoyed by the *Smart Set* throughout its history, and of its willingness to publish the work of young unknown authors. But, even if it is argued that Fitzgerald had no, or very little, prior knowledge of the magazine and its contents, it is easy to see why Mencken and Nathan accepted what others had failed to embrace. Although it may well have been entirely inadvertent on Fitzgerald's part, a natural upshot of his own sense of humour, the sort of parody found in "Babes in the Woods" was exactly the sort of material both welcomed and encouraged by the *Smart Set*'s two editors.

Only a few months later, in November 1919, Fitzgerald's submissions to the *Smart Set* indicate his familiarity with Mencken and Nathan's preferences and those embodied by their magazine. In a letter *circa* November 14th, 1919 Nathan accepted Fitzgerald's short story "Dalrymple Goes Wrong," the playlet "Porcelain and Pink," and three credos (*GJN Reader* 202). The credos and the play in particular demonstrate Fitzgerald's awareness of the niche occupied by this particular mass-market magazine. The credos were unique to the *Smart Set*, part of an ongoing series of mockeries of American culture and society. These credos consisted of single sentences that were meant to represent the unshakable beliefs held by a majority of Americans. Many of these beliefs were closely tied to the Horatio Alger / Benjamin Franklin American Dream of self-made success, the very first of their credos having been: "The doctrine that a man like Charley Schwab, who has made a great success of the steel business, could in the same way easily have become a great

composer like Bach or Beethoven had he been minded to devote his talents” (*My Life* 250). These credos became a regular feature of the *Smart Set*, Mencken and Nathan collecting and writing enough of them that in 1920 Alfred Knopf offered to bring out the collected credos—488 of them—in book form as *The American Credo: A Contribution toward the Interpretation of the National Mind*.

We know that Fitzgerald contributed several credos to the *Smart Set*. According to A. L. Lazarus, Fitzgerald had twelve credos accepted by Mencken and Nathan;³⁵ since Nathan’s letter to Fitzgerald in November 1919 indicates that Nathan was happy to accept “three of them” (Nathan, *GJN Reader* 202), it is reasonable to assume that Fitzgerald probably wrote several more. Fitzgerald’s submissions indicate a familiarity with the series, and it is intriguing to speculate how far this familiarity may have extended. After all, in his later work, and especially in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald’s art both embodies and questions the American myths of national character. Indeed, Mencken could have been writing the preface for *Gatsby* when he wrote in his Preface to the *American Credo* that “Deep down in every man there is a body of congenital attitudes, a corpus of ineradicable doctrines and ways of thinking, that determines his reactions to his ideational environment as surely as his physical activity is determined by the length of his *tibiae* and the capacity of his lungs” (8). We know from Fitzgerald’s 1921 *Bookman* review of Mencken’s *Prejudices: Second Series* that this was a preface that he had read.³⁶ There

³⁵ Lazarus, *George Jean Nathan Reader*, footnote to the letter from Nathan to Fitzgerald ca. 14 November 1919, 202

³⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald, “The Baltimore Anti-Christ,” *The Bookman*, 53 (March 1921); reprinted in *F. Scott Fitzgerald in His Own Time: A Miscellany*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli and Jackson Bryer (Kingsport: Kent State UP, 1971): 119.

may, therefore, be some connection to Mencken's preface in Nick Carraway's conclusion regarding Gatsby that "he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream"(126). In his preface to the *American Credo* Mencken had written: "Without their dreams men would have fallen upon and devoured one another long ago—and yet every dream is an illusion, and every illusion is a lie" (12).

In addition to these credos (which had to have been written specifically for the *Smart Set* since the "American Credo" was a department unique to that magazine), Fitzgerald enclosed and had accepted a play which would very likely have been ineligible for publication in any other mass-market magazine, but which was happily embraced by the *Smart Set*'s editors. Indeed, Nathan's comments in his letter of acceptance for "Porcelain and Pink" indicate how accurately Fitzgerald had judged their tastes: "Both your short story ["Dalrymple Goes Wrong"] and your one-act play please us—the play particularly. . . . I wish, in my office of dramatic critic, personally to congratulate you on the play. You have a decidedly uncommon gift for light dialogue" (*GJN Reader* 201). What Nathan failed to mention, but which was—as I shall indicate—well understood by the author, is that this "light dialogue" was particularly welcome in the *Smart Set* since it took place within the entirely inappropriate setting of a ladies' bathroom. The entire comedy of and premise for this short play hinges on the fact that we are encouraged to believe that the woman in the bathtub at the centre of the room is naked.

In the play's preface Fitzgerald wrote: "It is a girl—clearly an appendage to the bath-tub, only her head and throat—all beautiful girls have throats instead of necks—and a suggestion of shoulder appearing above the side. For the first ten minutes of the play the

audience is engrossed in wondering if she really is playing the game fairly and hasn't any clothes on or whether it is being cheated and she is dressed" (77). The question of whether or not the woman is dressed becomes more of an issue when her sister enters the bathroom and the woman in the tub asks her for a towel, admitting that she has forgotten hers:

Lois: (*Looking around for the first time*) Why you idiot! You haven't even a kimona.

Julie: (*Also looking around*) Why, so I haven't.

Lois: (*Suspicion growing on her*) How did you get here?

Julie: (*Laughing*) I guess I whisked here. You know—a white form whisking down the stairs and (80)

Lois, the sister, leaves scandalized; shortly thereafter a young man comes to the window looking for her. He cannot see into the bathroom enough to see the tub, but he hears that someone is there and ends up having a flirtatious conversation with Julie who hints at her condition by running water and asking him questions about "bath-tubs in history" (84).

The play ends with the sister re-entering the bathroom and fainting upon hearing the voice of the young man, and the lover rushing in to aid her. Julie is left to try and to leap out of the bath and find a towel before he arrives. Fitzgerald ends the play: "*She put her hands on the side of the tub to lift herself out and a murmur, half gasp, half sigh, ripples from the audience. A Belasco midnight comes quickly down and blots out the stage*" (85).

Whatever the obvious demerits of this play, in its particular brand of humour and

scandalousness Fitzgerald demonstrates his keen understanding of the style and biases of the magazine to which he submitted it.

That Fitzgerald very likely recognized both the slightly scandalous reputation of the magazine and his own audacity in writing something like “Porcelain and Pink” is indicated in his introduction to this story in *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922):

“And do you write for any other magazines?” inquired the young lady.

“Oh yes,” I assured her. “I’ve had some stories and plays in the ‘Smart Set’ for instance—”

The young lady shivered.

“The ‘Smart Set!’” she exclaimed. “How can you? Why they publish stuff about girls in blue bathtubs, and silly things like that!”

And I had the magnificent joy of telling her that she was referring to “Porcelain and Pink,” which had appeared there several months before. (viii)

Whether or not this anecdote is true, it indicates Fitzgerald’s awareness of the fact that the *Smart Set* was known for testing the boundaries of propriety. According to Fitzgerald his reader “shivered” at the name of the magazine, but she had read it; even if Fitzgerald concocted this story, his summary of the magazine’s reputation is entirely apt. In the press, Mencken and Nathan were often characterized as “bad” or “naughty” boys, and were associated with “wickedness” (see, for example, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 30 May 1914; *Los Angeles Times* 8 Oct 1916, *Philadelphia North American* 6 March 1920; and especially “Three Bad Boys’ Wicked Book” in the *St Louis Mirror* 12 June 1914), but they were often reviewed, and therefore certainly read.

At about the same time that Fitzgerald's first published stories appeared in the *Smart Set* he modified the proof sheets for *This Side of Paradise* to include Mencken in the text of his first novel. In a letter dated 3 February 1920, Fitzgerald revealed his new literary interests to Maxwell Perkins, who was the editor responsible for *This Side of Paradise*: "Another of my discoveries [in addition to Frank Norris] is H. L. Mencken who is certainly a factor in present day literature. In fact I'm not so cocksure about things as I was last summer--this fellow Conrad seems to be pretty good after all" (*Dear Scott* 28). Fitzgerald transferred his new opinions regarding present day literature directly into *This Side of Paradise*, in the guise of Armory Blaine's literary education:

He read enormously. He was puzzled and depressed by "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"; intensely interested by "Joan and Peter" and "The Undying Fire," and rather surprised by his discovery through a critic named Mencken of several excellent American novels: "Vandover and the Brute," "The Damnation of Theron Ware," and "Jennie Gerhardt." Mackenzie, Chesterton, Galsworthy, Bennett, had sunk in his appreciation from sagacious, life saturated geniuses to merely diverting contemporaries. Shaw's aloof clarity and brilliant consistency and the gloriously intoxicated efforts of H. G. Wells to fit the key of romantic symmetry into the elusive lock of truth, alone won his rapt attention. (212)

The causation here is stronger than in his letter to Perkins. In this passage Fitzgerald acknowledged, in a way not fully recognized in his letter, that Mencken was one of his new literary discoveries, and that his discovery of many others had been developed "through" him.

