

THE LOCAL-COLOR ARTISTRY  
OF GEORGE MILBURN

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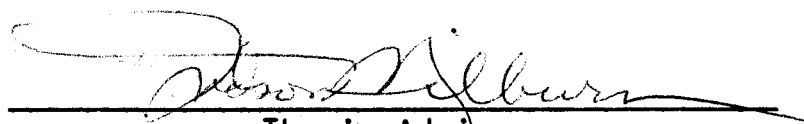
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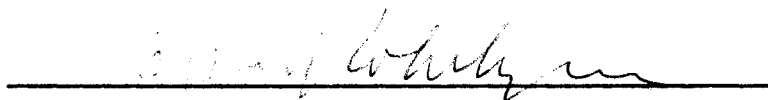
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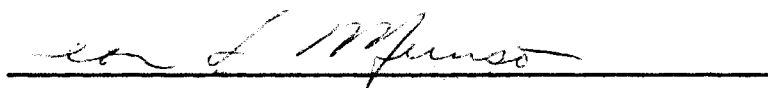
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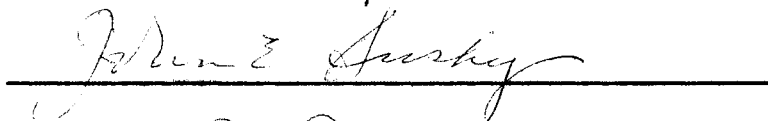
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## PREFACE

This dissertation is concerned with the local-color artistry of George Milburn. Milburn's stories were categorized into groupings: internal problems, external problems, manipulation of material, and humor. In addition, his two novels were discussed. These groupings and the novels were analyzed according to the characteristics of the New Regionalists: setting, provincial character types, humor, and psychological insight. Milburn's fiction is a blend of these characteristics as he recorded the life of a small Oklahoma town during the first part of the twentieth century.

I should like to take this means to express my appreciation to the people who were instrumental in the completion of my work at Oklahoma State University. I am indebted to Dr. Gene Collier, Chairman of the Department of English, East Central State College, who arranged my schedule in order that I might have time to work on my dissertation. I am deeply grateful for the advice and the assistance given to me by two members of the English Department at East Central State College, Mrs. Lucile Morse and Mrs. Mary McGraw, who gave me more of their advice and time than I deserved. I should also like to express my appreciation

to the members of my committee--Dr. Clinton C. Keeler, Dr. Mary Rohrberger, Dr. Leon Munson, and Dr. John Susky--for their advice and guidance. To the chairman of the committee, Dr. D. Judson Milburn, I am most deeply indebted, for without his encouragement when things seemed the most hopeless I might not have ever completed my work at Oklahoma State University. To my wife, Laura, I owe the most, for she gave unceasingly of herself in time, money, and effort beyond that which could be expected of any wife.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In their book entitled American Local-Color Stories, Harry Warfel and G. Harrison Orians point out that the first successful record of cultural diversity in the United States was started in the nineteenth century. These writers who came to be known as local-color writers wrote short fiction which depended upon setting which used an artistic representation of a particular locality, provincial character types who were true to their locale, and dialect which was recorded with some phonetic accuracy.<sup>1</sup> This implies that local color was a part of the realistic movement. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, realism had become dominant. William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James were leaders of the realistic movement. Regarding local color and realism, Warfel and Orians said:

Local color is one type of realism, if realism be defined as a graphic delineation of actual life. It is concerned with contemporary social truth. Yet it is not a realism that professes to present the whole truth and then proceeds to reveal only the nether side of life without its sense of humor, its homiletic tendencies, its forthrightness, and its essential neighborliness.<sup>2</sup>

What one might ordinarily notice, the local-color writers saw, stressed, and judged. They are important because they

represent life in such a fashion that the point where their fiction leaves off and life takes up seems to merge into one. Erich Auerbach in Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature searched "for representations of everyday life in which that life is treated seriously, in terms of its human and social problems or even of its tragic implications."<sup>3</sup> It is true that local color is a surface representation of realism which delights in oddity, idiosyncrasy, and other traits which can be treated as comic or as caricature. The strength of such portrayal depends upon the author's insight and artistry and his willingness to confront the unpleasant facts of life.

There are several uses of the local colorist. One of these is the employment of atmospheric setting. In many local-color stories, setting is related to both characterization and action. As such, it can be a powerful force in the narrative. Thus, environment can be almost as important to the local colorists as to the naturalists Emile Zola, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane. This does not mean, though, that the local colorist is writing in this vein. A reading of the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett or Mary E. Wilkins Freeman indicates a use of setting in which it is not the powerful force that it is in naturalistic fiction.

A second practice followed by the local-color artist is that he does not forget that his primary purpose is telling a good story. In this respect, the local-color writer

often used what Dr. Mary Rohrberger calls the simple narrative. She says

that the simple narratives form a totality, that they are characterized by a unity of effect, that they partake of the qualities of brevity, closeness of texture, and freedom from excrescence.<sup>4</sup>

They lack the symbolic structure that characterizes some short fiction.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Rohrberger cites as examples the works of Maupassant, Maugham, and Poe, although not all of the works of these men would fall into the classification of simple narrative. Warfel and Orians believe that there is an affinity between local-color fiction and the sketch.<sup>6</sup> In this connection, the influence of Bret Harte is paramount, as "he focused attention upon the short story as a medium for regional portraiture and enjoyed the distinction of being widely imitated in this country and abroad."<sup>7</sup>

A third characteristic of the local colorist is the use of humorous literature. This is literature of the tall-tale variety, and it is not limited to any geographical setting. The tales of Mark Twain such as "Baker's Blue Jay Yarn" or "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Seba Smith's down east humor, and the tales of Pecos Bill all illustrate this facet of local color. One must note, however, that these tales presented enough of the traits of the areas in which they were set to make them pictures of the peculiarities of that region.

In the later years of regionalism, a New Regionalism grew which "is adding to the descriptive and dialect

accuracy of the early regionalists deeper psychological insights, fuller portraiture, and high seriousness."<sup>8</sup> It is to this group that George Milburn belongs. He wrote of the people of his region, Oklahoma, and followed in the vein of the local colorist in his use of setting, character portrayal, and in the use of dialect. He attempted to present people from the inside by being concerned with the minds of the characters. In this way Milburn's fiction has certain affinities with that of Sherwood Anderson, Ring Lardner, and Sinclair Lewis, although they are not local-color writers. At the time Milburn's books were published, H. L. Mencken had included several of George Milburn's stories of Oklahoma in The American Mercury. Mencken recognized the use of irony and satire in Milburn's fiction.

In his fiction, Milburn did make an extensive use of irony, a trait of the simple narrative. For example, in "Sugar Be Sweet" the sweetness of sugar is an ironical contrast to the bitterness of a mother who has lost her daughter. The feigned love of a girl is juxtaposed to her greed for money in "The Fight at Hendryx's." The hate of a southern white woman for Negroes in "White Meat" becomes ironic when the reader learns that the woman had unknowingly married a man who was part Negro. As Milburn revealed the narrow, bitter lives of the characters, he revealed significant attitudes of the people and the town they inhabited.

In this dissertation, I propose to examine the fiction of George Milburn. I intend to use the characteristics of the local-color writer as a means of examination, especially those of the New Regionalist. Where feasible, comparisons to other local-color artists will be made. The results of the study will be categorized into groupings: internal problems, external problems, manipulation of material, humor, and novels. While the local colorist is frequently a minor figure, he is important as an artist whose writings may depict forever the life and times of an important era in American history. George Milburn is important as one who recorded the life of a small Oklahoma town during the first part of the twentieth century.

#### Review of the Literature

I have examined PMLA: Annual Bibliography, International Index, Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, and the Book Review Digest. I have found no critical study of George Milburn; I did examine the reviews made at the time his books were published. At the time Oklahoma Town was published, the reviews were mixed. The most unfavorable review was that in The Bookman of July, 1931. The reviewer said that Oklahoma Town was composed of a set of curios and expounded jokes. These the review felt to be the best pieces, for they imposed a certain form on the incident. The reviewer also felt that the stories were self-conscious and affected with tedious characters.<sup>9</sup>

The New York Times Book Review of the same year presented a more favorable picture. The reviewer said that Milburn was able to combine the prejudices of the South and the prejudices of the Midwest. While the reviewer felt that the stories were sketches

that did not measure up to Anderson's Winesburg, Mr. Milburn understands, and very possibly forgives, both human frailty and deceit, but excludes tenderness from his stories. Their power, as sketches, mounts thereby; for in the sketch, as in etching, it is the deep-bitten single line that counts. But they do not become living literature of the sort that is built up from within, the sort that depends on a literary chiaroscuro compounded of good writing. "Oklahoma Town" is thus not quite a "Winesburg."<sup>10</sup>

The reviews of The Nation of March 11, 1931, and The New Republic of May 13, 1931, praised Milburn's work. The reviewer in The Nation said that Oklahoma Town had

extraordinarily vivid sketches, running only a few pages each, wherein the character or simple situation is treated with an economy and realism of touch which we cannot sufficiently praise.<sup>11</sup>

The reviewer compared Milburn to Anderson and to Chekhov, and he hailed Milburn "as something very like a new genius."<sup>12</sup> The review in The New Republic emphasized another aspect of Milburn. He said that Milburn was a gifted story teller with racy and picturesque colloquialisms, "and in a number of stories whose plots are vaguely reminiscent of certain immemorial smutty jokes, he achieves a real Chaucerian gusto."<sup>13</sup> The reviewer found Oklahoma Town to be readable, exhuberant, and entertaining.<sup>14</sup> Stanley Vestal found Milburn's work to be sounder than that of

Edgar Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology. Vestal, like others, found Milburn to be an artist who treated objectively the folklore of a small town in the Middle West. Oklahoma Town is not monotonous and was obviously written with enjoyment.<sup>15</sup>

Harvey Ferguson in The New York Herald Tribune Books of March 1, 1931, commented upon Milburn's portrayal of small towns that are "relics of pioneer America with all of its brutality and bigotry and none of its expansive energy and good humor."<sup>16</sup> According to Ferguson, Milburn's writings evidenced detachment, restraint, objectivity, and hate in the presentation. Milburn presented the grotesque and obsessive to the reader, although none of the stories is a study in psychopathology.<sup>17</sup>

With the publication of No More Trumpets in 1933, George Milburn was praised as a writer of consequence. The New York Times Book Review of September 24, 1933, found much to praise in Milburn's latest book. The review compared Milburn to Ring Lardner in the characters' revealing themselves as they speak and in eschewing commentary. Both writers excelled in the ability to catch the rhythm of middle-class speech. The review did say that Milburn pilloried the Rotary mind and that the book suffered from a "lack of richness and variety."<sup>18</sup>

Reviewing No More Trumpets in the Saturday Review of Literature, William Rosby praised Milburn highly. Rosby, too, found Milburn observant and capable of reproducing

dialect. Rosby said that Milburn did not follow a form, but he dealt in the irony of the lives of ordinary people. Rosby felt that of the eighteen stories in No More Trumpets, about a dozen were "quite superior to the general run."<sup>19</sup> Robert Liddell Lowe also found a great deal worthy of praise in Milburn's short stories. According to him,

With the exception of Katherine Ann Porter, the Southwest had supplied no one in fiction of Mr. Milburn's stature. Indeed, his place among young American short story writers is enviable.<sup>20</sup>

Lowe said that No More Trumpets was not as bitter as Oklahoma Town and possessed characters with which one could sympathize. He felt Milburn was able to picture authentically the Southwestern scene in his selection of detail and representation of the language of the Southwest. Lowe also thought that Milburn was unique in his ability to write effectively about adolescents and that these stories were among the best in No More Trumpets. At times Milburn's stories became caricatures and some endings were irrelevant as Milburn too often insisted on a turn in the conclusion to give the stories an acidity they actually already had; this practice tended to mar Milburn's direct narration. Lowe was also critical of Milburn's practice of attacking Rotarians and Kiwanians. He did find Milburn to have "a masculine, unobtrusive style, as much interested in his subject matter as in his expression."<sup>21</sup> Robert Cantwell in The New Republic of October 18, 1933, said that in No More Trumpets Milburn wrote with "a surgical precision, in

the way an observer in an enemy country might record the customs of the people."<sup>22</sup> Cantwell commented that, since the publication of Oklahoma Town, Milburn showed sharpened observation, sensitivity to common speech, a wide range of subjects, and more awareness as a social critic.<sup>23</sup>

In 1936 George Milburn published his first novel, Catalogue, a work which seemed to show the influence of John Dos Passos in his use of quotations from the Montgomery Ward and Sears-Roebuck Catalogues. In his review of Catalogue, Carl Van Doren said that "For a novelist at this date to be discovering the mail order catalogues for a theme is about what it would be if a map maker now suddenly discovered the Mississippi."<sup>24</sup> Unlike Van Doren's review, most of the reviews written at the time Catalogue was published were uncertain about the use of the quotations. Writing in the Review of Reviews, Herschel Brickell called Catalogue more of a sketch than a novel and said that George Milburn knew America's meanness and depicted it with humor and realism.<sup>25</sup>