Indeed, Armory Blaine's list of favourite authors sounds like a recitation of Mencken's regular *Smart Set* review columns: Dreiser and Norris received unstinting praise from Mencken in almost every issue as the exemplars of what was possible in American Fiction; whereas the British authors then popular in America, including Chesterton, Galsworthy, and Bennett were regularly bashed for the defects of their own work as much as for their influence over American writers and readers. As previously indicated, the *Smart Set* was the first American magazine to publish James Joyce and had provided positive reviews of both *Dubliners* and *Portrait* in its pages, and although Mencken could be critical of Shaw (see especially his essay on "The Ulster Polonius" *Smart Set* August 1916), he was the first American critic to devote a book-length study to his work (*George Bernard Shaw: His Plays* [1905]), and regularly mentioned him in his review columns. Accordingly, it seems likely that the writers praised by Fitzgerald in *This Side of Paradise* had been introduced to him, as he himself suggests, in the same manner that they had been introduced to Armory—through Mencken. As Robert Sklar argues concerning Fitzgerald's reading habits in 1920, "with Teutonic efficiency Mencken had completed his intellectual conquest of Fitzgerald in hardly more than a year" (61).

Whether Fitzgerald learned about the virtues of these specific writers from Mencken in person, there is no question that he rapidly, and extensively, familiarized himself with Mencken's writings. By the time he reviewed Mencken's *Prejudices: Second Series* for the *Bookman* in March 1921, Fitzgerald could speak knowledgeably about the work in question, and was able to do so with reference to much of Mencken's previous work, including his *Smart Set* columns, his *Book of Burlesques* (1916), his *Book of*

Prefaces (1917), and *The American Credo* (1920). Certainly, even in the above quoted passage from *This Side* he shows enough familiarity with Mencken's work to provide a lengthy list of authors regularly praised and condemned by him in his books and *Smart Set* review columns, and to do so while employing Mencken's distinctive mannerisms, especially his fondness for the excessive use of adjectives and long lists. Such phrases as the "gloriously intoxicated efforts of H. G. Wells" ring with the inflated irony typical of Menckenesque.

The effect that Mencken thus exerted on Fitzgerald's reading habits was profound enough for Fitzgerald to include a lengthy tribute to Mencken in his first book and, even, to imitate the style of his new-found mentor. When Fitzgerald inscribed a copy of *This Side* for Mencken he drew his attention to the accolade, writing "As a matter of fact, Mr. Mencken, I stuck your name in on page 224 in the last proof,—partly, I suppose, as a vague bootlick and partly because I have since adopted a great many of your views" (*A Life in Letters* 39). His assertion that he had adopted many of Mencken's views might itself be taken as little more than a "vague bootlick" if it weren't for the fact that he repeated this assertion in both theory and practice in his own columns and book reviews, in his short stories and, later, in his next novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*.

In an article for the *Bookseller and Stationer* in January 1923, Fitzgerald freely admitted the extent of his indebtedness to Mencken. In this article, Fitzgerald argued that "the vogue of books like mine depends almost entirely on the stupendous critical power at present wielded by H. L. Mencken" ("How I Would" 167). To this assertion he added, "And it is his influence at second hand that is particularly important. Such men as Weaver,

in the *Brooklyn Eagle*; Bishop in *Vanity Fair*; Boyd in the *St. Paul News*, and dozens of others show the liberal tendencies which Mencken has popularized” (167). Such comments, of course, may have been written by Fitzgerald as another vague boot-lick, but what argues against such an interpretation, or sole interpretation, is the strong imitation in this article and others of Mencken’s prose-style.

Fitzgerald was adopting Mencken’s prose style even in venues that Mencken was unlikely to read. So, in an open letter to Thomas Boyd of the *St. Paul Daily News*, and published in that paper on February 20th, 1921, Fitzgerald lambasted the reading taste of the American public in decidedly Menckenesque, and un-Fitzgeraldian, prose:

This class which makes up the so-called upper class in every American city, will read what they’re told and now that at last we have a few brilliant men like Mencken at the head of American letters, these amiable sheep will pretend to appreciate the appreciable of their own country instead of rushing to cold churches to hear noble but unintelligible lords, and meeting once a week to read papers on the aforementioned Blasco Ibanez. Even the stupidest people are reading “Main Street,” and pretending they thought so all the time. (“Credo” 165)

Not only does Fitzgerald praise Mencken here, but the hyperbolic adjective-noun phrases “amiable sheep,” “cold churches,” “unintelligible lords” all have an unmistakably Menckenesque ring. Moreover, his disdainful comments concerning the inability of the American upper class to appreciate their own writers, especially new writers, was a common theme in Mencken’s *Smart Set* columns. When this article was later reprinted in the *Chicago Daily News*, either that paper’s editors or Fitzgerald himself acknowledged

the implicit connection of its views to the *Smart Set* through the *Smart Set*-style title “The Credo of F. Scott Fitzgerald.”

Fitzgerald’s absorption of the particular brands of comedy and social criticism championed by Mencken and Nathan appears in the content and style of his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*. As Robert Sklar has argued, “Readers of *The Beautiful and Damned* who thought they were getting F. Scott Fitzgerald’s latest views on the Jazz Age were wrong. They were getting H. L. Mencken’s views” (93). Robert Roulston similarly asserts that “throughout Fitzgerald’s second novel, the impact of Mencken’s tastes and ideas is ubiquitous—a fact Fitzgerald himself was aware of” (“Something” 57). As proof of this assertion Roulston refers to a letter from Fitzgerald to Moran Tudury in April 1924, in which Fitzgerald distanced himself from both *The Beautiful and Damned*, and from Mencken’s influence upon him, writing of his progress on *The Great Gatsby* that “The B & D was a better book than the first but it was a false lead. . . a concession to Mencken. . . The business of creating illusion is much more to my taste and talent” (Fitzgerald, *Correspondence* 139). Fitzgerald’s analysis of the failings of *The Beautiful and Damned* could not have been more acute; the novel fails because, in many ways, it was never Fitzgerald’s own.

The Beautiful and Damned was dedicated to Shane Leslie, Maxwell Perkins, and George Jean Nathan, and from the beginning both Mencken and Nathan’s voices, and the style of their jointly edited magazine, can be heard in this novel’s pages. Robert Long argues that “the condescending tone of *The Smart Set* is pervasive in the work and can be noted in Fitzgerald’s slighting references to clergymen and public officials” (42). Indeed,

Mencken and Nathan's prose style, as well as their ideas, appear in the very first chapter with the introduction of Anthony Patch's puritan grandfather: "Emulating the magnificent efforts of Anthony Comstock, after whom his grandson was named, he levelled a varied assortment of uppercuts and body-blows at liquor, literature, vice, art, patent medicines, and Sunday theatres" (4). Moreover, there is little question that Fitzgerald's character Maury Nobel is a thinly disguised Nathan, even down to his physical description. In his description of Nobel, Fitzgerald portrays a character whom any number of period photographs in magazines and newspapers would have supported as Nathan's likeness: "Maury Nobel is like nothing so much as a cat. His eyes are narrow and full of incessant, protracted blinks. His hair is smooth and flat, as though it had been licked by a possible—and, if so, Herculean—mother-cat" (19). In addition to the photographic evidence widely available at the time, it should be remembered that, as John Brown indicates in his 1958 tribute to Nathan, most people in New York wouldn't have needed the photographs: "Of course, too, I had come to recognize [Nathan] as the landmark he was at first nights, to watch for his disdainful exits at the end of many second acts, and, if near enough, to steal glances at his remarkably handsome, haughty and expressive face on which reviews, blistering or favorable, seemed to be written" (3). In *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald's handsome, haughty Nobel is, like Nathan, a graduate of an Ivy-league school (Harvard rather than Cornell) and is described as "the most unique figure in his class, the most brilliant, the most original—smart, quiet and among the saved" (19). In this novel

which contains echoes of Mencken and Nathan's magazine throughout, it should be noted that Nobel is specifically equated with the adjective "smart."³⁷

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that when Fitzgerald explained his method and attempted goals for "May Day" in his introduction to it in *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922) his primary themes and concerns are very similar to the style and content of the *Smart Set*. Fitzgerald indicated his indebtedness to the ideals of the bohemian "tart set" when he wrote:

This somewhat unpleasant tale, published as a novelette in the "Smart Set" in July, 1920, relates a series of events that took place in the spring of the previous year. Each of the three events made a great impression upon me. In life they were unrelated, except by the general hysteria of that spring which inaugurated the Age of Jazz, but in my story I have tried, unsuccessfully I fear, to weave them into a pattern—a pattern which would give the effect of those months in New York as they appeared to at least one member of what was then the younger generation.