Samuel Sillen in The Nation said that Catalogue was a collection of short stories like Winesburg, Ohio in that a master symbol united the separate themes of the stories. Sillen commented that Milburn's novel was more awkward than his short stories and the publication of Catalogue marked no real stride in Milburn's writing ability.<sup>26</sup> Howard Mumford Jones was also adversely critical of Catalogue in that he felt that the novelty of the scheme forced Milburn

to write a series of sketches rather than a penetrating novel. He did say, however, that "The author has caught with remarkable fidelity the speech of the region, through which he dramatizes both the sordor and the humor of regional life."<sup>27</sup> Hamilton Basso thought that Catalogue was full of material that would have made admirable short stories. He felt that Milburn had the ability to produce a much better book.<sup>28</sup>

Fred T. Marsh in The New York Times Book Review of September 20, 1936, said that Catalogue was a hard, raucous, and heartless book of the Mencken school of literature. He found the portrayal of the young boys especially effective, as were other episodes in which Milburn got inside his characters but managed to retain his ironic tone. Marsh felt that the book was a novel which used the excerpts from the two mail order catalogues as a scheme to unite the various subplots into what might be called its theme song.<sup>29</sup> In the Yale Review Helen McAfee found much of value in Catalogue. She said that the village characteristics were firmly drawn and that there was vigor in the individual portraits and vigor especially in the dialogue. While pointing out that the mail order catalogues became actors in the community, they did limit the scope of the story and hamper its freedom.<sup>30</sup>

George Milburn's last novel, Flannigan's Folly, was written in 1947. The reviewers did not see much of value in this book, although B. V. Winebaum in the New York Times

found the novel to have a nostalgia for farm life that city readers expect. This is relieved by old-fashioned humor.<sup>31</sup>

A reviewer in The New Yorker said that there was little to hold a reader's attention in this "bland trifle; in fact, it may make you wonder what became of the originality and the sharp bite that distinguished Mr. Milburn's earlier fiction."<sup>32</sup> Thomas Sugrue said that, while there is a physical pleasure to read the prose of George Milburn, Flannigan's Folly is an inconsequential story. It has neither a point nor a theme. Its plot is that of the "routine slick short story, nothing more."<sup>33</sup>

Thus, it is apparent that the reviews written at the time George Milburn's books were published were somewhat mixed. Many reviewers found a great deal to praise in Milburn's work, his handling of dialect, and his ability to portray characters through the use of irony; but they found him wanting in richness and variety. Often it is said that his stories were really sketches or jokes rather than short stories.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Harry R. Warfel and G. Harrison Orians, "Introduction," American Local-Color Stories (New York, 1941), p. x.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Rohrberger, Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story: A Study in Genre (The Hague, 1966), p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. The problem of definition is beyond the scope of this study. The short fiction in this paper does basically follow the characteristics given in Mary Rohrberger, Samuel F. Woods, Jr., and Bernard F. Dukore, An Introduction to Literature (New York, 1968), p. 20. "The short story is commonly defined as a piece of short prose fiction characterized by unity of effect, freedom from irrelevance and a closely wrought texture; and it deals with a single character in a single situation at a single moment in time."

<sup>6</sup> Warfel and Orians, p. xii.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. xx.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii.

<sup>9</sup> "Notes on New Books," The Bookman, LXXIII (July, 1931), iv-v.

<sup>10</sup> "'Oklahoma Town' and Other Recent Works of Fiction," New York Times Book Review (February 9, 1931), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>"Notes on Fiction," The Nation, CXXXII (March 11, 1931), 278.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>"Book Notes," The New Republic, LXVI (May 13, 1931), 363.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Stanley Vestal, "Life in a Small Town," Saturday Review of Literature, VII (March 7, 1931), 643.

<sup>16</sup>Harvey Ferguson, "Small Town Sketches," New York Herald Tribune Books, XI (March 1, 1931), 6.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>"Mr. Milburn's Stories," The New York Times Book Review (September 24, 1933), pp. 8-9.

<sup>19</sup>William Rosby, "Out of Oklahoma," Saturday Review of Literature, X (September 30, 1933), 148.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Liddell Lowe, "Milburn's Short Stories," The Nation, CXXXVII (October 4, 1933), 386.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Cantwell, "Can You Hear Their Voices?" The New Republic, LXXVI (October 18, 1933), 285.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Carl Van Doren, "With Mail Order Catalogues as Theme Song [.] Milburn, Aided by 'Sears-Sawbuck' and 'Monkey-Ward,' Makes His Oklahoma Town Live," New York Herald Tribune Books (September 13, 1936), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup>Herschel Brickell, "Literary Landscape," Review of Reviews, XCIV (October, 1936), 15.

<sup>26</sup>Samuel Sillen, "Oklahoma Catalogue," The Nation, CXLIII (October 17, 1936), 454-455.

<sup>27</sup> Howard Mumford Jones, "Mail Order Town," Saturday Review of Literature, XIV (September 12, 1936), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Hamilton Basso, "A Story-Teller's Novel," The New Republic, LXXXVIII (October 7, 1936), 259-260.

<sup>29</sup> Fred T. Marsh, "Mr. Milburn's Tempest in a Catalogue," The New York Times Book Review (September 20, 1936), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Helen McAfee, "The Library of the Quarter, Outstanding Novels," Yale Review, XXVI (Autumn, 1936), x.

<sup>31</sup> B. V. Winebaum, "Life in Buried Hatchet, Okla.," The New York Times Book Review (May 4, 1947), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> "Briefly Noted Fiction," The New Yorker, XXIII (May 3, 1947), 102.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Sugrue, "A Dull and Witless Man," New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review (April 27, 1947), p. 16.

## CHAPTER II

### INTERNAL PROBLEMS

In The Rite of Becoming: Stories and Studies of Adolescence, Arthur Waldhorn and Hilda K. Waldhorn point out that the emerging hero of contemporary literature and culture is the adolescent, because he represents to many writers the conflict and the confusion of the twentieth century. They point out that adolescence is a dynamic process,<sup>1</sup> and in the stories selected for their book

an apprentice youth faces some physical, intellectual, or emotional conflict that complicates his becoming an adult. What distinguishes an adolescent's experience from an adult's is not the range of problems (they are nearly identical) but their intensity. Everything is new. . . . Whether it is the transport of first love discovered or the despair of first love lost, or the early stirrings of rebellion against authority, or the newly awakened consciousness of death, the experience is, for an adolescent, fresh and sudden, and its impact upon his sensibility is overpowering.<sup>2</sup>

These periods of crisis involve personal problems which are intense and are an essential part of the initiation process.

The stories in this chapter are about initiation, isolation, and love. These are problems which are common not only to most adolescents but also to many adults. With a few exceptions, the central figure in the stories of this

chapter is an adolescent. These three categories naturally fall into one group, since they do involve problems common to all mankind. These stories were also chosen because, as Henry James recognized, the American story is the initiation story.<sup>3</sup>

### Initiation

The initiatory theme has been widely used in literature. One needs only to look at O. Henry's The Gentle Grafter or Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV to see contrasting uses of the initiation theme. In American letters, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sherwood Anderson are only two of the many short fiction writers who are representative of those who write initiation stories. Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is a good example of an initiation story. According to Mary Rohrberger, "Hawthorne's purpose is to present the psychological conflict involved in the maturation of a youth."<sup>4</sup> The protagonist of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" has a series of experiences which present the conflicts involving the protagonist's need to attain independence and yet to retain a degree of dependency.<sup>5</sup> Sherwood Anderson has also written initiation stories such as "I'm a Fool," "The Egg," and "I Want to Know Why." According to David C. Anderson, "I Want to Know Why" "is often considered a classic example of the theme of an adolescent's initiation."<sup>6</sup> Male in Types of Short Fiction points out that

In stories of this kind [initiation] the hero measures his environment--natural, social or both. Relatively young and an outsider, he seeks to identify himself by entering society or its equivalent; he tests his courage, honor, and endurance against his environment.<sup>7</sup>

"A Position on the Staff" is a story of George Milburn's which fits the initiation pattern. In Part I, the protagonist of the story, Paul Stuart, a young man recently graduated from high school, wishes to become a journalist. Like many heroes of an initiation story, he is a young man who leaves rustic surroundings to travel to an exotic world. In the opening of the story, Milburn describes the farm from which Paul comes.

He opened the ornamental wire gate at the foot of the lawn, and stood hesitating by the small blackboard on the gatepost. The blackboard was trimly stenciled, "Farm Home of Jas. A. Stuart," and chalked "Fresh Country Butter & Eggs For Sale Here." Ford trucks, stacked high with egg crates and squirming coops, wheezed past on the concrete slab.<sup>8</sup>

It is apparent to the reader that Paul Stuart is a young man from the provinces who is going out into the world to seek his fortune. The farm from which Paul comes seems to be no source of discontent. Unlike the chicken farm in Sherwood Anderson's "The Egg," the surroundings are neat and trim. They are not grotesque.

In juxtaposition to this passage, Milburn describes the exotic world to which Paul is going.

He turned his gaze toward the city's skyline. It jutted up from the dun prairie; as colorful and preposterous as a pile of toy blocks. The first rays of an unseen sun were washing in

the golden light the limestone spires of The Chateau Building, the chromium mast of the Drovers and Drilling Trust Company, and the colorful tile of Petroleum Tower. Paul regarded the distant city with solemn wonder. . . . "The Magic city!" he murmured, "the magic city!" (NMT, p. 363).

In the description of "the magic city," Milburn describes only its surface features. The real heart of the city is not described; consequently, Paul considers the city to be a place of enchantment and magic. He is to discover the sordidness and unpleasantness that lie underneath the facade he sees from a distance. Milburn has very carefully allowed the reader and Paul to see only the most desirable features. However, the reader and Paul are to learn the reality that is beyond these appearances. The familiar reality and appearance idea is used in the context of the story. In these two passages, Milburn has juxtaposed the Oklahoma farm and the city to provide direct contrast. To Paul Stuart, the city with its golden towers and colorful buildings represents the promised land; it is almost a New Jerusalem. The city is an irresistible attraction to any young man when seen alongside the drab prairie. It is for Paul to find the real truth.

Part II of "A Position on the Staff" describes Paul's trip to the office of the Star, the newspaper which has hired him. The naivete of the boy is established by Milburn's allowing the reader to see the boy's thoughts as he travels on the street car. Paul smokes a cigarette, not because he enjoys the taste of it but because he feels that

smoking cigarettes is one of the marks of newspaper men. He also assumes a strong dislike for the Enterprise, the rival newspaper of the Star, just because it is the rival newspaper. Paul also quite innocently dreams of scooping a race riot his first day on the staff and of being given a raise the second day. This idea occurs to Paul because his idol, Steve Fowler, had scooped a race riot while Paul was in high school. This "first big scoop would prove to Mr. Lytle, the managing editor, that he had made no mistake in giving Paul Stuart a position on the staff" (NMT, p. 266). It seems apparent that in Part II two essential traits of the initiatory story are exhibited: Paul takes a journey to the exotic city he has envisioned; also, his sensitivity and youthfulness are established.

In Part III of the story, Paul learns about the operation of the Star. Paul begins to see the real workings of a city newspaper. He learns that plagiarizing from the Enterprise is a common practice, for his first assignment was to write the column, "Starpoints," which utilizes material directly lifted from the Enterprise. He also sees the various members of the staff in a new light, especially Steve Fowler. Paul has accidentally used Fowler's typewriter, and Fowler asks Paul to move. As Paul is preparing to move, Lytle emerges from his office to discuss a story Fowler is writing. Fowler's latest expose is apparently of some concern to Lytle, and the two men argue about the accuracy of the story. This argument introduces the

conflict which is to burst into full force during the last part of "A Position on the Staff." Paul is sent out to interview people for the newspaper in Parts IV and V. In many initiation stories, the journey of the chief character allows the author to acquaint the reader with other characters. Each of the three interviews acquaints Paul with an aspect of life he has not seen before. The first interview is with a butcher who is having marital problems. Paul interviews the butcher, who claims that he is being blackmailed. The wife of the butcher pleads with Paul to help correct the story as printed in the Enterprise. After interviewing the madam to whom the butcher, August Schmidt, has made false statements, Paul thinks "of how splendidly he was going to champion the cause of August Schmidt" (NMT, p. 277). With this good feeling still with him, Paul interviews a tart who has attempted suicide. It is plain that Paul has never seen the likes of her before, because she ends up interviewing Paul, and "As he left the hospital, Paul felt that he was retreating again. He strove to regain his composure" (NMT, p. 279). The girl has convinced Paul that she has attempted suicide for love; the head nurse is wiser in her assessment of the real reason when she says the reason is to gain publicity. The interview is still on Paul's mind when he goes to his third interview, a routine assignment, which is about the construction of a new hotel. The publicity for the construction is to instill civic pride and to gain some advertising accounts for the Star.

Returning to the office, Paul attempts to write the three stories. He writes the story about the suicide first, since he had his lead in mind when he left the hospital. The story about the hotel is also easily done, as the builder has given Paul a press release containing the necessary information to write the story. The last story, however, gives Paul some trouble. The Star is known as a newspaper with a heart, and Paul intends to serve the cause of August Schmidt. Lytle sees that Paul is having trouble with the story and writes it for him. What little justice Paul has dreamed of is lost in Lytle's treatment of August Schmidt's involvement with a madam.

In Part VII of the narrative, Paul goes to the court house where he receives more education. He learns how justice is administered, and once again the enmity between Fowler and Lytle is mentioned. Steve Fowler is assigned to the court house, and he discusses with Paul the reason for the tension between the two men. Milburn, thus, keeps in the reader's mind an important detail in the story, for in Part IX the feud between the two men reaches its height. Paul learns that his idol may have been responsible for the race riot. This bit of information Paul receives with some shock, as it is hard to realize that Fowler has clay feet. In the violent argument between Lytle and Fowler, the last vestiges of glamour surrounding the city and being on the staff of the Star are destroyed.

As Part X reaches its conclusion, the reader fully realizes that Paul is not the same young man that he was that morning when he stood beside the sign on his father's farm. In the evening as Paul sits at his typewriter, trying to write his last story,

the insidious memory of the brief day dream about making a scoop and getting a raise, the one that he had had on the street car early in the day, returned to him. His lip curled up. "God," he breathed, 'God, what a sap I was at that age' (NMT, p. 290).

The initiation is complete. The next day Paul will no longer be the young man from the provinces; he will no longer dream about the New Jerusalem. He will be aware of the reality that lies behind glittering appearances.

The final selection in Oklahoma Town is a sketch entitled "Hail and Farewell." Like "A Position on the Staff," the subject of this sketch is a young boy who leaves his home town to seek a place in the world of journalism. In "Hail and Farewell," the main character is a senior in high school. David has had some news stories printed in the Tulsa Globe-Telegram. A hail storm strikes the small town where David lives, and the story that David sends to the newspaper exaggerates the facts about the storm. The editor calls David, ascertains the truth, and rewrites the story; nevertheless, the story is printed under David's by-line. "One Monday, a week after he had graduated from high school, David got a telegram from the

Globe-Telegram. It said that they had an opening for him at \$20 a week."<sup>9</sup> David hurriedly packs and leaves town. As he rides on the train,

A paean welled up in David's heart.

"Good-bye, home town!" his heart chanted to the increasing tempo of the rail click. "I am going out to the cities to be a newspaper man. Good-bye, all you dull, uninteresting people! . . . the world is mine to do what I please with! Good-bye, little town, good-bye!"

Those were the days before David knew drudgery and defeat. Those were happy days. He was seventeen (OT, p. 198).

As is readily apparent, the story is much like the beginning of an initiation story. The central character is young and sensitive; he leaves rustic surroundings to seek his fortune in the city. Here he will learn of "drudgery and defeat." It is apparent that David is an adolescent with some degree of intelligence and ambition. This story is disappointing, because it is concluded with three short paragraphs which indicate only that David learned about life. Until these last paragraphs, Milburn had very carefully laid the background for a good story, but he chose to leave the reader with a sense of being cheated.

There are, however, good features to "Hail and Farewell." One of these is the use of humor which depends on exaggeration. This is in keeping with the tradition of the local colorist. The hailstones that fell in the town were large, "Some of them were as big as baseballs" (OT, p. 195). David's story described them as being large as

water buckets. The editor trimmed the size of the hailstones to baseballs, and then to the size of billiard balls. Milburn treats humorously the exaggeration natural for an impressionable adolescent, and he juxtaposes the boy's perception to the more realistic view of the editor. Another exaggeration is found in regard to the death caused by the storm. In this case, Milburn plays upon racial prejudice, or perhaps he indicates the local feeling about Negroes in the 1920's.

A team of mules hitched back of Hunter's Dry Goods Store had got tangled in their traces. One of them had a broken leg and the other one had got hit in the head with a hailstone and was dead.

David heard a rumor that a nigger named Scot had got hit in the head and killed by a hailstone (OT, p. 195).

While this is not a pleasant feature of the story, many people would find the juxtaposition of the death of the mule and the rumor of the death of the Negro amusing and ironic. To speak of them in one breath and in the same matter-of-fact way says a great deal. It is clear that this effect of the storm appeals to regional racial prejudice. But of all the storm's effects, perhaps the most amusing is the response of a little boy: "Oh, dear God, I won't do you-know-what any more, if you'll only let me get home to my mama!" (OT, p. 196). The terror of the hail storm has affected the little boy, and to the observer the plaint of the boy is amusing and risque.

The little boy's response to the storm reminds one that in "Hail and Farewell" environment is important. It is the storm which precipitates the action of the sketch.

He began to notice the sky. It had changed from the lapis lazuli of an April morning to a dirty gray. The gray was rapidly being overcast by a pall of black. A sudden strong wind came up out of the west and began to bang the doors. . . . There came a little flurry of rain. Then the hail began. At first it was nothing more than a few small pats in the street. Then the hailstones began coming down in wagonloads (OT, p. 194).

This storm gave David his story on the front page of the Tulsa Globe-Telegram, and the story in turn was a result of the effect the storm had on the townspeople. The environment was not malevolent or capricious as in Crane's "The Open Boat," but was a storm of the type that frequently occurs in Oklahoma, as any native Oklahoman could tell from the description quoted above. Like many other local colorists, Milburn has used setting as an important element in "Hail and Farewell."

Milburn also chooses his words carefully in the sketch. When the story opens, David is talking to a local baker. With a single bit of conversation, Milburn allows the baker to characterize himself by placing David's observation about the cyclone in juxtaposition to that of the baker.

"Hank, we're going to have a cyclone," David said. He was a little amazed at his own calmness.

"I don't like the color of that there sky," said Hank, "but sac-clones don't start like this. I seen many a one out in western Oklahoma" (OT, p. 194).

Hank's use of "that there" and "many a one" are all dialectical expressions used by many Oklahomans. His pronunciation of cyclone, and the subject-verb disagreement in the sentence show that he is an ignorant man. It might also be said that they do add some humor to the story. David did pronounce cyclone correctly; and in his discussion with the editor of the Tulsa Globe-Telegram, David did not make any gross errors. In fact, the conversation indicates that the editor found David to be a fairly reliable individual.

Thus, in "Hail and Farewell" Milburn began what could have been an initiation story only to fail to develop it completely. He did follow the uses of the local colorist in using setting, humor, and diction as important devices in the story. What could have been a very weak story is good because of the uses of local color material. It was in "A Position on the Staff" that Milburn was to take up the thread he left hanging in "Hail and Farewell." Perhaps, too, Milburn might have had in mind Sherwood Anderson's final story "Departure" in which George Willard, also a reporter, recalls the people of Winesburg, Ohio, for David too says good-bye to the people of his town.

"Boy and Snake" is another story which has some elements of the initiation story, but there are also some other important aspects of the story. The narrative line of the story is relatively simple. One June day, Dennis leaves his home and walks to a neighboring farm. His plan is to make some money by carrying water to the crew of men

that are threshing wheat. The owner of the farm, Mr. Kuykendall, does not hire Dennis; but he send him to play with the Kuykendall children. Dennis plays "Banner" with the children, a group he easily outsmarts. When it is time for lunch, Dennis eats heartily. That afternoon while Dennis is watching the threshers, one of the men finds a rattlesnake and kills it. Dennis has always been fascinated by snakes, and he rushes to see it. After the excitement about the snake has ceased and the men have returned to work, Dennis remains near the snake. He then begins to torture the snake, and the snake attempts to strike Dennis. Pushing himself to his feet, Dennis retches. He finds a large rock, wrenches it loose from the soil, and pounds the snake's body until "the snake was a crimson-gray smear there in the golden stubble" (NMT, p. 156). The farm hands find Dennis weeping as a strong man weeps, and Mr. Kuykendall drives home a very sick boy.

The initiatory elements are quite apparent. First of all, a boy leaves familiar surroundings and travels to another world. While Dennis is not a young man from the provinces, he is sensitive and intelligent. He is able to out-wit four children; and when he is teased by one of the farm hands, he is easily embarrassed. Structurally, the story is like other initiation stories in that the story is episodic. And Dennis does learn something about life in his experiences that June afternoon.

But there are several other matters about the story which need consideration. The setting is important, as in most local-color stories. In the first part of "Boy and Snake," Milburn describes the harvest scene.

After a while he [Dennis] came up over the rise past Humphrey's place and he saw the black smoke from the threshing machine piling up against the washed blue sky. The men looked small in the fields below and they moved like mechanical toys pitching their bundles (NMT, p. 150).

One is reminded of the description of the harvest scene in Chapter XIV of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles. And the similarities are more than superficial. The goddess Demeter has long been associated with harvest. She is often depicted as holding grain in her hands or a snake, and she was generally regarded as an earth mother. Primitive people have often associated the snake with earth worship, and vestiges of this practice are still found today.<sup>10</sup> Dennis was interested in the men's working in the fields, and he had long been fascinated by snakes.

Dennis was very proud of the way he could handle snakes. He used to carry a little garter snake around in his pocket and frighten the girls at school with it. He always fell in love with the snake-charmer when a circus or carnival came to town. The other boys could have their trapeze performers and bareback riders, but Dennis always felt a little pang in his heart when he saw a snake-charmer, **even** if she did have a mouthful of gold teeth (NMT, pp. 153-154).

Dennis observes the snake after it has been killed, and he teases it by jabbing a piece of straw into the snake's eyes. When the snake almost hits him in the face, Dennis

crushes it. Dennis is an innocent child when he leaves home, but he loses that innocence when he teases the snake.<sup>11</sup> It would seem that Dennis has learned some unpleasant facts about the world in which he lives. He is no longer the shy, innocent boy who leaves home one early morning in June.

In "Boy and Snake" George Milburn has written a story with consummate skill. He has utilized the elements of the initiatory story in the choice of character, in the episodic structure, and in the coming to knowledge of a young boy. He also used mythic elements in the story by setting the story in a harvest field and in the use of a phallic symbol as a means by which the boy receives an education. So skillfully are these two woven into the threads of the story that it is almost impossible to separate them from the narrative and examine them as disparate elements.

### Isolation

A variation on the initiatory theme is that of isolation. According to Roy R. Male, the protagonist in an isolation story is not initiated into society.<sup>12</sup> In the three stories discussed in the first section of this chapter, the heroes are initiated, or come into some sort of awareness. In two cases, the hero was initiated into society; in the last story, the boy becomes aware of evil. This is not true of stories dealing with isolation. Each of the protagonists leaves or has left home, but he is not

initiated. Each is a misfit, and there is a failure of communication. That this theme has been a major concern in twentieth century literature is apparent when one reads short stories or novels of Sherwood Anderson or James Joyce. Even today writers like Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Saul Bellow are still reflecting the failures of communication in this century.

George Milburn also deals with the problem of isolation and communication in his short stories. An interesting study of isolation is a story entitled "Mabel Barclay" in Oklahoma Town. Mabel was a country girl who loved movies.

As long as she lived in our town Mabel Barclay never missed a picture show at the Broadway Theater. The Broadway had shows three times a week and for years Mabel saw them all (OT, p. 111).

Mabel has married Ed Barclay, who sometimes accompanies her to the shows. Mabel's husband is killed on a show day. Rather than miss an installment of a serial that is to be shown the night Ed Barclay is killed, Mabel takes nickels and dimes out of her china pig bank in order to pay for a second showing.

Mabel Barclay seems to have found in the movies what she did not find in society. The day her husband is killed, she is more concerned about the serial at the theater than she is about the death of her husband. "As soon as Mabel saw them carrying in her husband's corpse she realized that she couldn't go to the movies that night and

she might never know who the Hooded Terror was" (OT, p. 114). Even when the movie owner unintentionally insults her, Mabel returns to the theater the next evening. Nothing could keep her away from it, for apparently it gives her the emotional satisfaction she craves.

Mabel liked to enter into the spirit of a picture. If it was romantic, she put her head on one side and pursed her lips. If it was sad, she wept. If it was exciting, she twisted in her seat and gasped, "My God! My God!" (OT, p. 114).

Clearly, Mabel found in the movies a cathartic experience. The movies give her an emotional outlet, and thus she can remain emotionally withdrawn from society and unmoved by the death of her husband.