(viii)

In this introduction he encompasses several of the criteria which, as I have suggested, were associated with the *Smart Set*: he characterizes "May Day" as an "unpleasant" story

³⁷ Of Anthony's relationship to Maury Nobel, Fitzgerald records: "This is the man whom Anthony considers his best friend. This is the only man of all his acquaintance whom he admires and, to a bigger extent than he likes to admit to himself, envies" (19). During the writing of this novel Fitzgerald was friends with both Mencken and Nathan, but since Nathan lived, like Fitzgerald in New York, while Mencken lived in Baltimore, it was natural that Fitzgerald saw more of Nathan (*Brucoli Some Sort* 138). Moreover, while Mencken had never attended an institute of higher learning, Nathan was a Cornell graduate and therefore, presumably, the kind of role model who Fitzgerald might more naturally admire; as Fitzgerald wrote to Harold Ober in December 1919: "I'm on rather good terms with Mr. Nathan and intend to send him half a dozen little one act plays a year" (*As Ever* 6). Nathan was aware that he had been the model for Maury Nobel (see Nathan "Memories" 148).

with an experimental “pattern” in which he attempted to capture the mood of a particular time and the attitude of its younger generation. While he does not emphasize humour or cleverness in this introduction, these were also integral aspects of the story.

Most critics of this particular story cite Fitzgerald’s sophisticated mastery of theme, order, time, symbolism and technique as evidence of its considerable importance in Fitzgerald’s early artistic development. Robert Long is not alone in suggesting that the story “anticipates *The Great Gatsby* in a number of ways,” from Fitzgerald’s intricate use of colour symbolism to his unique juxtaposition of realism with a moral fable, through which he contrasts the degeneration of present-day America with the promise which it presented to its discoverers (37-38).

The three strands of this story parallel different aspects of Fitzgerald’s own recent experiences, including the May Day riots in New York in 1919. In the main narrative the unsuccessful artist Gordon Sterrett has become entangled with a woman who will reveal the physical nature of their relationship to his parents if he doesn’t pay her. Sterrett approaches one of his former Yale classmates, Philip Dean, and begs him for money. Dean is looking forward to joining several of their former classmates for the Yale Gamma Psi dance at Delmonico’s in a few hours and responds to Sterrett’s distress by thinking to himself, “If Gordon was going to be depressing, then he’d have to see less of Gordon” (101). He finally offers Sterrett—who had asked for \$300—a five dollar bill: “before they turned to go out their eyes met and in that instant each found something that made him lower his own glance quickly. For in that instant they quite suddenly and definitely hated each other” (104). The second strand of the story involves the debutante Edith Bradin

who decides to visit her brother, who edits a socialist paper, after the Delmonico dance. She is portrayed as a woman whose thoughts and actions primarily concern her appearance and the attention of her amours. The story's third strand introduces the lower class characters of the two demobilised soldiers—Carrol Key (undoubtedly a play on Fitzgerald's own name) and Gus Rose—who gets drunk and joins the May Day riots. Key is killed and Sterrett commits suicide.

These three story lines are linked only tangentially by plot, but meticulously in mood and timing. As James Miller contends, if Fitzgerald “wished to evoke the general hysteria of postwar New York in 1919” then he chose a perfect technique for his story: “It is the technique which John Dos Passos was to use later on a much larger scale: the independent and simultaneous development of several apparently unrelated lines of action which are merged occasionally in seemingly accidental ways” (*Fictional* 46). As Anthony Mazzella reveals, Fitzgerald crafted the story's timeline and structure with extreme care: “The content of ‘May Day’ is chaos and destruction, but the story's form reverses the direction of the content, giving the reader attuned to form a sense of order and stability” (380). Most critics of this particular story cite Fitzgerald's sophisticated technical mastery in this story as evidence of its considerable importance within his early artistic development.

The particular essay which most clearly and carefully connects the artistic and thematic advances made by Fitzgerald in this story to Mencken's influence, if not more generally to the *Smart Set*, is James Tuttleton's “Seeing Slightly Red: Fitzgerald's ‘May Day.’” In this essay he prefaces his comments about the story with the assertion that “if as

John P. Marquand once claimed, a writer has only one story to tell and repeats it with variations throughout his career, 'May Day' is a particularly apt, early formation of the Fitzgerald 'story.' It combines with uncommon adroitness the social and the psychological, the public and private" (181). It is one of the paradoxes of the story that something that was related in so many respects to Fitzgerald's own personal experience also reflected the ideology to which he had been introduced through Mencken and Nathan's *Smart Set*. As Tuttleton argues, "Mencken's influence is immediately to be seen in two aspects of the story: the theme of character in decay, and in the satiric treatment of socialism as a political ideology" (186). Both he and Robert Roulston have argued that Fitzgerald dealt with these Menckenesque themes by incorporating Menckenesque prose into his own descriptions.

For example, Tuttleton notes that in the opening section Fitzgerald employs such Menckonian techniques as "hyperbole, the high-flown rhetoric, and the archaisms put in the service of satiric deflation," resulting in such lines as "all exulted because the young men returning were pure and brave, sound of tooth and pink of cheek, and the young women of the land were virgins and comely both of face and figure" (191). Roulston adds that "even more redolent of Mencken are the flippant asides, as when Fitzgerald describes Edith Bradin's dreamy state after prolonged dancing as 'equivalent to a noble soul after several long highballs'" ("May Day" 210). In fact, Tuttleton suggests that Mencken's criticism may even have been the inspiration for the story's climactic event, the drunken elevator ride of Mr. In and Mr. Out (Peter Himmel and Philip Dean who are both drunken Yale men who are wearing "In" and "Out" signs stolen from the Biltmore Hotel):

“What floor, please?” said the elevator man.

“Any floor,” said Mr. In.

“Top floor,” said Mr. Out.

“This is the top floor,” said the elevator man.

“Have another floor put on,” said Mr. Out.

“Higher,” said Mr. In.

“Heaven,” said Mr. Out. (140)

The “vaudeville clowning” (Tuttleton 194) of these two drunken characters amuses even as it conveys a blunt commentary on the state of American society, a technique integral to the particular élan of the *Smart Set*.

Moreover, as Tuttleton convincingly argues, this scene brings together the disparities of wealth and social condition in America, a common concern in Mencken’s criticism, enough so that Tuttleton suggests Fitzgerald may have had Mencken’s Preface to the *American Credo* in mind when he wrote this particular scene, perhaps even this specific passage:

Such a thing as a secure position is practically unknown among us. There is no American who cannot hope to lift himself another notch or two, if he is to keep on fighting for whatever position he has; no wall of caste is there to protect him if he slips. One observes every day the movement of individuals, families, whole groups, in both directions. . . . It is this constant possibility of rising, this constant risk of falling, that gives a barbaric picturesqueness to the panorama of what is called fashionable society in America. (*Credo* 30)

The possibility that Fitzgerald may have been influenced by this particular statement, or any of the others like it which appeared in both Mencken's *Smart Set* columns, gives Fitzgerald's assertion to Perkins that he was still working on his "*Smart Set* novelette" more weight than it has been traditionally allotted.

"May Day," as an occasional story about class turbulence during a period of debauchery, might be characterized as Fitzgerald's Jazz Age *Twelfth Night*. On a similar note, earlier in the same year in which this story was published in the *Smart Set* an editorial article in the *New York Globe* on Mencken's *Smart Set* criticism was titled *What You Will*. In this article the editorialist condemned Mencken's views on journalism and argued that Mencken's attacks were not only too harsh, but also too adjective-laden. But even so, this critic also acknowledges that despite Mencken's flaws he always entertains, calling him "one of the most interesting attractions in the great American circus. May his typewriter run long and smoothly" (Clippings). This sort of article indicates the general perception that while Mencken and Nathan could be serious, it was finally amusement with which they and their magazine were associated. As John Brown indicated in an obituary tribute to Nathan, to the younger generation of the 1920s these men were regarded as "Katzenjammer" kids (1).

In light of such assertions, it is possible to see the significance of the publishing history of "May Day." While this story criticized American society, it ultimately possessed the same *joie de vivre* as the magazine in which it appeared and for which it had been written. Roulston summarizes its effect as criticism with humour: "despite the disgust directed at the patricians and paupers, past and future, humanity and himself, Fitzgerald

does not make 'May Day' an orgy of nihilism. Perhaps he does not because Mencken had taught him to laugh at the world more than to rage at it" ("May Day" 215).