Even as Mabel Barclay lives in the world of the cinema, so does Claude Parsons live in his own world in "No More Trumpets." Claude Parsons has been sent to jail for robbery. When he is in the prison, Claude plays the trumpet in the reformatory. His trumpet playing won him many admirers outside the reformatory, as the band plays regularly over the radio. When Claude comes home, he discovers that he is no longer a celebrity. He is an ex-convict. It is Claude's failure to see this fact that places him in isolation. Claude is an exile in return.<sup>13</sup> In the narrative of the story, Claude is given the opportunity to communicate with his parents, his adolescent brother, his brother-in-law, and a girl. And his response is always the same. He makes a reference to the reputation he has gained as a result of his playing the trumpet with the reformatory

band. On his first morning home, Claude's responses are typical of what is found throughout the story.

His mother hovered about. "I reckon it must feel pretty nice to get some good old home cooking, don't it son?"

"Oh, not bad," Claude said, "but I used to feed pretty good anyhow. The band played all during meals, and we never did have to eat the regular mess. And after I started broadcasting over KRJR people sent me more stuff than I could eat. What's the matter with you-all? You-all just can't get it through your heads that I had got to be somebody in there, can you?" (NMT, p. 307).

Claude not only rebuffs his own immediate family in this way, he also treats a girl in a similar fashion. The second night Claude is at home, Claude's brother arranges a blind date for him. When he attempts to become intimate with the girl, she repulses him and says, "You keep your filthy hands off'n me, you goddam jailbird!" (NMT, p. 312). When he remembers this incident at the end of "No More Trumpets," Claude murmurs, "If she'd ever seen me in my band uniform, it would have been different. She just didn't know who I was" (NMT, pp. 313-314). Claude has not learned that there are no more trumpets, and that is what makes him a pathetic figure. The story ends on a pessimistic note because Claude lost the only reality he wants to know; he refuses to accept the reality of life as it is offered to him in a small Oklahoma town.

Also printed in No More Trumpets, George Milburn's most famous short story, "A Student in Economics," is a study in isolation. Like many stories, this story employs

a juxtaposition of appearance and reality. To the protagonist of the story, Charlie Wingate, the reality is grim, but as he tells his fellow worker,

Oh, it's worth it! It's a big satisfaction to my folks to have me in college. And where can a man without a college degree get nowadays? I didn't know it was going to be like this when I came down here last Fall. I used to read College Humor in high school, and when fellows came home from the University for holidays, all dressed up in snappy clothes, talking about dates and football and dances, and using college slang--well, I had a notion I'd be like that when I got down here. The University publicity department sent me a little booklet showing how it was easy to work your way through college. So here I am. I haven't had a date or been to a dance or seen a football game since I enrolled. And there are plenty of others just like me. I guess I'm getting a college education, all right--but the only collegiate thing I've been able to do is sleep in class (NMT, pp. 89-90).

Earlier in "A Student in Economics," Charlie Wingate's isolation is quite apparent in his contacts with representatives of the university. Many students who have had to see a dean of men about academic matters can recognize the pattern followed in this section of the story. The Dean asks for the reason for failure, and then supposedly probes deeper to see if he can determine the real reason for failure. Charlie's problem is that he has to work all night and then attend classes in the day. Thus, he gets only about two hours of sleep each day. The Dean of Men's response is typical.

Very interesting, Wingate. But don't you suppose that it would be advisable to cut down on this outside work and attend a little more closely to your college work? After all, that's what you're here for, primarily--to go to college, not work in a cafe (NMT, p. 76).

In the course of the conversation, the Dean points out that Aubrey Carson, the quarterback of the football team, is entirely self-supporting. Charlie Wingate points out that all Carson "has to do is hand out Treasure Trove cigarettes to other students. The tobacco company pays him a good salary for passing out samples of their cigarettes" (NMT, p. 78). The Dean then claims that Charlie is being critical of a fellow student. The refusal of the Dean to recognize Charlie's plight as one that is worthy of his attention and understanding is lamentable. In reality, he simply does not really care about Charlie Wingate. Probably the Dean's position as a representative of the administration of the University is clear when he says,

We have six thousand other students here who need our attention, and the University has to be impartial and impersonal in dealing with these problems. Unless you can find some means to avoid flunking out I suggest withdrawing beforehand (NMT, p. 79).

The episode following the interview with the Dean reinforces the isolation theme of the story. At the conclusion of his discussion with the Dean of Men, Charlie was advised to see the chairman of the Student Senate Committee on Freshman Activities to rectify his social delinquency, as Charlie has not purchased a freshman cap, has received a refund on his student ticket fee, and has not attended the Y. M. C. A. freshman mixer. As one might expect, Aubrey Carson is the chairman. When Charlie explains that he cannot afford to buy a cap, Aubrey Carson's response is,

Now who do you think you are, Wingate--Mr. God? You're going to get you a cap, and you're going to wear it. See? No ifs, ands, or buts about it. And if you don't leave this office with a green cap on your head then I don't mind telling you that we've got ways of getting one on you before another day passes (NMT, p. 83).

Charlie buys the cap, since he knows that the threat is not an idle one, for students at the University have been hazed that fall for less heinous offenses. But the incident ends on a wry note, for Aubrey Carson's last comment is "Here, have a Treasure Trove on me before you go" (NMT, p. 84).

The last episode of "A Student in Economics" strengthens the sense of isolation. Charlie has a B in his economics course. The instructor of this class

was the celebrated author of seven textbooks on economics, five of which his students were required to buy each semester. Doctor Kenshaw's national reputation as an economist permitted him to be erratic about meeting his class, but fame had never dimmed his fondness for student flattery. The only students who ever flunked Ec 150 were those who gave affront to Doctor Kenshaw by neglecting to buy his textbooks or not laughing at his wit or by being outrageously inattentive to his lectures (NMT, pp. 90-91).

Doctor Kenshaw's method of grading is to assign a reading report to each student and base the grade for the semester on this report. Charlie Wingate's report is to be on Theodore Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class. The day after Charlie has seen the Dean of Men and Aubrey Carson, Doctor Kenshaw calls for the reports, as the class has made him angry by attempting to vacate the classroom since Doctor Kenshaw was so late. When Doctor Kenshaw sees that Charlie is sleeping while one of the students is giving her report,

he has Charlie awakened, and then asks him the title of his report. When Charlie tells him, Doctor Kenshaw's reply is

Ah, then, that's the explanation. So you were assiduously engaged in evolving your own theory of the leisure class. Is that right, Mr. Wingate? You have evidently concluded that Economics 150 is the leisure class (NMT, p. 94).

This comment, of course, is ironic when one considers the state of Charlie Wingate's impoverishment. Charlie is working hard to succeed in college, but there is little hope of his succeeding. The environment of the university community is against him. The administration, students and instructors are indifferent to Charlie Wingate's social and economic problems. Their only concern is for themselves. By having these three separate episodes in which three separate strata of the university community are shown, George Milburn has made it clear that the environment is against Charlie Wingate, and that he is an isolated character.

As was indicated earlier, isolation is closely related to initiation. Charlie Wingate is a typical protagonist of an initiation story in that he is young, sensitive, and intelligent. He is a young man from the provinces who has gone into the world to seek success. Unlike those who seek success in the city, Charlie's dream of success lies in the university. Charlie's failure is typical of isolation stories, as his story is what Male called "The Sensitive Young Man" whose story

amounts to a retreat or a series of retreats from involvement, as this actual or spiritual orphan finds no home, no parent, no girl, no guide that

exactly fulfills his psychological needs. Essentially a quest for identity, his search is partially frustrated by the crassness, cruelty, or hypocrisy of the group he yearns to join.<sup>14</sup>

This sentence is truly descriptive of the situation of Charlie Wingate.

Like most initiation stories, the plot of "A Student in Economics" is episodic, but George Milburn allowed each of the six parts of the story reflect the idea he is attempting to convey, as a brief examination will show. Part I establishes the setting of the story. The bleak December, the chilly atmosphere of Charlie Wingate's room, and the harsh treatment that he receives from a fellow roomer prepare the reader for these elements in the story. Part II of the story establishes the conflict between Charlie and the university, for the notice about Charlie's failure to fulfill his social obligations and to meet academic requirements is introduced. Part III is about Charlie's interview with the Dean of Men, and Part IV the confrontation with Aubrey Carson. In Part V, Charlie's real problems become known to the reader. The reader is made aware of the difference in life at the university as depicted in college publicity releases and the reality of Charlie's life at the university. Part VI relates Charlie's experience in Doctor Kenshaw's class. Each of these episodes contributes to the total effect George Milburn is making. There is not one extraneous detail in the story. Each incident, each reference to some event on campus, each phrase in the story adds to the total effect. Even the

choice of words is important, for each word, each sentence adds to a blending of tone, character, and atmosphere creating a story of isolation which exceeds the most rigid demand for a well-told tale. "A Student in Economics" is truly a fine example of an initiation story dealing with isolation.

### Love

Many initiation stories include a protagonist's experiences with women, as this is frequently an important part of his education. Not all of these stories in this section are about initiation, but they are related in some way or another to one of man's most perplexing relationships, the relationship between a man and a woman.

"Darling, Darling" is a story which is an inversion on the initiation idea of the young man from the provinces. The protagonist of the story is sent to a small town in Oklahoma to gain some experience in running a telegraph office.

Curt Grey was a tall, good looking young man, careful about his dress, and very affable. He was easy to get along with, but he was city-bred and none of the men in our town seemed to like him very much (OT, p. 98).

Curt met Elsie at a local dance; she was the mistress of G. W. Scott, and the night of the dance she had an argument with Scott. She took up with Curt as a means of getting back at Scott. Curt took Elsie home; and by the time he got back to his hotel room,

he was idiotic with love. He was convinced that he had found the ideal woman. Taking her home

he hadn't touched her. He hadn't even kissed her good night. He didn't know how far he could go with Elsie (OT, p. 99).

Curt writes Elsie a letter that night composed of the word darling repeated again and again on a single page of paper. The next morning, Curt learns that Scott has had Elsie out till four that morning; Curt then attempts to retrieve the letter from the post office, but it is too late. Scott gets the letter from Elsie, and a few days later he attempts to get Curt to send a night letter to Elsie composed of fifty darlings. A fight between the two men ensues, and Scott knocks Curt down by cracking him across the neck with the telegraph rate book. Curt "left town on the evening train. The telegraph office was closed for three days" (OT , p. 102).

Curt Grey's bitter experience may have taught him something. Judging from his action the day after the dance, Curt learns how harsh and cruel a small town can be. Instead of remaining in the town, he chooses to leave. He rejects the town and its coarseness. Had he chosen to send the telegram, he might have proved that he is able to take his initiation.

The small Oklahoma town finds the behavior of Mrs. Hopkins about as amusing as that of Curt Grey. Mrs. Hopkins is a woman who wears strange clothes and even stranger hats that she makes. She brings her revolver to town to get some shells for it because she is afraid that some man might take advantage of her, as she explains to the store keeper.

I had always hoped that the occasion for using that gun would never come up, but you see Mr. Hopkins has to be out in the country a good deal, and I am left alone. Lately I have been hearing strange noises around my house. I am alone. A pretty woman is apt to arouse a man's brutal instincts. So I thought it would be a good idea to get some loads for my gun (OT, pp. 172-173).

A few days later an Armenian rug peddler comes to the Hopkins' home. When he attempts to get someone to answer the door, Mrs. Hopkins shoots at him. The next day Mrs. Hopkins turned herself in. She tells the judge,

You know, judge, after I think about it, maybe I was a little too rash. I thought that man had his animal passions aroused. But I guessed all he really intended was just a little romance (OT, p. 175).

"Mrs. Hopkins" is an amusing treatment of a concept often found in literature--a woman of faded beauty who secretly wishes a man would violate her while she openly claims to abhor animal passion. Unlike the frustrated women who would demand that the innocent peddler be prosecuted, Mrs. Hopkins turns herself in and makes the amusing comment already noted. One cannot help but feel that George Milburn is taking a sly poke at those writers who believe that women like Mrs. Hopkins are sexually frustrated, as the tone of the story indicates. Perhaps Milburn is nearer the truth than some other observers of the American scene.

Another story in Oklahoma Town, "Delmer Dilbeck," treats with wry humor a second marriage. Delmer Dilbeck is the stingiest man in town. A short time after his first wife died, the town is surprised to learn that Delmer is

going to marry Hattie Detwiler, a mail-order bride from Iowa. Although Delmer had hoped to resume his usual stingy ways, Mrs. Dilbeck did not cooperate very well. She insists on going to a movie (Delmer asked the owner what the name of the movie was so that he would not waste his money by seeing it twice), and then she decides to go on a train excursion to Muskogee. Delmer tries to discourage his wife, but to no avail. As she is boarding the train, Delmer gives her a little blank-book. He wants Mrs. Dilbeck to keep track of her expenses, but she throws the book on the train platform. After the train is moving out of the station, Delmer sees the book and attempts to return it to her. Delmer falls as he runs alongside the train. He yells at Mrs. Dilbeck, "Hattie, you dropped your little blank-book" (OT, p. 157).

Although this is an amusing story, the story is rather pathetic. There are barriers between Delmer and his wife. The most important misunderstanding is financial. As has already been indicated, Delmer is stingy, while Mrs. Dilbeck seems to be indifferent about money. This is clear in the incident at the railroad station. When she threw away the blank-book, Mrs. Dilbeck seems to be symbolically rejecting the standard Delmer wants her to adopt. When Delmer attempts to return the book to her, she is oblivious to his efforts. Her actions show her disinterest in Delmer's ideas, and he fails to recognize this. Earlier in the story, Delmer "saw that it was going to be necessary for

him to have an understanding with his new wife pretty soon" (OT, p. 156).

A second thing that separates Delmer and Hattie is that they are attempting to deceive each other. When Delmer starts to seek a second wife, he buys a toupee for his bald head. When Mrs. Dilbeck arrives in town,

The men were all surprised to find that the insurance agent had got a tall, handsome woman with a generous bust and a fine head of blond hair. The women detected that the new Mrs. Dilbeck's hair was a wig and that her skin was beginning to wrinkle (OT, p. 154).

Delmer always wears his toupee around his wife, and Mrs. Dilbeck never neglects to wear her wig when Delmer is around. If Delmer and his wife are deceptive about these matters, they could have been deceptive about others. The pathetic thing about the marriage is each partner's failure to communicate with the other. Each one seems to live in a separate world. There are barriers between the two people that may never be bridged, and both will probably attempt to deceive the other the rest of their lives.

"The Fight at Hendryx's is also about love, but in this instance, a girl feigns love. George Milburn uses an old, familiar device of having men fight over a girl. The main details of the story are about the fight, but the cause of the fight is a woman. Flossie Greet, who has trouble getting a beau, manages to get two men to fight over her by claiming that one of the men insults her honor. During the course of the fight, two men are killed. The body of one of the men, who is an outsider, has not yet been buried, as

the ground is frozen hard. The owner of the farm where the fight takes place and narrator of the story decided to burn the body with some brush. Shortly after the body is burned, the girl comes to claim it. She is upset when she finds the body burned, but not because she loves the man. She has seen a circular with his picture on it. He is an ex-convict who has robbed banks and murdered a man, and there is a five hundred dollar reward for him. Flossie is really upset because she has lost the money, not her lover. Milburn has juxtaposed feigned love for Merryweather, the ex-convict, to her real desire for money. The real interest of the story lies in the description of the fight, not the love story. Milburn let the fight assume a proportion of the story that is not commensurate with its importance to the plot.

The structure of "The Fight at Hendryx's" is interesting. Milburn has a narrator relate the story to a group of men gathered around a pot-bellied stove. A blizzard has struck the Oklahoma town, and the men gathered around the stove are convinced that this is the coldest day ever in Oklahoma. The narrator of the story has driven in from his farm, and he tells the story as proof that he has seen colder weather in Oklahoma. The use of the narrator is a familiar device. Eugene Current-Garcia says that

the form of the frontier tale was as important as its contents if not more so; for it depended on the skillful characterization of a narrator, or raconteur, who was capable of holding an audience spellbound as he spun his fantastic yarns and of employing a racy, untutored vernacular to his own background and locale. . . . To lend authenticity to them, and thus to enhance their comic flavor,

their authors generally set them forth in a simulated or "mock" oral framework. Opening with a brief descriptive passage to set up the scene and situation--usually a fireside gathering after the day's hunt--the story introduces the narrator, who, after a few descriptive lines about his outward appearance, voice, and gestures, drifts naturally into the telling of his tale. . . .<sup>15</sup>

In the case of "The Fight at Hendryx's," the narrator is one who is reliable.

He [the narrator] was, nevertheless, an earnest truthful man, given neither to heated arguments nor to tall tales. No greater insult than "Liar" could have been offered to Old Man Peck, and he was unaccustomed to being doubted. He was too positive and impassive to debate his theory. His reputation for honesty was secure, and he never went to any great pains to convince anybody (NMT, p. 49).

Milburn's use of Old Man Peck as the narrator makes the diction of this story interesting. In Part II of "The Fight at Hendryx's," Old Man Peck begins to relate his tale.

"That was as cold a time as ever I seen in this country," the old man went on. "It was so cold that the horns on the steers all froze up and bust wide open. It was so cold that the snot froze on the ends of the younguns' noses. You'd see the sparrers set out to fly and they'd just drap down out of mid-air, froze stiff. Alongside of that there big freeze, this here blizzard is just a little cold snap. . . . The cold spell had been set in for nigh on to a week when Old Man Hendryx sont word around that he was going to th'ow him a dance over at his place. By that time even the Hardshell Baptists was anxious to fix up and git ready and start out and go to a dance. This country wa'n't settled up as close then as it is now, but the news got norated around, and that there dance at Hendryx's turned out to be quite a gethering. Quite a gethering" (NMT, pp. 50-51).

This passage is interesting. First, it sets the background for the story. The repressive cold has forced people to seek an outlet for their energies and Hendryx decided to

hold a dance. That way people will have something to occupy their time, and they will have plenty of company. This passage also gives a humorous beginning to what turns out to be a rather unpleasant story. Old Man Peck's comparisons are like those used by some Oklahomans. His reference to the Hardshell Baptists is also interesting, since native Oklahomans are well acquainted with the strictness of this religious body. By having Old Man Peck relate the story, George Milburn also suited the diction of the story to the audience. To an educated man, the crude comparison, the word choice, and the use of such words as froze up, sparrers, drap, this here blizzard, sont, norated, and gethering and other such usages would be offensive. But to the men gathered around the stove at the store, the language that Old Man Peck uses is clear, expressive, and not crude at all. The diction, usage, and other speech patterns of Old Man Peck add to the quality of the story and are in the tradition of the tall tale. One could scarcely expect a man like Old Man Peck to speak otherwise. While "The Fight at Hendryx's" is not one of George Milburn's better stories, it does serve as an illustration of Milburn's ability to catch the language used by many Oklahomans during the late 1920's and early 1930's

Perhaps one of the most pathetic stories of George Milburn's is "Love Song." In this story the barrier between the protagonist, Virgil Clay, and his wife Minnie

Flynn, is one that is age old. The first paragraph of Part I describes Virgil before he meets Minnie.

Virgil Clay had never been loved by anybody. There wasn't any reason for it. It was even strange that no woman had ever loved him. He was as pathetic as a spaniel, and women are more attracted by pathetic men than they are by strong men (NMT, p. 244).

The remainder of Part I explains how Virgil rose from poverty to his position as a janitor at the local bank. He also becomes an employee at the local furniture and undertaking shop. In Part I of "Love Song," the local joke about Virgil is given to the reader; this joke which seems harmless at first becomes the cause of the barrier between Virgil and Minnie.

One of the wags at the Sanitary Barber Shop made a joke about it [Virgil's job as janitor at the bank]: "Say, have you heard about Virge Clay getting a job as teller at the Farmer's and Merchants' Bank?"

"Naw, sure enough, has he? How did he get to know anything about banking?"

"He don't have to know nothing about banking. He tells the customers to stand over a little so as he can sweep there." Everybody thought that was a good joke (NMT, pp. 240-241).

Virgil's future wife, Minnie Flynn, is introduced in Part II. Minnie comes from a farm in western Kansas. She came to Oklahoma to help her sister-in-law during her confinement. "She [Minnie] was eighteen, and eager to get away from the drudgery and the monotony of the farm" (NMT, p. 241). Minnie meets Virgil; and at the time they meet, Minnie's brother tells her the first part of the joke, but he fails to let Minnie know that Virgil is the janitor.

Minnie thinks that Virgil is a teller at the bank. Thus, the deception that makes the marriage founder is attributable to Minnie's brother not telling her the whole truth.

After Virgil and Minnie are married by a justice of the peace, Minnie learns the truth about Virgil's job; she verbally attacks her brother severely for allowing her to marry Virgil because she believed that he was a bank teller. When Minnie's father dies, Virgil uses Minnie's inheritance to buy the furniture store where he works. Virgil is not a successful businessman.

He was adept at odd jobs, and at working for other people. He had been able to save doing that. But having a business of his own confused him. Their living came from the slender profits of the furniture store without his ever knowing how it did (NMT, p. 260).

In addition to his business failure, Virgil's marriage with Minnie is a marriage in name only.

Virgil is an abject failure. He has been happy and successful as a bachelor, but now he is unhappy. Like the protagonist in Sherwood Anderson's "The Egg," he has attempted to do that which is beyond him. The environment of the town is not against Virgil. He would have probably led a happy, successful life as a janitor and an employee in someone's store. Virgil's unfortunate plight is made clear as the story closes. Virgil is listening to a victrola playing the waltz "Let me call you 'Sweetheart.'" Virgil believes that music will attract customers; and hoping to attract customers, he has set his Edison victrola in the window. It does not succeed; and as the woman sings the

words of the song, Virgil dreams that she sings to him. Whether or not Virgil imagines the woman to be Minnie or whether or not he dreams of the actual singer is not important. What is important is that Virgil is a man who is isolated in the world. As the opening line of the story says, "Virgil Clay had never been loved by anybody" (NMT, p. 244).

There are two elements which unite the stories in this chapter. As is readily apparent, the initiatory elements unite these three groups of stories. In the first group, the hero undergoes experiences during which he passes from immaturity and ignorance to maturity and acceptance by the social group which he wishes to join. In the second group of stories, the protagonist also undergoes similar experiences; but he rejects his initiation and remains an outsider, as he does not become a member of the social group with which he comes in contact. The last group of stories deals with love as part of the initiatory process. A second element in these stories is local-color material. George Milburn has used setting, diction, and a lean narrative line in the construction of these stories. He has blended local color material and the initiatory material to form a group of stories which reflect life in Oklahoma during the late 1920's and early 1930's, even as John Steinbeck in The Grapes of Wrath was to reflect the effects of the depression and dust bowl on Oklahomans.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Waldhorn and Hilda K. Waldhorn, The Rite of Becoming: Stories and Studies of Adolescence (Cleveland, 1966), pp. ix-x.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>3</sup> Ray B. West, The Short Story in America, 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1952), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Rohrberger, Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story (The Hague, 1966), p. 31.

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

<sup>6</sup> David B. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1967), p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Roy R. Male, Types of Short Fiction (Belmont, 1962), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> George Milburn, No More Trumpets (New York, 1933), p. 262. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated parenthetically with the abbreviation NMT and the page number.

<sup>9</sup> George Milburn, Oklahoma Town (New York, 1931), p. 191. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated parenthetically with the abbreviation OT and the page number.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Cottrell in The Horizon Book of Lost Worlds, ed. Marshall B. Davidson (New York, 1962), p. 251.

<sup>11</sup>Will Durant, Our Oriental Heritage, Vol. I of The Story of Civilization (New York, 1935), p. 329. Durant points out that the serpent is a phallic symbol, "sex and knowledge destroy innocence and happiness, and are the origins of evil. . . ."

<sup>12</sup>Male, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Eugene Current-Garcia, O. Henry (New York, 1965), p. 49.

## CHAPTER III

### EXTERNAL PROBLEMS

Social problems have long been the concern of artists. In fiction which concerns itself with social problems, attention is given not only to society's effect on the characters but also to various social, environmental, or economic forces. While many early local-color artists were not concerned with social or environmental conditions as external forces directly influencing the lives of their characters, later local-color artists such as Hamlin Garland became more concerned about them.

Garland thought that literature should deal with both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of life, and its form should be based on experience.<sup>1</sup> In his most famous collection of short stories, Main-Travelled Roads, Garland attempted to put into practice what he felt American literature should do. In Main-Travelled Roads the farmers of the region of which Garland wrote are exploited by the social system. This is exemplified in such stories as "Up the Cooly" and "Under the Lion's Paw." In the former, a brother who has been successful in the east and abroad returns to Wisconsin. He becomes aware of his brother's degradation and brutalization by the social system in which

he lives. In "Under the Lion's Paw" the effect of an unjust social system is apparent. The protagonist rents a farm and labors to improve it. He discovers that his improvements have doubled the value of the farm when he attempts to buy the farm from the owner, and "he recognizes and at last sullenly submits to the numbing weight of the lion's paw--economic inequity--not killing him, but slowly crushing his humanity away."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Garland shows farm life as it is in the use of regional materials.