"The Diamond as Big as the Ritz"

While Mencken and Nathan are praised by modern critics for their recognition of the quality of "May Day" and then later "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," as evinced through their publication of them, the connection of these stories to the magazine in which they first appeared is often reduced to the terms of a commercial transaction. For example, in his introduction to "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" in *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Matthew Bruccoli notes that Fitzgerald had been unable to place it in any of the larger, better-paying mass-market magazines owing to the fact that "editors found it baffling, blasphemous, or objectionably satiric about wealth" (182). Of Mencken and Nathan's acceptance of this story for the *Smart Set* he writes only: "*The Smart Set* paid Fitzgerald only \$300 when his *Post* price was \$1,500 for a long story" (182). Bruccoli's introduction to "May Day" places a similar emphasis upon the money which these editors paid Fitzgerald, rather than their support for Fitzgerald's artistic development, noting that "'May Day' Fitzgerald's first great novelette—published during his first year as a professional writer—appeared in July 1920. . . . *The Smart Set* paid him only \$200 for this masterpiece" (97). However limiting, this emphasis upon the monetary nature of the transaction is entirely understandable since it was Fitzgerald's own concern.

Accordingly, almost no one writing about "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" fails to quote the now well-known letter from Fitzgerald to Harold Ober on February 5th, 1922 before the sale of this story to the *Smart Set*, in which he wrote:

I am rather discouraged that a cheap story like The Popular Girl written in one week while the baby was being born brings \$1500.00 + a genuinely imaginative thing into which I put three weeks real enthusiasm [*sic*] like The Diamond in the Sky brings not a thing. But, by God and Lorimer [editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*], I'm going to make a fortune yet. (*As Ever* 36)

In a less quoted section from the same letter, Fitzgerald indicates to Ober that he should attempt to sell this story to the *Smart Set* since it was becoming increasingly obvious that the better-paying mass-market magazines would have nothing to do with it. This letter shows the precision with which Fitzgerald was able to judge, based on only one or two rejections, the extent to which most of the general interest magazines of the time shared the same mandate, a mandate which virtually guaranteed that if one of these magazines considered a story "inappropriate" they all would:

I should much prefer that The Diamond in the Sky be sent to Smart Set as soon as it can be re-typed with "Chap I" substituted for "I" ect. If Rascoe of Mccauls [*sic*] wouldn't risk it then Bridges of Scribners wouldn't. Besides he would hack it all to pieces—I once had reams of correspondence with him over a "God damn" in a story called The Cut Glass Bowl. Besides they would pay little more than Scribner—possibly four hundred or five hundred I should guess at most for a two part short story—while Smart Set, though they pay only \$35-\$80 for short stories, once gave me \$200.00 for a novelette when I was unknown, and I feel sure they'd give me \$250.00 now. (*As Ever* 35)

Fitzgerald's observation that the larger mass-circulation magazines wouldn't "risk" this story proved correct. But the most important aspect of this passage to my mind is not the financial issue of the *Smart Set*'s low pay scale, although that was certainly an issue, but Fitzgerald's recognition that the *Smart Set*, however low its pay, offered a uniquely liberated venue among the mass-market magazines, a venue in which artists might publish their stories without confronting editors who would quibble over a "God Damn."

Fitzgerald makes it clear in such letters that the *Smart Set* was a repository for material which, owing to its subject-matter, an author would be unable to place elsewhere. In a letter to Harold Ober in 1919 he asked, in despair, "One more question—Is there any market at all for the cynical or pessimistic story except Smart Set or does realism bar a story from any well-paying magazine no matter how cleverly its [*sic*] done?" (*As Ever* 7). This, indeed, was a niche which Mencken and Nathan were well-aware their magazine occupied; according to Mencken "we had second choice, despite our low pay—and first choice of most of the stuff that was obviously outside the field of the *Post*" (*My Life* 51). Fitzgerald's letter to Ober indicates that Mencken wasn't far wrong. Despite the fact that he might have earned more from *Scribner*'s for "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" his reasons for not wishing to send it there included both their likely rejection and their likely censorship (they would "hack it all to pieces"). In other words, Mencken and Fitzgerald, both author and editor, had basically the same perception of the *Smart Set* magazine, a testimony to the fact that Mencken and Nathan clearly and effectively managed to establish a niche for their magazine among the mass-market magazines of the day. If Fitzgerald's letters are representative, then we may assume that authors were aware that

good work which, owing to its content, was ineligible for, or likely to be censored in, the larger mass-market periodicals, would be accepted and not molested (however under-compensated) by the *Smart Set*.

Indeed, Mencken and Nathan's own interoffice communication (by letter or telegram when Mencken was in Baltimore and Nathan in New York) confirms not only their own playfulness in the editorship of their magazine but also that such playfulness may have been key in their ability to publish stories which were considered too cynical for the larger mass-market magazines. For example, in one of Nathan's letters to Mencken (*circa* 1920) he proclaimed, "The office decorations are coming on nobly. The one-sheet of Louis Robie's "Crackerjacks" looks very tasty. Also the Hoover for president poster. I have my scouts out for photographs of Lillian Russell in tights, Archbishop Mannix and the late Czar Nicholas. I shall autograph them" ("H. L. Mencken" 52). He cannot resist adding a sly comment about the office decor at their rival magazine *Vanity Fair*: "I think that there should be a gilt chair in the office. . . . I'll make an effort to dig up the chair at once. I favor the one with the two cupids at the top. I recall having seen such a one in the *Vanity Fair* office. I'll drop in casually to see Crowninshield at noon and steal it" (52). Mencken explains in his memoir that such outlandish decorations were an integral aspect of the *Smart Set* offices; any visiting authors would be aware upon entrance that this was not a typical magazine. Of their lack of decorum, whether in their editing or their decorating, Nathan claimed "those were the days when the opposition boys and girls sought to ridicule our literary and critical pretensions and when we in turn concluded that

the most astute practice on our part would be to set a clown to catch a clown" ("H. L. Mencken" 54-55).

Accordingly, then, if Mencken and Nathan were, as Fitzgerald contended, the only magazine editors who risked publishing the cynical or realistic story it was, in part, owing to their use of humour in the day-to-day workings of their office as well as in their editorials. Brooks Atkinson suggests the success with which Mencken and Nathan achieved their paradoxical juxtaposition of serious social criticism with outrageous wit in his recollection that when Mencken and Nathan became the *Smart Set's* owners and co-editors in 1914 "they tossed decorum out of the office window and applied the basrinado to decorum wherever they found it. They belabored all kinds of sacred cows—not only in literature but in public morals and university education" (1). Atkinson perceived what Nathan admitted had been their strategy: Mencken and Nathan had become clowns in order to catch clowns.

Fitzgerald eventually offered "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" to the *Smart Set* because, as his letters indicate, he knew that Mencken and Nathan would likely accept it, since, as with "May Day," there is reason to suggest that the content of the magazine itself may have inspired the content of Fitzgerald's story. In the February 1920 issue of the *Smart Set* (which contained Fitzgerald's "Dalrymple Goes Wrong" and his "Benediction") Mencken attacked the American propensity to embrace capitalism as its religion, stating at one point that "A man suspected of having designs on capitalism is quite without any rights in our law" ("From the Diary" 142). Mencken believed that socialism was inherently flawed, and had in fact written a book on the subject, *Men vs. the Man: A*

Correspondence between Robert Rives La Monte, Socialist, and H. L. Mencken, Individualist (1910), but this in no way mitigated his belief that people should be free to express anti-capitalist sentiments and even to embrace socialism if they so desired. Again, since this was an issue of the *Smart Set* in which his own work appeared, it is entirely possible that Fitzgerald may have read this criticism. When Fitzgerald wrote “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” in 1922 he was likely embracing Mencken’s challenge to the sanctity of capitalist belief.

There is more than a hint of Mencken’s *Smart Set* columns in one of Fitzgerald’s narrative asides early in the story: “The simple piety prevalent in Hades has the earnest worship of and respect for riches as the first article of its creed—had John felt otherwise than radiantly humble before them, his parents would have turned away in horror at the blasphemy” (186). Along with the Menckenesque phrase “the simple piety,” Fitzgerald indicates his *Smart Set* allegiance here, again, through his use of ironic deflation (“radiantly humble”) and in his mockery of wealth as the American religion, speaking against it being the only possible “blasphemy.” Moreover, in his reference to these beliefs as “first article” of their “creed,” there is even a hint of his indebtedness to Mencken and Nathan’s *American Credo*. In fact, this story embodies the central American credo; it was “Fitzgerald’s first treatment of a theme stressing the core of corruption deep within limitless and fabulous riches, the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of great wealth” (Miller 49).

In this story the Washington family, a fairly obvious synecdoche for the nation, lives in a hidden valley on top of a mountain which is, literally, as big as the Ritz Carleton

Hotel. They defend this wealth at all costs, including the corrupting of state surveyors (so that the five square miles on which they live remains unknown), the bribing of federal officials, and the manipulation of foreign governments and international monetary systems. Any aviators who accidentally discover the mountain are shot down, and if they live are kept in a cage built for that purpose. Since the Washingtons cannot live entirely secluded from the world, every summer they invite guests to visit and, as the protagonist John Unger discovers, murder them before they leave. As the Washington's youngest daughter Kismine confesses to John, these murders are carried out "in August usually—or early September. It's only natural for us to get all the pleasure out of them that we can first" (204).