Other regionalists such as Ellen Glasgow and William Faulkner<sup>3</sup> dealt with the effects of various social forces and institutions upon the characters in their fiction. Faulkner wrote of his southern past in terms of religious and social forms. In "A Rose for Emily" the change in social conditions in the South following the Civil War is mirrored in the setting in which the story takes place. The house in which Emily lives is a symbol of that decay.<sup>4</sup> Ellen Glasgow also wrote of the South. In novels such as The Sheltered Life and The Romantic Comedians she chronicled the history of the South in defeat. One of Miss Glasgow's traits is the use of irony. According to Edward Wagenknecht,

she rejected both sentimentalism and cruelty. "Blood and irony" was what she was after, for blood meant passion, warmth, vitality, and irony is "the safest antidote to sentimental decay!"<sup>5</sup>

George Milburn follows the trend established by other regionalists in that he, too, writes of some of the

institutions and forces which affect the lives of his characters. In his writing, his attitude is much like that of Sinclair Lewis, who satirized fundamentalist religion in Elmer Gantry, racism in Kingsblood Royal, and the Rotarians in Babbitt. George Milburn also treated these three subjects in his short stories and sketches. In addition to fundamentalist religion, racism, and Rotarians, there is a fourth category in this chapter, family. In his novels Lewis satirized familial relations such as Babbitt's relationships with his son and daughter. These four categories include a significant portion of George Milburn's short story production, although he does treat other areas satirically in stories focusing upon matters other than social satire.

### Religion

A predominant social force in Oklahoma that George Milburn writes about is religion. While Sinclair Lewis had satirized fundamentalism on a national scale in Elmer Gantry, George Milburn turned his satirical eye toward fundamental religion as it is found in a small Oklahoma town. Usually the objects of his religious satire were the Baptists and the Holy Rollers. The former compose the largest religious body in Oklahoma, while the latter are noted for their excess of religious fervor. In "Beulah Huber," George Milburn subtly juxtaposes a Baptist minister's behavior to Christ's behavior toward a prostitute.

Beulah leaves a very strict home, goes to town, and secures a job as a chambermaid in a hotel. She finds life here more to her taste.

Beulah would iron sheets at the Kentucky Colonel all day, and then go up to the Louvre Dance Hall on North Broadway and dance half the night with Elmer Dutton, her steady. She had plenty get-up-and-go, all right (OT, pp. 51-52).

One afternoon when she is singing a risque song, Beulah meets the new Baptist preacher, the Reverend Albert Sweasey. He treats Beulah as if she were a prostitute. When Beulah realizes what he has done, she goes to the table where the Reverend Sweasey is eating.

Then she said in a husky voice, "Say, wh-what kind of a girl do you think I am, anyway?"

The Reverend Sweasey would not pay any attention to her. He kept on looking down at his plate. Beulah began sobbing. Suddenly she turned around and ran out of the dining-room. Everybody went on eating as though nothing had happened (OT, p. 53).

The Reverend Albert Sweasey by his behavior does not reveal a Christian spirit, for Sweasey just as surely condemns Beulah Huber even as Christ forgave Mary Magdalene. In Chapter viii of the Gospel, according to St. John, a woman taken in adultery is brought before Christ, who refuses to condemn her. George Milburn has pointed out the hypocrisy of a man who is supposed to set an example for the community but has the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees in St. John's Gospel.

Another story in Oklahoma Town which satirizes the Baptists is "The Holy Roller Elders." In this story, the Baptists' concern for material things is juxtaposed to the Holiness' seeming lack of concern for the material in life. On the edge of town the Holy Rollers build a church made of pine overlap board.

Right across the street the Baptists owned a quarter of a block, and on the corner they were erecting their new red brick house of God. This was planned to be the most imposing edifice in our town. The Baptists were already occupying their new church, but they were having some trouble getting enough money raised to finish the belfrey and to completely furnish the interior with golden oak pews and Wilton carpets (OT, p. 31).

Property values in the area decline, and the Baptists cannot sell their adjoining lots. Then providence comes to the aid of the Baptists.

One night the little Holy Roller meeting house was destroyed by fire. The circumstances were very suspicious. The night on which the church burned was a calm one, and a charred five-gallon gasoline can was found in the ashes (OT, p. 32).

The Holy Roller Elders discuss the event with a local lawyer, but they really have no case. They leave "lawyer Weatherby's office singing 'Love Lifted Me'" (OT, p. 33).

In "The Holy Roller Elders" George Milburn has juxtaposed the Baptists and the Holy Rollers in regard to material possessions and in regard to the religious fervor of the people. He points out that the Holy Rollers recruit members from the shouting Methodists and the jumping Baptists.

The more conservative members of these two churches turned cold eyes on the ecstatic demonstrations made by these more ardent communicants when they received a visitation from the Holy Spirit (OT, p. 32).

On Wednesday and Sunday nights, the Holy Roller services almost drowned out the Baptists' singing across the street in their own building. Thus, in regard to religious fervor, Milburn almost seems to approve of the Holy Rollers more than the more conservative religious bodies in the town. They are more vigorous in their worship, and they are not too concerned about their lost property, whereas the Baptists are proud of their material prosperity. While Milburn evidences a strong dislike for the Baptists, he does indicate that he does not wholly approve of the Holy Rollers either. He points out that their first meeting house was lighted by "gas mantles, and the long, wavering feathers of blue flame from the gas jets gave their meeting hall a weird, Druidic effect" (OT, p. 30). He also indicates that the behavior of the Holy Rollers is irrational: they should have been more concerned about their financial loss and their worship services are emotionally charged experiences. There is an ironic and bitter note running through the whole story. Even the last line of it is ironic when the Elders leave the lawyer's office singing "Love Lifted Me."

"The Baptist Christmas Tree" is a sequel to "The Holy Roller Elders." This story is one of the weakest in Oklahoma Town, but it deserves a brief comment as it really concludes "The Holy Roller Elders." George Milburn once

again mentions the Baptists' pride in their new brick church with its golden oak pews and Wilton carpets before discussing the first party in the new church. This Christmas party turns into a disaster. One woman slips off a ladder and falls into the baptistry, one individual has wax from a candle drip down her back as she is singing a solo, and the whole affair ends with one of the men hurling corncobs at the people in the church. The Holy Rollers, of course, regard the calamitous event "as a visitation from God. The Holy Rollers always did believe that the Baptists had burned down their meeting-house across the street" (OT, p. 92). Apparently the Holy Rollers believed in a vengeful God rather than a forgiving God, as they did not show much charity. George Milburn brought the whole episode about the burning of the Holy Roller meeting house and the Baptist Christmas Party to an amusing and ironic end.

A third story which satirizes the Baptist church is "Imogene Caraway." Mr. Farnum, a local merchant, has been selling some flour which has not been liked by the women of the community. The flour, Bar-None, is used by Gabe Caraway's wife, who also uses the flour sacks for clothing. The local Baptist church is having a revival; and Gabe Caraway's daughter, Imogene, is saved in the revival. When she is baptized in the river, the Baptist preacher's wife, Mrs. Sweasey, shrieks out that she sees the mark of the goat on Imogene. "The water had pasted Imogene's white voile cloth against her flour sack undershirt. Across her

broad buttocks in large red letters had appeared the brand, Bar-None" (OT, p. 26). Since earlier in "Imogene Caraway," the evangelist had preached to the group about sheep and goats, telling them that the goats were branded with the sign of the beast, the ending of the story is ironic and cynical.

In "The Holy Roller Elders" and "The Baptist Christmas Tree," George Milburn has pointed out the materialism of the Baptists. This same idea is found in "Imogene Caraway." Conducted by a man named Foster, this particular revival is the first for the Baptists since they have built their new red brick house of God.

The Reverend Foster's meeting had been dragging along for two weeks and the Baptists were beginning to get dissatisfied with him. As until then he had saved only three souls, and the Baptists had all that big new debt for their new church hanging over them (OT, p. 23).

This cynical comment implies two things. First, the number of souls saved was apparently deemed to be important, as religious success is to be measured in numerical terms. Apparently, the Biblical story about the one lost sheep is ignored by this group. Second, the passage implies that souls and money are equated in the minds of the people. After Imogene has been saved and confesses her sins to the whole community, "the Reverend Foster preached and twenty souls were saved that night. The Baptist revival turned out to be successful after all" (OT, p. 25). Apparently the debt on the new brick church with its golden oak pews

and Wilton carpets will be paid off; at least this is what George Milburn seems to suggest.<sup>6</sup>

There are also some sexual elements in the sketch. The night after Imogene is saved, she tells the packed church about her carnal sins. One cannot help but feel that this event must have been like hearing a dirty story or seeing a pornographic movie. The tone of the story is cynical enough to suggest this. The brand name of the flour and its appearance on Imogene's buttocks in the baptismal rite form an ironic and cynical end to the sketch.

One other element in the story that is well handled is diction. Martin Shockley in his comments in Southwest Writers Anthology points this out. He says that in "Imogene Caraway,"

Social distinctions are immediately established. Mr. Farnum calls Mr. Caraway "Gabe;" Gabe calls him "Mr. Farnum." Several locutions characterize Gabe as an ignorant countryman: "I ain't noticed," "I cain't notice no difference," "them Bar-None sacks." Mr. Farnum speaks on Gabe's level: "We ought not to have no trouble," "They ain't nothing wrong with them."<sup>7</sup>

Shockley also points out that George Milburn takes some pains to characterize the Reverend Foster as an ignorant country man. He quotes a portion of the Reverend Foster's sermon on "The Sheep and Goats."

Don't you think you can just let this old muddy water here wash your sins away. You got to be pure in heart. . . . Don't think you're going to slip by, 'cause you ain't! God has his brands on all you goats, don't think he ain't. It's all written right here in the Grand Old Book (OT, pp. 25-26).

As is clear from the passage above, Shockley is correct about the Reverend Foster's being an ignorant country man.

"Imogene Caraway" is both humorous and cynical. Milburn satirizes the Baptists unmercifully by pointing out their materialism, their lack of charity, and their ignorance. The story is well plotted in that the seemingly casual reference to the flour sacks is used to provide a cynical culmination of the plot of "Imogene Caraway."

In "God Smote a Shoemaker," the religious satire of George Milburn becomes sharper. Thematically, the story is about people who believe in the wrath of a cruel and jealous God. George Milburn makes this clear in the first paragraph of the story.

That man Kunkel had it coming to him. Anyway, every one said that he had it coming to him. People knew that he couldn't go on talking like that without coming to grief (OT, p. 41).

Milburn repeats this idea throughout the story, bringing the story in a full circle at the end.

In the first part of "God Smote a Shoemaker," George Milburn delineates the character of the shoemaker, August Kunkel. He points out that August is a very strong man. He is "a huge, bull-chested man. . . . He had a neck like a tree trunk" (OT, p. 42). He is also a very loquacious man, and the people of the community enjoy listening to him talk as he goes about his work. A third aspect of August Kunkel is that he is a well-read man. The townspeople respect August for the vast store of knowledge he has gleaned from

his reading; but he is an atheist, and "had an autographed set of Robert Ingersoll's works that he bragged about openly. There were rumors that he had many other books it wouldn't do anybody any good to look into" (OT, p. 43). Another characteristic of August Kunkel is that he is materially prosperous because he does work hard, and from all reports his work is excellent. The people in the community believe that God prospers those who follow Him; consequently, they are convinced that August Kunkel cannot continue to prosper.

The last part of "God Smote a Shoemaker" centers around August Kunkel's two daughters, their conversion at the Holy Roller meeting, and subsequent developments. George Milburn provides motivation of the daughters to rebel against their father when one says to her father when he accuses her of attending Holy Roller meetings,

You're not going to treat us like you have Mama, shut in like some animal all the time. Don't you reckon we want to get out and mix with other people? All my life I've been wanting to go to Sunday-school like the other kids. You made us stay at home (OT, p. 42).

Attendance at Sunday School is important in a small Oklahoma town, as frequently it is as much an opportunity to engage in social intercourse as an agency for religious instruction. Probably the two sisters have been ostracized by the community, and they also may not be invited to various social functions connected with Sunday School. One thing is certain: they are not the individualists that their father is. They are conformists.

The night Ellen Kunkel defies her father, the Holy Rollers have a service. In this section, George Milburn uses sexual allusions to tell the reader what he thinks of the meeting. In describing the meeting house, Milburn says that "The blue plumes from the gas jets made long shadows across the walls" (OT, p. 47), a phallic image also found in "The Holy Rollers." After the incoherent sermon,

The organist began playing a lively hymn. The men and women, gaunt country folk, were jumping to the music, shrilling the song. The moans of the seekers ran like an undertow through the crowded hall (OT, p. 47).

This description of the meeting is immediately followed by the hysterical behavior of Ellen and Zenobia as they utter incomprehensible syllables and writhe on the floor at the foot of the altar. Some men fall on the floor beside the two girls and also writhe on the floor. This description is quite suggestive; the climax of this description occurs when "The preacher knelt down to run his hands over her [Ellen's] body, kneading her and exhorting her. Zenobia lay close by, still squirming on her back and screaming in tongues" (OT, p. 48). The emotional climax of this episode occurs when August Kunkel enters the door of the building and slaps the two girls so that they will regain control of their faculties. The Holy Roller preacher tells August Kunkel that God will smite him for what he has just done. In reply, "August Kunkel twisted his head around and sent a smooth spout of tobacco juice toward the altar. The brown liquid splattered on the pages of the open Bible" (OT, p. 49).

The next day, August Kunkel's blasphemies shocked the whole community. In the midst of his anger and blaspheming, he suffers a paralytic stroke. The men at the shoe shop take him to his house and go for the doctor. As the daughters begin to burn his books, he glares malevolently at them. Echoing the words of the Holy Roller preacher and indeed that of the whole town, Mrs. Kunkel tells the doctor that God has smote her husband. Ironically, all August Kunkel can do is reply with the same incoherent syllables that his daughters had screamed at the Holy Roller meeting the night before.

Perhaps one of the strangest stories George Milburn wrote about religion is "Gerald Lee Cobb." The narrative line of the story is rather simple. Gerald, a very religious boy who excels at track, wins the W. C. T. U. essay prize while in high school. After he graduates from high school, Gerald goes to the Garrett Bible Institute at Evanston, Illinois. When the war comes, Gerald becomes a conscientious objector; and he is placed in a detention camp in Kansas. "Gerald was a pretty boy, and the other prisoners shut up like that must have treated him with some brutality. He never was right in the head after the war" (OT, p. 95). After Gerald joins the Holy Roller Church, he allows his hair and beard to grow. His mother, an aristocrat from Tennessee who objects to her son's erratic behavior, stands on the fringe of the Holy Roller meetings and

calls the Holy Rollers "vile beasts" and "dirty swine" (OT, p. 97).

The tone of this sketch is doubly satirical, as Milburn centers not only directly on religion but indirectly on the super-patriots who mistreat conscientious objectors, for in a sense they are to blame for Gerald Lee Cobb's condition. But the real force of his satire is shown when Milburn describes Gerald's behavior after the war. He says that Gerald "began to emulate Jesus" (OT, p. 96). He loses any concern for material things; he takes long evangelistic trips, and he breaks ties with his family. George Milburn implies that if Gerald Lee Cobb's behavior is like that of Jesus, then Jesus may not have been quite right mentally. Tradition says that Jesus had a light complexion and blond hair.<sup>8</sup>

When he Gerald graduated from high school his class voted him the high school Apollo. He was tall and lithe and his hair was like frayed new rope. Blushes played under his smooth skin" (OT, p. 94).

The analogy George Milburn makes between Jesus and Gerald Lee Cobb is complete; they are not mentally sound, and their physical appearance is alike.

In "Gerald Lee Cobb" George Milburn again satirizes the Holy Rollers. Mrs. Cobb says that "They're just poor white trash and they don't know how to act" (OT, p. 96). When Mrs. Cobb watches the Holy Roller meetings from a distance, she could see her son's behavior at the meeting.

Sometimes Gerald would jig until he fainted. All the others would bend over him, exhorting him. He would lie there in the dust, slaver-  
ing and rolling up the whites of his eyes  
(OT, p. 97).

In another place, the narrator refers to the Holy Roller's meeting as a hullabaloo. In "Gerald Lee Cobb," George Milburn has not only satirized religion, but he has commented about the nature of Jesus Himself.

### Race

One of the most pressing problems in Oklahoma is the failure of white people to accept Negroes. In 1970 Oklahomans have become more tolerant about racial matters, but this has not always been the case. Before the Civil War, slavery was practiced in the Five Civilized Tribes, and at the present time racial discrimination is found in Oklahoma and in the midwest.<sup>9</sup> In two separate short stories in Oklahoma Town and in a story in No More Trumpets, Milburn writes about racism. It should be noted that the story in No More Trumpets, "White Meat," does not take place in Oklahoma; it is included in the discussion because it does reveal and satirize regional attitudes about Negroes.

"The Nigger Doctor" uses comparison to achieve its satirization of racism in Oklahoma. The story opens by explaining the town's attitude toward doctors and toward Negroes.

Most people in our town felt uneasy about the nigger doctor. In that community a doctor was a man whom nearly everyone looked up to.

The general feeling was that a doctor was beyond good and evil. He could be a drunkard, a dope head, or an atheist and people would still treat him with deference. But a nigger doctor--well, there was something wrong about a nigger being a doctor (OT, p. 72).

Doctor Johnston, the Negro doctor, is from a northern university; his attitude toward the whites of the community is such that some members of the community describe him as "uppity."

There is another doctor in town whose name is Johnson. The similarity of the two names causes some confusion at the local post office, and Dr. Johnston points out that his family is better than that of the white Dr. Johnson when he tells the postmaster that

One of my relatives was Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate general, and that was the way he spelled his name. That's an old southern name, Mr. Elder. You won't find any one in the south named Johnston without the t. No, Mr. Elder, there never has been any such name as Johnson. That's merely a misspelling. Johnston should always be spelled with a t (OT, p. 74).

Since Dr. Johnson is an Arkansas Democrat, Dr. Johnston's claims of descent and his comments about the spelling of the name probably irked the white doctor, as further events of the story indicate. And of course it is a satire directed at southern Democrats who are still fighting the Civil War.

Besides juxtaposing the men's names, Milburn also juxtaposes the abilities of the two doctors. There is a flu epidemic in the town; and since Dr. Johnston's patients are getting better medical treatment, many white people

avail themselves of his services. Dr. Johnson's response is to place a notice in the local newspaper in which he says he will never treat a person who has received medical treatment from Dr. Johnston. "Old Dr. Johnson's entire practice was among cotton farmers and southern poor whites, so he didn't lose anything by his ultimatum" (OI, p. 75).

Another conflict between black and white occurs when Dr. Johnston attempts to vote. The Republicans have allowed Dr. Johnston to register, but the election board is composed of one Republican, Mrs. Jim Caraway, and two Democrats, Old Man Chalmers and A. P. Smith. Smith is almost illiterate; he can only copy his own signature. At that time, a voter had to "be able to read and interpret the Constitution of the United States to the satisfaction of the election board" (OI, p. 76). When Dr. Johnston comes to vote, Smith asks the Doctor to interpret the Constitution. His interpretation does not satisfy Smith, as might be expected. Then Dr. Johnston tells Smith that he did a better job than Smith could. Smith calls him a son of a bitch and throws an inkwell at him. The Doctor regards Smith with contempt, smiles, and leaves the courthouse.

As he was going out the door Mrs. Jim Caraway jumped up and screeched, "A. P. Smith, you make me ashamed of being white!"

"You ought to be ashamed of being white, you nigger-loving Republican, you!" said Apple Pie Smith (OI, p. 77).

This incident and the comments by Mrs. Caraway and Smith are indicative of the conflicting attitudes found in

Oklahoma. There are those who regard the treatment of Negroes by some whites as reprehensible; the epithet "nigger lover" is used by some people to describe whites who regard the Negroes as equal. Oklahoma Town was published in 1929, and the attitudes and conflicts shown in "The Nigger Doctor" still prevail in Oklahoma, as any observer of the local scene can tell.

The first story in Oklahoma Town also has as its subject racism in a midwestern town. This story, "The Nigger Lover," is the most violent story in Oklahoma Town. The protagonist is named John Parnell, the only lawyer in the community with a college degree; and from the day he moves to town he upsets it.

A new man in town was expected to get about introducing himself to people. Then they could talk over local conditions and where he had been located and how much better he liked our town (OT, p. 3).

Parnell refuses to do this, and this antagonizes some of the people.

The year after Parnell comes to the town is an election year. He urges the local Negroes to register and vote; this disturbs the town. He begins to defend Negroes in court, and he is a good enough lawyer to get his clients acquitted. "People knew then that John Parnell was a nigger-lover and after that no one had anything to do with him" (OT, pp. 4-5). Parnell comes to the attention of the Ku Klux Klan. He receives a note from the Klan which is typed on the typewriter used at the local drug store.

Parnell threatens to kill the owner if he receives another letter or is subjected to any outrage.

The next Saturday at a medicine show a Negro boy accidentally jostles a white woman. He is thrown in jail. His mother, Black Mamie, asks Parnell to get her son's freedom. He succeeds, but the boy shouts something at the white jailer. The jailer shoots the boy and knocks out Mamie with the pistol. A Negro cook shoots the jailer, and Parnell is killed as he runs to the scene.

That was the way the race riot started in our town. It went on all that Sunday. Four white men and sixteen niggers were killed. Those who picked up the bodies that afternoon found John Parnell lying face down with his lips against the cheek of Black Mamie, the nigger harlot (OT, p. 10).

It is apparent from this brief plot summary that the senselessness of the whites in the community is depicted by Milburn. Many white people would classify Parnell as a trouble maker who has no business encouraging the Negroes to vote or insisting on their legal rights. Others would regard the Negroes as villains, for they forgot their rightful place in a white southern community.

There is one aspect of the story which deserves further comment: the use of diction. Milburn's ability to catch Negro dialect is shown when Black Mamie asks Parnell to help her.

"Mr. John," said Black Mamie, "they's got my boy in the cooler and his face is all smash up and they won't let him see nobody. My boy

say he ain' had no water since Sad'dy noon and he's all het up with a fever. Mr. John, suh, cain't you do nothing about hit?" (OT, p. 8).

This passage is illustrative of the speech patterns of many illiterate Negroes. While Black Mamie does not sound like Uncle Remus in Joel Chandler Harris's fiction, she is not the same kind of black Uncle Remus is. Her actions in "The Nigger Lover" make this quite clear. More evidence of Milburn's ability to record diction is evident when the city jailer tells Parnell that he will release the boy.

"Now don't you go trying to get hard with me," said the city marshall. "I told Mamie and told Mamie that she had to keep that black idiot of her'n off the street. Hell, I ain't holding him. I don't want him in my jail. They ain't no one to wait on him, and I ain't going to run no errands for a goddam nigger. I cain't stand his nigger stink. If ole Mamie will take him home I'll turn him out now" (OT, p. 8).

The city marshall's speech characterizes him as ignorant and as a racist in his choice of words. Such words as they ain't, her'n, no errands, and cain't are all indicative of the city marshall's ignorance. But more important, the attitudes expressed and the rhythm of speech typify him as the southern lawman found in many movies.

Further indication of Milburn's ability to record diction is evident in Parnell's conversation with the druggist who has written Parnell the note from the Ku Klux Klan.

"Mr. Bascome," he Parnell said, "I have a letter from the Ku Klux Klan advising me to leave town while I am able. It is written on Klan stationery, but the typewriter used was the same one you use to type your prescription labels. Now, the Klan can do as it sees fit

about this, but I'm telling you now that if I am subjected to any outrage, if I even so much as get another threatening letter, I'm going to kill you like I would a mad dog" (OT, pp. 6-7).

This passage characterizes Parnell as an educated man. Many speakers would have placed an on after prescription labels. The structure of the sentences and the word choice indicate that Parnell is a man who chooses his words wisely and well.

These three separate paragraphs of dialogue all indicate Milburn's ability to record the speech patterns used by people belonging to three different social and economic classes. In each case, the diction used by each character adds to the richness of the story. Like other local-color artists, Milburn recorded the language of the people in his fiction with great accuracy.

A third story which has racism as its subject is "White Meat." This story is divided into four sections. Section I introduces the subject of white meat, which refers to the white meat of southern fried chicken served at the Pine Crest Mansion. The boarders at Mrs. Nettleton's boarding house continually complain about never having white meat. This is the chief interest at Pine Crest Mansion, and "Daily the subject grew more vital, not more banal, and daily their interest in it was excited and renewed" (NMT, p. 208). The boarders are afraid to approach Mrs. Nettleton about the matter, as

She was not a woman who could be approached on such a subject because she had given them to understand that she was a Southern lady who had been reduced. The loss of her husband had brought her to taking in Summer boarders (NMT, pp. 208-209).

The boarders are all intimidated by Mrs. Nettleton's manner, and her physical appearance would ward off any interloper.

Mrs. Nettleton's attitudes toward the Negroes are also introduced in Section I. She reads the New York Times and the Atlanta Constitution each day, and every afternoon she gives her boarders a digest of events.

"Oh-wup-uh?" Mrs. Nettleton would say, putting down her spectacles and the untidy roll of newspapers and assuming her pouring position by the tea table. "Ah see by the Constitution whuh they attended anothuh negrah in Miss'ippi last Sad'dy. Lemon, Mis' Chambers? Well, it wouldn't bothah me none if they wiped them all out, the black scounduls. Is it you that don' take sugah, Judge Leftwich?" (NMT, p. 310).

This passage illustrated Milburn's ability to record Southern speech patterns. What is ironic about it is that Mrs. Nettleton has stressed her Southern accent so much that it sounds forced. She sounds almost like Black Mamie in "The Nigger Lover."

The boarders at Pine Crest Mansion blame Mrs. Nettleton's extreme dislike of Negroes on a commonly shared belief that Mrs. Nettleton's husband had been murdered by a Negro. There is no foundation for this belief. While they do not agree with Mrs. Nettleton about the character of the Negro, they do sympathize with her. The reasoning of the

boarders is important, for the question about the fate of Mrs. Nettleton's husband is of major importance.