Robert Long has astutely noted that "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" was written within a satirical tradition which Mencken and Nathan supported through their choice of fiction for the *Smart Set* magazine (38). Long does not mention specific examples, but he may have had in mind a story like Donald Ogden Stewart's "The Secret of Success," which appeared in the *Smart Set* in November 1921. In Ogden's story, the business world is treated with religious solemnity by a young man who wishes to be admitted to the faith; he is successful and rises to the top of the company; the ironic ending, however, reveals that the secret of his success was not that he had believed in capitalism and had worked hard, but that he had married the boss's daughter. Certainly Willa Cather's "Her Boss" (*Smart Set* Oct. 1919) would also fit this anti-success mold welcomed by the *Smart Set*'s editors, since in her story a woman who had a good heart and a selfless disposition not only fails to reap the rewards of her kindness but is, in fact, ruined by it.

Whether or not Fitzgerald was influenced by this particular brand of “anti-success” story as it appeared in the *Smart Set* (examples of which certainly appeared in the *Smart Set* during the same period in which Fitzgerald’s own fiction appeared there), he was influenced by Mencken’s ideas on success. Long argues that “Mencken’s concern with the illusion of national myth was to have an immediate and then a far-reaching effect on Fitzgerald’s career in the twenties” (39). He adds that “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” not only embodies Mencken’s criticisms of the national myths but also “anticipates *The Great Gatsby* in its concern with the national ideal of wealth, as well as in its form as a fable or modern morality” (67). It is little wonder that this story was widely rejected by the mass-market magazines of the day. It was rendered virtually unsalable to anyone but Mencken and Nathan from its inception since it embodied not only their American credos, but it also flouted the standard formulas of the success stories common in the popular magazines.

As Mencken had written in the popular *Smart Set* department “Répétition Générale” in the January 1920 issue of the *Smart Set* (which, significantly, was the same issue which contained Fitzgerald’s play “Porcelain and Pink”),

American Fiction—One of the intrinsic defects of American fiction lies in this fact: that it habitually shows an inferior man yielding discreetly to his environment and so achieving what, under a third-rate civilization, is commonly called success.

Here we have the typically American, the optimistic, the inspirational, the *Saturday Evening Post* school. In character creation its masterpiece is the shoe-drummer who, by thinking of some new and idiotic advertising dodge, outsells all other shoe

drummers, marries the daughter of the owner of the shoe factory, and ends by owning it himself. Optimism? Yes. But what a world it would be if all men were optimists of that sort! (53)

Mencken continued this series of observations on the problem with American fiction in general and the American success story in particular with the assertion that in all really first-rate novels the story is not a success story in the conventional sense at all, but a plot in which the hero resists “the mandates and vagaries” of destiny and fails:

Nine times out of ten his aspiration is almost infinitely above his achievement. The result is that we see him sliding down-hill—his ideals breaking up, his hope petering out, his character in decay. Character in decay is thus the throne of the great bulk of superior fiction. One has it in Dostoevsky [*sic*], in Balzac, in Hardy, in Conrad, in Flaubert, in Zola, in Turgenieff, in Sudermann, in Bennet, and, to come home, in Dreiser. In nearly all first-rate novels the hero is defeated. In perhaps a majority he is completely destroyed. (53-54)

It is not difficult to imagine that a young, and clearly impressionable, F. Scott Fitzgerald may have read this passage, and been affected by it.

Certainly, in “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” Fitzgerald writes the kind of anti-success story of which Mencken approved. As Fitzgerald wrote in his introduction to this story in *Tales of the Jazz Age* “One well-known critic has been pleased to like this extravaganza better than anything I have written” (viii). Within the “Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” however, he also included his own love of luxury. Again, in his introduction he wrote: “‘The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,’ which appeared last summer in the ‘Smart Set’

was designed for my own amusement. I was in that familiar mood characterized by a perfect craving for luxury, and the story begins as an attempt to feed that craving on imaginary foods" (viii). This combination, unique to Fitzgerald, of a prose-style capable of satirising the worst excesses of capitalism while simultaneously revelling in those same excesses appears in "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" in the passage in which John and Percy are picked up at the train station by a car which will take them to the mountain:

As they came closer, John saw that it was the taillight of an immense automobile, larger and more magnificent than any he had ever seen. Its body was of gleaming metal richer than nickel and lighter than silver, and the hubs of the wheels were studded with iridescent geometric figures of green and yellow—John did not dare to guess whether they were glass or jewel. (186)

There are obvious hints in this passage of the famous evocation which he would later write in *The Great Gatsby*: "It was a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns" (*Gatsby* 51). This paradoxical ability to reconcile abuse of the capitalist system with an almost reverential deference was Fitzgerald's particular skill, and it was of his own making. But it is interesting to consider, at least in terms of the initial publication and reception of "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," that this story first appeared in a magazine which contained brutal denunciations of the American obsession with wealth, but which had been founded to entertain dilettantes. Even when the *Smart Set* ceased to fill that particular role, it retained some of the spirit of high society through the reproduction, on the cover of every

issue, of a man in a tuxedo and a woman in an evening gown. And, after all, it was still called the *Smart Set*.

Playing the Clown

The *Smart Set* had been more open to Fitzgerald's early experiments in form and content than any other magazine of the day. It had encouraged him to defy standard mass-market magazine formulas in his fiction, and had accepted his most innovative work. This pattern was repeated, in a sense, in 1932 when Fitzgerald was unable to find a magazine willing to publish his story "Crazy Sunday," owing to its sexual frankness (Kuehl 6). In 1932, twelve years had passed since Mencken and Nathan had published "May Day." Ten years had passed since their publication of "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." Eight years had passed since they had published "Absolution" in the *American Mercury*—a story that Fitzgerald had been unable to place owing to its frank social criticism. Now he was faced, once again, with the same situation. As with all three of these earlier stories, "Crazy Sunday" is generally regarded as one of Fitzgerald's best short works. It was accepted for publication by Mencken and appeared in the *American Mercury* in October 1932. In effect, despite his own later disclaimers and those of many of his critics, Fitzgerald recognized in 1932, just as he had in 1920, that there were few mass-market magazine editors willing to allow their authors the enjoyment of full creative expression regardless of content—and he knew where to find the ones who did.

During a key period in Fitzgerald's artistic development, Mencken and Nathan offered this young author the example of their own social criticism and their comedy, and encouraged him to freely explore whatever manner or matter were necessary for him to

find his own voice. Fitzgerald may have been acknowledging as much when, in a letter to Mencken after the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, he wrote: "Incidentally, I had hoped it would amuse the Mencken who wrote the essay on New York in the last book of Prejudices" (*A Life in Letters* 111). Ultimately, he may have realized that these editors and their magazine had offered him what he offered them in return, the literary freedom and artistic achievement to be derived from playing the clown.

Conclusion: Hemingway and “that shit” Mencken, 1920-26

The nebulous question of image—the associations a reading audience makes in relation to a particular magazine—is more than an abstract consideration with respect to monthly magazines, since magazines, far more than books, rely upon image as the means by which they establish both their difference from other magazines in the market and create the expectations necessary to support sales month after month to the same people. As David Reed explains in *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States, 1880-1960*, people buy a magazine or a group of magazines primarily for reinforcement of particular ideas and attitudes: “the serial format, returning every week or month, reassures its audience in the way that a mother reading or telling a story to her child over and over again reassures the infant that there is a base of reliability and predictability that can be touched in a dangerous and unstable world” (11). In conjunction with the conclusions reached by Leon Festinger in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957) and Douglas Waples, Bernard Berelson, and Franklin Bradshaw in *What Reading Does to People* (1940), Reed determines that the most successful magazines establish an identifiable persona. In essence, he argues that the primary attraction of mass-market magazines is their ability not just to entertain but to comfort their readers through the provision, month after month, of the same recognizable characteristics by which its readers will know it and continue to buy it.

The accuracy of Reed’s thesis is confirmed by Mark Edmiston, founder of the Library of Congress’s *Civilization* magazine, when he made the following comments in the course of an interview on the magazine industry. With reference to recent changes at the

New Yorker under its new editor Tina Brown, Edmiston said: "It's called 'repositioning.' And it's very very difficult. Few magazines ever successfully carry it off" (138). As David Reed and Mark Edmiston indicate, changing a magazine's image is difficult, and often even impossible, owing to the strength of association that a magazine's readers develop with that magazine's content and style. The difficulty of changing a magazine's image is similarly noted in Richard Ohmann's *Selling Culture*, which he defines mass-market magazines as products designed to shape "habitual audiences" around "common needs or interests" (14). Accordingly, while the "mass" in mass-market denotes a reasonably large audience, it does not necessarily involve a precisely defined number of participants; the definition does not rely on the number of readers as much as it relies upon their shared experience.

Reed and Ohmann demonstrate that unlike the "little magazines," which were often characterized by short lifespans and by patrons rather than subscribers (Bishop 287), mass-market magazines survive by creating an identifiable persona and then maintaining an audience loyal to it (Ohmann 14; Reed 11). The character of a magazine is central to its sustained success. Indeed, a magazine without an identifiable persona cannot, by definition, be considered a mass-market magazine since such a magazine would be unable to create an 'habitual audience' formed around common needs and interests. The *Smart Set* magazine, as I have indicated, possessed such a readily identifiable persona. It was known for its "bad boy" literary critics as well as its responsiveness to European trends in literary modernism. It was regarded as a venue that welcomed the work of young authors and quality fiction, regardless of subject matter. These views of the magazine occur again

and again in its reception history between 1908 and 1920. Its “habitual audience,” too, is readily identified. The iconoclasm of the magazine attracted educated readers, and particularly the young. It achieved both a recognizable persona and an ascertainable readership.

Within the wider history of American commerce at the beginning of the century, this magazine may be considered as a recognizable product, as brand name merchandise. This is an important consideration, since when the *Smart Set* was being published the entire notion of a brand name was still very new. At the turn-of-the-century rapid technical and scientific advancements led to the development of the concept of a trademark. As a direct result of the rise of modern advertising, Congress passed sweeping trademark legislation in 1905 (Strasser 45), and between 1905 and 1915 “litigation about trademark infringement and unfair competition became central to the understanding of trademarks as a legal field” (Strasser 51). Trademarks were still so new in 1899 that the Eastman company took out a series of advertisements which explained, “‘Kodak’ is a Trade Name applied by us to cameras and other goods of our manufacture. We originated and registered the word ‘Kodak.’ The trade-mark is our exclusive property” (qtd. in Strasser 47). In 1905 the Eastman company revised this wordy explanation of trademark law into the snappier slogan: “If it isn’t an Eastman, It isn’t a Kodak” (Strasser 47). As these Kodak slogans indicate, people were being trained to accept the idea of buying a product primarily on the basis of its name recognition.

It is no coincidence that mass-market magazines developed during the same historical period during which these changes were taking place. New technology allowed

for increased print runs and lowered production costs. But along with the technological developments that allowed them to exist, mass-market magazines were developing increasingly well-defined personas in an attempt to attract, and to keep, thousands or even millions of readers. The importance of the name on the label was recognized across manufacturing industries. The development of a unique style became so important that in the case of the most successful mass-market magazines, advertisements and the accompanying advertising revenue would be refused if they did not fit with the overall image of the magazine. Some magazines even made demands about the appearance of the advertisements that they did publish. The *Ladies' Home Journal*, for example, refused any advertisements that would detract in any way from their image as a clean-cut "family magazine" or even from the look of their journal (Reed 74). The link between the initial growth of mass-market magazines and the wider development of specialized brand name products is indicated by the fact that Coca-Cola appeared in the American marketplace in the same year that Cyril Curtis, owner of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, determined to make his magazine the best-selling magazine in the United States: 1888. In the years that followed Asa Candler, the owner of Coca-Cola, and Cyril Curtis employed advertising and new "techniques for shaping markets" to make their two brand names into two of the nation's most popular products (Strasser 128-29; Reed 62-63). Mass-market magazines were not very different from any other modern conveniences then being developed; they too were a result of late 19th century social, economic, and technological trends which had resulted in the creation of a commodity culture.

The main demographic shift of the period was the rapid development of an urban middle class that was single-handedly responsible for creating massive changes in patterns of consumption (Reed 93; Ohmann 48). Magazine publishers were able to exploit these new economic realities to build magazine readerships of unprecedented size (Reed 27-49). In America, the phenomenal growth and increased sophistication of print advertising also played a significant role. As David Reed somewhat wryly notes, the American publishers of mass-market magazines were occasionally so successful in attracting large numbers of readers through their advertising campaigns that their success occasionally outpaced technological developments. For example, he records that Cyrus Curtis's strategy of promoting the *Ladies' Home Journal* through extensive advertising proved so successful that in 1891 the *Journal* reached 600,000 subscribers—the maximum number of copies which their factory could produce (62). As a result, Curtis had to abandon attempts to increase the magazine's readership until he had built a printing plant capable of handling a larger print run (Reed 74).

In this climate of rapid technological and economic growth, marketers were presented with hitherto unknown options. As Susan Strasser indicates in *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*, "Marketers had a choice between, on the one hand, attempting to create standardised products that might be sold in all regions and to all classes and nationalities, and on the other, of exploiting differences in tastes—in modern jargon, positioning products for segmented markets" (Strasser 140-42). In brief, in this era of increased competition (when the word "consumer" first appeared in the English lexicon [Ohmann 48]), the promotion and sale of products was tied to the

newly created need to position products in relation to others, to define a market niche. For example, prior to 1900 coffee was generally sold in bulk from an unlabelled drum; by 1913 coffee was being sold in labelled containers which were affiliated with a particular firm (Strasser 139). Moreover, marketing strategies had developed to include levels of distinction based on class and desired market share. The J. Walter Thompson advertising agency encouraged the coffee firm Arbuckle Brothers to exploit class distinctions by marketing coffee packaged as “Yuban” to the middle class (Strasser 139). In contrast, they were to try to sell their coffee to the working class as “Ariosa,” which would be advertised in “national farm papers, sectional weeklies, religious papers, and daily newspapers in medium-sized cities” (Strasser 139). By thus defining two different markets they could hope to attract and monopolise two different sets of consumers. This knowledge and exploitation of class difference was an important consideration in how coffee was marketed and also in how literature was sold.

As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu outlines in *Distinction*, taste is a social construction: “in identifying what is worthy of being seen and the right way to see it, [people] are aided by their whole social group (which guides and reminds them with its ‘Have you seen. . .?’ and ‘You must see . . .’) and by the whole corporation of critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worthy of the name” (28). In other words, whether your social group asks if you drink Yuban or read the *New Yorker* amounts to the same thing—a reaffirmation of who and what you are and what your tastes may be, a conferring

of distinction. This idea is necessary to an appreciation of how Mencken and Nathan's *Smart Set* was perceived, and of the effects of that perception.

Mencken, Nathan and God

In his recent novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996), John Updike neatly summarized the *Smart Set*'s persona. In the 1920s section of this novel, a poor widow in small town America exclaims: "He calls us all the booboisie," Aunt Esther said, now meaning Mencken. "Well, for all of me he's welcome to his smart set" (153). The reception history of the magazine indicates that Updike's fictional Aunt Esther accurately represents the reputation of Mencken and Nathan's magazine. Updike's portrayal of Aunt Esther's reaction to the magazine exemplifies how well the *Smart Set*'s reputation has remained intact over time. It is no longer well-known, but those who do know it, still get the reputation exactly right. Similarly, for example, in his recent novel about 1920s Hollywood, *The Englishman's Boy* (1996), Guy Vanderhaeghe records: "There's not much to amuse me here, a desk, a typewriter, a coffee can full of pencils, a three-shelf bookcase holding Dreiser, Crane, Norris, London, and back numbers of the *Smart Set*, which my friend Rachel Gold browbeat me into subscribing to because it is edited by her idol, H. L. Mencken" (7). The authors mentioned by Vanderhaeghe in this passage are all American writers of whom Mencken approved for their realistic portrayal of America. Rachel Gold, the character who encourages the narrator to buy the *Smart Set*, is a young,

intelligent, well-educated woman—precisely the sort of person who would have been reading the magazine.³⁸

That both the reputation and likely readership of the magazine have been accurately assessed by late 20th century writers indicates just how well-entrenched the persona of the magazine was at the time. Indeed, the most famous summary of the magazine's persona from the age itself reflects the well-defined nature of the *Smart Set's* literary reputation, its audience, and its influence. This summary came in the form of a satirical poem by the comedian Berton Braley, which was based on Eugene Field's children's poem "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod." It appeared in the *New York Sun* for 6 December 1920 and was titled "Three—Minus One":

There were three that sailed away one night
 Far from the madding throng;
 And two of the three were always right
 And every one else was wrong.
 But they took another along, these two,
 To bear them company,
 For he was the only One ever knew
 Why the other two should Be;
 And so they sailed away, these three—
 Mencken,

³⁸ For the specific period fear that young university women, or "flappers," were reading the magazine see Stuart Sherman's "Mr. Mencken, The Jeune Fille, and the New Spirit in Letters" in his *Americans* (1922).

Nathan

And God.

And the two they talked of the aims of Art,

Which they alone understood;

And they quite agreed from the very start

That nothing was any good

Except some novels that Dreiser wrote

And some plays from Germany.

When God objected—they rocked the boat

And dropped him into the sea,

“For you have no critical facultee,”

Said Mencken

And Nathan

To God.

The two came cheerfully sailing home

Over the surging tide.

And trode once more on their native loam

Wholly self-satisfied;

And the little group that calls them great

Welcomed them fawningly,

Though why the rest of us tolerate

This precious pair must be

Something nobody else can see

But Mencken,

Nathan

And God! (“Three”)

This poem, an extremely accurate representation of how the *Smart Set* was viewed by its contemporaries, also added to the ongoing influence of the magazine. It was reprinted in “Brick versus Brick” by Nathan in *Vanity Fair* in November 1927, and again in *Reader’s Digest* in December 1927. It has been parodied, as well, by subsequent humourists.

James Thurber titled a chapter in his history of the *New Yorker* magazine *The Years with Ross* (1957), “Mencken, and Nathan, and Ross”—with Ross, not coincidentally, in the position of “God.” At about the same time, Steve Allen wrote a version of this poem titled “Mencken, Lincoln and God” for his *Wry on the Rocks* (1956). The poem thus became a part of American popular culture, enough so that thirty-six years after its first appearance the original reference was still well-enough known for Thurber and Allen to parody it.

Each of the stanzas in this poem summarizes important features of the reception history of the *Smart Set* magazine. First, Mencken and Nathan appear here without any first names. As already indicated, by 1916 these men had attained name recognition for themselves and for their magazine. Even in the absence of a direct reference to the *Smart Set* in this poem, the names of these two men cause it to be present by implication: they

had become synonymous with the magazine. A literal example of this conflation occurred in the *New York Sun* in October 1919: “The essays collected under the title ‘Prejudices: First Series’ read quite as well as they did in the pages of the Mencken-Nathan magazine” (“Mencken Lays”). It is necessary to emphasize that Mencken and Nathan had become synonymous with the *Smart Set*. The association of their names with their magazine made them, in a real sense, name brands.

Within the general context of Mencken and Nathan’s joint fame, Berton Braley’s poem reveals just how well the distinguishing characteristics of their magazine were known and understood. Braley manages, in the space of a relatively short poem, to indicate the primary attributes associated with these men and their magazine: (1) humour and youthfulness, as indicated through the humour of the attack itself and the fact that this satire was based on a children’s poem; (2) an elite audience—“the little group that calls them great”; and (3) the constructive destructiveness of their critical opinion—“two of the three were always right.” Braley even managed to summarize two of the recurrent trends in Mencken and Nathan’s *Smart Set* columns: their dismay at the general state of American literature (“nothing was any good / Except some novels that Dreiser wrote”) and their praise for the innovations then taking place in European art (“some plays from Germany”). Of course, each of these facets of the *Smart Set* had to be understood by the *New York Sun*’s readers in order to render this a successful satire. That such a parody appeared in a major New York daily indicates that its editors believed their readers would understand and appreciate the subject matter. For all its obvious frivolity, the fact that this poem was printed in a popular venue for a popular audience indicates just how well-

known the magazine was in 1920, and the extent of its impact upon American popular culture. By 1923, when Mencken and Nathan left the *Smart Set* to found the *American Mercury*, they had created an identifiable persona for themselves and for the magazine they had published over the previous ten years; the *Smart Set*'s reputation was as unique and as readily identifiable as a package of Yuban coffee.

Ernest Hemingway

James Schroeter argues in his overview of American critical trends of the early 20th century that "the real significance of the Coming-of-Age criticism [in the teens] was extrinsic, and probably lies in the influence it had on the following decade. As late as 1926 Hemingway was still chafing at the bonds of Mencken's literary influence; whole passages of 'The Sun Also Rises' consist of jibes directed at Mencken" (4). Schroeter is correct in his assertion that the influence of this magazine extended beyond the end of Mencken and Nathan's association with it in 1923. Indeed, although the *American Mercury* was extremely influential in terms of its criticism of American society and politics, it was the former magazine that exerted the greater literary influence. It was Mencken's decision, when he and Nathan founded the *Mercury*, to turn away from literature to other matters, rendering it surprising that the latter magazine, not the former, possesses the greater critical reputation in terms of its contribution to American letters.

If one views the *Smart Set* as the more important magazine (at least in terms of literary matters), then it immediately makes more sense that many of the writers who would become famous in the American literary renaissance of the 1920s mentioned Mencken or Nathan in their fiction in the years *before* the founding of the *American*

Mercury. Mencken appeared in Ezra Pound's poem "L'Homme Moyen Sensual" in 1917, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* in 1920, and in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* the same year. Both Mencken and Nathan also appeared, indirectly, in Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), which was also dedicated to Nathan. Many of the writers who achieved important professional notice and support through the *Smart Set* would also continue, after the *Smart Set* years, to dedicate their work to these two men. Sinclair Lewis dedicated *Elmer Gantry* to Mencken in 1927 and Eugene O'Neill dedicated his only comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!*, to Nathan in 1933. The literary influence of these men certainly continued during their years with the *American Mercury*, but it is important to recognize that this influence had been established by them through the *Smart Set* well before 1924.

The literary reputation which these men attained and the influence which they exercised through the *Smart Set* are perhaps best summarized by reference to the opinion of the one who, among their contemporaries, liked them least—Ernest Hemingway. Less than three years after Mencken and Nathan left the *Smart Set* to found the *American Mercury*, Ernest Hemingway had already written in *The Sun Also Rises*: "I wondered where Cohn got that incapacity to enjoy Paris. Possibly from Mencken. Mencken hates Paris, I believe. So many young men get their likes and dislikes from Mencken" (42). There is no direct evidence in this passage to indicate that Hemingway had the *Smart Set* in mind, but there is no question that, like Berton Braley before him, he perfectly captured the *Smart Set's* audience and influence. Braley had a small group welcoming Mencken and Nathan fawningly, while Hemingway mocked Mencken's excessive influence upon "young men." It might be argued, of course, that Hemingway was referring only to

Mencken's literary criticism as it had appeared in book form, but a few factors indicate that Hemingway himself was likely familiar with Mencken's writings beyond his books and that he likely had a personal familiarity with the *Smart Set*.

Hemingway certainly knew of Mencken while the *Smart Set* was still being published. He wrote to Edmund Wilson (who was himself very familiar with the *Smart Set*) in November 1923 to complain about various matters, including contemporary critics. He was particularly annoyed with Mencken's criticism of Gertrude Stein: "I would like to write a review of an old book of hers [Stein] sometime. She is where Mencken and Mary Colum fall down and skin their noses" (*Selected Letters* 105). Stein, as I have indicated, was criticized by Mencken in his *Smart Set* review columns. Even if Hemingway had become aware of this criticism by other means, he was clearly already familiar with what Mencken had to say. More importantly, however, in 1924 Hemingway submitted some of his stories to Mencken and Nathan for consideration for publication in the *American Mercury*. It should be kept in mind that Hemingway's submission to the *Mercury*, coming so early in the history of that magazine, was not likely a response to its literary reputation but rather to the literary reputation that these men had already established in the *Smart Set* and to their own prominence as literary critics. In the fall of 1924 his stories were rejected (Hobson 246), which perhaps explains the extended critical treatment which Hemingway doled out to Mencken in *The Sun Also Rises*.

Even before *The Sun Also Rises* was published, Hemingway had expressed his feelings concerning Mencken's rejection of his work. In a letter to Harold Loeb, 5 January 1925, he wrote: "Don said it was all horsecock except they didn't want to lead off

with a book of short stories no matter whether good or not. So he has given the book to Mencken—that shit—to recommend to [Alfred] Knopf—well as Menken [sic] doesn't like my stuff and Nathan does that will probably end in horsecock too" (*Selected Letters* 143). It is significant that Hemingway here lists both Mencken and Nathan in tandem; like the other young authors of his generation, he likely recognized the importance of the men jointly and, presumably, of their joint publications. He was certainly still smarting from Mencken's rejection when, in April 1925, he wrote the following to John Dos Passos: "I always liked Up in Mich altho some did not. I suppose if it was called Way Out in Iowa, Mencken would have published it if the fucking would have been changed to a community corn roast" (*Selected Letters* 157).³⁹ In terms of identifying how familiar Hemingway was with Mencken's criticism and perhaps why he so desired Mencken and Nathan's support, it is important to consider the comments that he made in a letter to Fitzgerald in December 1925:

Buddenbrooks [by Thomas Mann] is a pretty damned good book. . . . When you think a book like that was published in 1902 and unknown in English until last year it makes you have even less respect, if you ever had any, for people getting stirred up over Main Street, Babbit and all the books your boy friend Menken [sic] has gotten excited about just because they happened to deal with the much abused Am. scene. (*Selected Letters* 179)

³⁹ Hemingway may have been mistaken in his assumption that Mencken disliked the crudeness of his story. In his memoir Mencken praises Hemingway's modernization of "Rabelais" (*My Life* 261); however, there is little doubt that the two men did not see eye to eye about very many things, and perhaps the crudeness of Hemingway's story was initially among them.

Although he is clearly angry about the support given to Fitzgerald by Mencken, and not to him, Hemingway's reference to the "much abused Am. scene" indicates a considerable awareness of one of Mencken's *Smart Set* themes—the state of American letters. By 1925, when Hemingway wrote this letter, Mencken was no longer proclaiming the need for a truly American literature, because in Sinclair Lewis he felt that he had already found it. But the mention of the "American scene" in Hemingway's letter indicates the fact that Hemingway was familiar with Mencken's criticism from before 1925.

Hemingway eventually used his anger at not being accepted for publication in the *American Mercury* as a subject in his fiction. The extended passage in the *Sun Also Rises* that is devoted to discussing Mencken reads as follows:

We had a drink. Harvey added my saucer to his own pile.

"Do you know Mencken, Harvey?"

"Yes. Why?"

"What's he like?"

"He's all right. He says some pretty funny things. Last time I had dinner with him we talked about Hoffenheimer. 'The trouble is,' he said, 'he's a garter snapper.'

That's not bad."

"That's not bad."

"He's through now," Harvey went on. "He's written about all the things he knows, and now he's on all the things he doesn't know."

"I guess he's all right," I said. "I just can't read him."

“Oh, nobody reads him now,” Harvey said, “except the people that used to read the Alexander Hamilton Institute.”

“Well,” I said. “That was a good thing, too.”

“Sure,” said Harvey. So we sat and thought deeply for a while. (43)

Considering how Hemingway clearly felt about Mencken at this time, the critical tone of this passage is not unexpected. What is unexpected is the fact that he notes that Mencken says “some pretty funny things” and that although no one reads him now, according to the speakers, they grant that they used to read him. Moreover, although they claim that Mencken no longer knows what he is talking about, they admit that he has written on all the things that he knows. Presumably, then, at some point Mencken’s critical opinion was worth reading; he used to know what he was talking about. Even Hemingway, who considered Mencken “that shit,” accords him his cultural influence.

James Schroeter claims that the sudden, and surprising, extent of the maturation of American fiction which took place in the 1920s can be understood, in part, by “comparing a Hemingway short story of 1925 with even the best fiction of 1915; by comparing Fitzgerald’s handling of point of view in *The Great Gatsby* with his handling of it in *This Side of Paradise*; or most simply by comparing Faulkner’s technique in *The Sound and the Fury* with that of any American novel written before that time” (22). He claims that American critics tried “not always successfully, to get ahead or simply abreast of that kind of thing” (22). As the extended passage on Mencken in *The Sun Also Rises* implies, one of the critics who did get somewhat abreast of these trends, at least for a time, was Mencken. The reception history of the *Smart Set* indicates that Mencken’s enormous

critical influence on the members of America's younger generation took place primarily through the *Smart Set*, rather than his books. Moreover, the reception history of this magazine reveals that his critical influence was matched by Nathan's and that for ten years the two of them played a crucial role in the publication and promotion of American modernism.

The influence of these two men was such that Fitzgerald wrote his literary agent Harold Ober in 1920 to request that he continue to send Mencken and Nathan stories, even though they paid much less than Fitzgerald was earning from the larger periodicals. Fitzgerald explained: "I want to keep inright [sic] with Menken [sic] + Nathan as they're the most powerful critic[s] in the country" (*As Ever* 11). In Fitzgerald's case, as with many of the young writers published in the *Smart Set*, and even some of the established ones, there was an understanding that staying "inright" with Mencken and Nathan could be important to one's career. The influence of the review columns written by these men is similarly indicated by the fact that even such established writers as Willa Cather were concerned about earning their good graces. As Cather's biographer James Woodress notes, even at the height of her critical and popular success in the early 1920s, Cather considered Mencken's review column in the *Smart Set* important enough that six months before the publication of *One of Ours* in 1922 she "tried hard to prepare the way for Mencken to notice it favorably. In a long letter . . . she wrote Mencken explaining in detail what she was trying to do and outlining to him her credentials for doing it" (333).

Mencken and Nathan's influence as critics was well-enough known by 1918 that it became the subject of an editorial cartoon that year in the *Chicago News* ("Here They

Are”; see fig 7). This drawing shows Mencken and Nathan from the back—a strong indication of how well their profiles were known (although it is not clear why Mencken is wearing glasses). They are hiding behind a wall waiting to ambush unsuspecting authors and playwrights; the caption reads: “Here they Are. George Jean Nathan and Henry Louis Mencken. The editors of the *Smart Set* magazine waiting for a victim. Henry L. is on the lookout for an author, while George J. has his eye peeled for some well established actor person.” Each holds a weapon, a relatively harmless weapon in Nathan’s case (a balloon on a stick) but more substantial for Mencken (a big piece of wood or a cricket bat, perhaps?). The childishness of their hiding and even of their choice of weapons suggests their regular association with youth, many articles of the period referring to them as “boys” even into their late thirties. This editorial cartoon captures the sprightliness of Mencken and Nathan’s editorials—through which they managed to attract readers to their opinions—and their reputation as critics who wielded a big stick, reason enough for writers to wish to impress them.

A Magazine of Cleverness

The literary and critical influence of the *Smart Set*, so well-recognized at the time, has almost completely disappeared from American literary histories. Contemporary critics and biographers of authors from the period tend to mention the *Smart Set* in passing, if at all. Mencken and Nathan’s use of humour in their editorials, as well as the juvenile nature of much of the magazine’s fiction, may have contributed to its subsequent critical neglect. On the surface, it seems difficult to believe that a magazine which regularly published mother-in-law jokes and heavy-handed social satire introduced American and European

modernism to its readers, but it is precisely this sort of anomaly which renders the contemporary accounts of the magazine so essential to our current understanding of it. Regardless of how this magazine may appear to present-day critics, there is no question that its contemporaries viewed it as an essential component of the process whereby both European and American literary modernism were introduced to American writers and readers. An overview of these early 20th century opinions reveals that current critical neglect of this magazine has obscured Mencken and Nathan's significant contribution to the American renaissance of the 1920s, and has prevented a complete understanding of how literary modernism spread to the general public in America, especially in light of the limited circulation of the "little" magazines and the dismissal of such literary trends by the Academy.

If academics are to understand American literary developments of the early 20th century, it is necessary to restore Mencken, Nathan, and the *Smart Set* to their central position in American literary history. These men were clowns as well as social critics, and their magazine was popular in addition to being avant-garde. These apparent paradoxes render it a difficult magazine to include within the generally accepted history of literary modernism as a movement that developed in conjunction with high-brow "little magazines." Whatever difficulties the history of this magazine may present to current perceptions of the history of modernism, it is necessary to acknowledge that the readers, writers, and critics of the early 20th century placed the *Smart Set* at the forefront of periodicals responsible for the popularization of American literary modernism.

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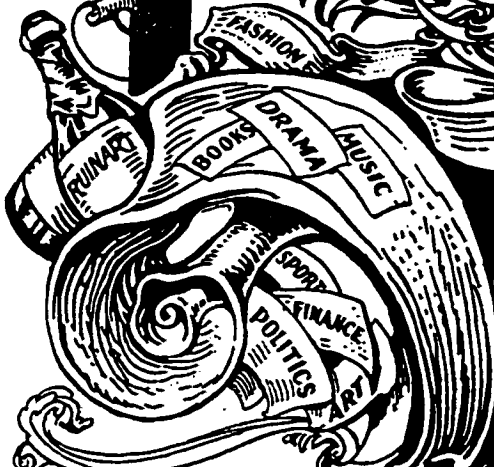
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By Joseph Conrad

Author of "Chance," "A Set of Six," "Youth," etc.

THIS is the story of Axel Heyst and the girl from a traveling Ladies' Orchestra with whom Heyst runs away and lives on the almost desert island of Samburan in the Southern Pacific, amid the ruined buildings of the once flourishing Tropical Belt Coal Company.

Thus stated, this new romance of Mr. Conrad's sounds prosaic enough, but in reality nothing about Heyst is prosaic. A man of title in his own country, a dreamer, Heyst wakes up to a new quality in the world of things when a girl comes into his vision. From that day in Schomberg's hotel when he answers the look of mute appeal in Lena's eyes, a new current of life sweeps Heyst along.

And then begins that strange life of Heyst and Lena amid the ruined splendors of the Tropical Belt Coal Company's headquarters and the still stranger visit to Samburan of that well-mated pair of scoundrels, Mr. Jones and Ricardo.

"Victory" is specially notable for the directness of the narrative. In this respect it is the complete antithesis of "Chance." And yet it has much in common with "Chance," especially that quality of evoking from the reader a compassionate affection for the two souls that ever strive for, and ever miss, the fullness of understanding. If Flora de Barral of "Chance," is to be written down first among Conrad's women, Lena, of "Victory," shall be her sister. Seated pale, distracted, at bay before Ricardo, every sense battling beneath a supernatural calm for Heyst's life, she will remain a radiant memory, inexpressibly tender and appealing.

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