Section II begins by pointing out that Mrs. Nettleton likes to talk about her late husband. "She liked to review the manly virtues that had shone in Mr. Nettleton as they can shine only in a Southern gentleman" (NMT, p. 212). Mr. Nettleton had been a gambler who had won Pine Crest Mansion in a card game and left Mrs. Nettleton her diamonds, the Mansion, and two small daughters. Mrs. Nettleton's favorite topics at the dinner table are her husband, the loss of wealth suffered by her husband's death, her hatred of Negroes, and her two daughters. The last named subject is her especial favorite, and Mrs. Nettleton describes her daughters as paragons in every way imaginable. The boarders resent the two girls because they eat the white meat before the chicken is served to the boarders.

A conflict rises in "White Meat" when one of the daughters, Agnes, interrupts her mother as she is telling her favorite story, a lynching she attended in Georgia, by telling her mother that "a real lady would not gloat over such horrible things" (NMT, p. 216). After a few tense minutes, Mrs. Nettleton sarcastically asks her daughter if she would marry a Negro.

Agnes pushed back her chair suddenly and stood up. "If I loved him I certainly would," she said firmly. Then she tossed down her napkin and thudded flat-heeled out of the room (NMT, p. 216).

Mrs. Nettleton almost faints, but she recovers long enough to blame the college Agnes attends for teaching her daughter these ideas. "Aggie nevah got no notion like that at home!" (NMT, p. 217).

In Section III, the conflict gives the boarders something to talk about besides the white meat. The two girls leave Pine Crest Mansion without telling their mother. Mrs. Nettleton tells the boarders that the girls have gone to Syracuse for a short visit, but the boarders know that she is lying. As time passes, Mrs. Nettleton becomes more haggard. She finally receives a letter from the two girls in which they announce their complete independence from their mother. The boarders sympathize with Mrs. Nettleton. She becomes hysterical and says,

God knows Ah did evuhthing Ah could foh mah guls! God knows Ah tried to give mah guls evah advantage! God knows Ah did. . . . It's the low-down Nettleton in them. None of mah folks would evah have done a trashy thing lak this! That low-down Nettleton tribe was paht niggah! Evahbody knowed that was why he left the place he was from. But Ah never knowed it till Ah's had two babies by they Daddy. Befo God, Ah left him the day Ah found it out. As God is mah witness Ah left they Daddy when Ah found out what he was! (NMT, p. 220\_).

This revelation shocks the boarders. That evening there was enough white meat for everyone; but the boarders were not satisfied, as "there was really nothing left to talk about" (NMT, p. 221).

This story about racism depends on an ironic turn of events to achieve its effect. The attitudes of Mrs. Nettleton and those of her boarders are a direct contrast

to those of the daughters. The four subjects which Mrs. Nettleton was so fond of discussing have been treated ironically and cynically. The height of the story's irony is achieved when the reader learns that the cause for the daughters' leaving home is their willingness to marry a Negro, a thing their own mother has actually done. Mrs. Nettleton can no longer discuss her daughters, her lost wealth, her hatred of Negroes, or her husband. What makes "White Meat" so interesting is that Milburn has juxtaposed Mrs. Nettleton's fictional husband with her real one, her attitude and her daughters' attitude. Even the title is significant, for in vulgar usage the term can refer to sexual intercourse with a white woman. These things are all skillfully blended to make the story one of Milburn's best. It is every bit as carefully crafted as "A Student in Economics," and the subject matter is still applicable today.

### Rotary

George Milburn wrote two short stories about the Rotarians. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sinclair Lewis has satirized the luncheon-clubs and their middle class attributes of coarseness, smugness, and crassness in Babbitt. Some critics of No More Trumpets thought that further satire of the Rotary was not necessary. These critics failed to see that Milburn shows that the luncheon-club mind exists not just in Zenith, the Zip City, but also in

small midwestern towns and that the malaise is not restricted to large cities.

Published in No More Trumpets, "A Pretty Cute Little Stunt" is divided into three sections. The first section describes a shenanigan of the local police chief and then shifts into the subject matter of the story, a bum who says he is an ex-Rotarian. It seems that the bum wishes to speak to the local Rotary Club and to give the members the benefit of his experience. The necessary arrangements are made, but with the stipulation that the bum is not to ask for any remuneration. The bum replies by saying, "Why of course I have no intention of begging for alms. Of course not. That wouldn't be Rotary. . . ." (NMT, p. 141).

The main emphasis in Section II is on the speech the bum gives. As the narrator says,

Well he [the bum] finished up by saying that all his message was that he could get us to live a little more like the Master Rotarian, and follow in His footsteps, his mission would be fulfilled, and, even if he was a ragged bum, he would 'a' done something worthwhile (NMT, p. 146).

The Rotarians respond by starting to take up a collection for the bum, but he removes his ragged coat and the Rotarians discover that he is a clergyman from a neighboring city.

In Section II, the bum asks the Rotarians not to give his stunt away. They all agree that bums are human beings, as this was the lesson they got from the bum's appearance. The Club gives the bum twenty-five dollars to defray his

expenses, and the monologue closes with these lines, "Well, R. A., give me a ring when it's anything in the insurance line" (NMT, p. 149).

Wilbur L. Schramm in a study guide prepared for Edward O'Brien's 50 Best American Short Stories comments on "A Pretty Cute Little Stunt." He points out that satire is closely related to serious narrative and that Milburn writes satire with skill.

He [Milburn] tells the story in the first person, not only for intimacy but also to take us into the luncheon-club mind. As he works his plot up to its most interesting point we are aware of a few sour notes. The first is the opening story of the bridegroom handcuffed and taken from his bride as a practical joke, the reiteration of the Rotary Spirit and 'That wouldn't be Rotary,' are themselves suspicious. But perhaps we aren't sure of the author's meaning until he works our interest up to the climactic point, with the Rotarians in tears, and then tells us the most sodden sort of anticlimax: the bum is a masquerading minister who will get \$25 for his expenses. The effect is like that of making a magnificent high dive into a pool of oatmeal.<sup>10</sup>

Schramm points out that Milburn could be compared to Sinclair Lewis in commenting about luncheon clubs. He believes that Milburn uses less caricature and satirizes more subtly. He also thinks that Milburn is like John Steinbeck in that both of them are moved by social inequalities.<sup>11</sup> What Schramm does not mention is that this story places Christianity and Rotary on the same level. The masquerading minister-bum refers to Christ as the Master Rotarian and asks the Rotarians to follow in His footsteps. This linking of the Rotary and religion gives "A Pretty

Cute Little Stunt" an ironic turn that it might not have otherwise. It certainly adds to the texture of the story.

The other story Milburn wrote which deals with the Rotary is "The Apostate," which has been included in some anthologies. It is divided into five separate sections, each of which carries the plot forward to the story's inevitable conclusion. Section I of "The Apostate" establishes the main idea of the story, the reasons for the narrator's quitting Rotary Club. In Section II the narrator describes his relationship to his son, who is a student at the university. He describes their relationship in terms of the Rotary when he says,

No, Harry, I always felt like a father has got certain responsibilities to his son. That's just good Rotary. That's all that is. You know that's just good Rotary yourself, Harry. Well, I always wanted Hubert to think about me just like I was a pal to him, or say an elder brother, maybe. I don't know that him and I ever was that way in the fullest sense of the word, but God knows I've tried to make things like that between us. I mean I've always wanted to be just a big buddy to Hubert (NMT, pp. 39-40).

This quotation points to the conflict that H. T. faces. He evidently enjoys the Rotary Club and hates to give it up, but he feels that it has come between him and his son. This rather trivial matter is an indication of the lack of a mature relationship between the two. H. T. seems more worried about whether or not his son approves of Rotary than he does whether or not his son respects him as a father, not as a buddy or an elder brother. H. T. cannot

decide between his own self respect and Rotary or his son and being a buddy.

In Section II, H. T. tells about his visit to the university his son is attending. His son attempts to persuade H. T. to remove his Rotary pin from his lapel. H. T. is full of righteous indignation, but he finally does remove the pin, with some misgivings. These are accurate, for Hubert comes home for the summer vacation with his mind set against Rotary. In Section IV, the breach between H. T. and Hubert widens, as Hubert keeps hammering away at Rotary. Because the father thinks his association with Rotary may be robbing him of his son's regard, his attendance at Rotary meetings becomes irregular. But one day he passes a Rotary meeting and hears the members singing a Rotary song; he says to himself, "The Hell with Hubert and his highbrow college-fraternity ideas, I'm going to Rotary next week" (NMT, p. 44).

H. T. does attend a Rotary meeting, but he forgets to call a fellow Rotary member by his first name and is fined a dollar. This incident in Section V causes H. T. some distress, as he wishes he could send the dollar to Hubert instead. He definitely decides to leave Rotary and to devote his time and money to the fraternity. To his listener, H. T. points out that the fraternity sings songs, just as the Rotary does; he also tells about his son's being fined for not calling him H. T. He concludes his

conversation by saying that the boys in the fraternity "are the builders of the coming generation" (NMT, p. 45).

It is apparent that Milburn has used juxtaposition to satirize both the Rotary and the fraternity. He contrasts the singing of the two organizations and the fines for failing to use a first name at meetings. The story also compares the attitudes of the two organizations. Both the Rotary Club and the fraternity appear to be inconsequential and worthless organizations. As H. T. describes them, they do not really do much of any value. As they both spawn the same sort of luncheon-club rationale, they are identical in ideas. It is this kind of thing that Milburn opposes. To H. T. and to Hubert, these social organizations are more important than the proper relationship between a father and his son. H. T. thinks that by leaving the Rotary Club and becoming active in his son's fraternity he may improve his relationship with his son. Probably all he does lose is the respect of his son and become the laughing stock of the fraternity. Fraternities and luncheon clubs are both harbingers of social inequality, and Milburn manages to satirize both in "The Apostate."

Milburn uses the first person point of view in this story to attain certain effects. It allows the reader to see the type of mind H. T. has. The reader can see H. T.'s reasons for acting as he does, and this allows the reader to have a small amount of sympathy for H. T. but yet keeps

the reader a good distance from him. This point of view also demonstrates Milburn's ear for diction, as a paragraph from Section I indicates.

Don't you never take it into your head that I haven't been wrestling with this thing plenty. I mean I've argued it all with myself. Now I'm going to tell you the whyfor and the whereof and the howcome about this, Harry, but kindly don't let what I say go no further. Please keep it strictly on the Q.T. Because I guess the rest of the boys would suspicion that I was turning highbrow on them. But you've always been a buddy to me. Harry, you mangy old son of a hoss thief, so what I'm telling you is the straight dope (NMT, p. 38).

Milburn is able to catch the rhythm and nuances of speech patterns of a midwestern businessman. Such expressions as whyfor, whereof, howcome, mangy old hoss thief, and straight dope could just as easily be used by Babbitt, as a brief passage from Babbitt shows.

"How's the old horse-thief?"

"All right, I guess. How're you, you poor shrimp?"

"I'm first-rate, you second-hand hunk o' cheese."

Reassured thus of their high fondness, Babbitt grunted, "You're a fine swell guy you are! Ten minutes late!" Riesling snapped, "Well, you're lucky to have a chance to lunch with a gentleman!"<sup>12</sup>

Milburn has treated in a short story form what Sinclair Lewis satirized in Babbitt. Both "A Pretty Cute Little Stunt" and "The Apostate" are like Babbitt in tone, attitude, characterization, and diction.

## Family

Many short story writers have written about familial matters. Ruth Suckow, for example, is one short story writer who used family relationships as a vehicle in "One of Three Others" and "Mrs. Vogel and Annie." Katherine Ann Porter also shows interest in this subject in her short stories relating to The Old Order. Thus, local-color writers are no different from other writers of short fiction in that they too must deal with forces which shape the characters in their works. In his work, George Milburn is no exception, as in some of his stories he writes about the lack of communication in a family and about permissive parents.

"Those Seagrave Boys" is a story which satirizes permissive parents, but the subjects of the story are unusual. Old Man Seagrave is a bootlegger who made his money selling apricot brandy. He has been forced to curtail his operations because the newly elected sheriff raised his protection money to one hundred dollars a month. An interesting facet of Old Man Seagrave is his use of Scriptural quotations and his belief that people who drink corn whiskey are defiling their bodies. For example, Old Man Seagrave comments on the quality of his brandy when he says,

Now, this here brandy of mine ain't never defiled no one. It's good for your bowels and it tones up your system. Paul says, 'Take a little wine for your stomach's sake,' but Paul never had tasted none of my brandy. I been

drinking this brandy for thirty years. I ain't had a sick day in my life and I'm away past sixty (OT, pp. 188-189).

As is evident in this passage, Old Man Seagrave is a rather illiterate man.

Old Man Seagrave has four sons who "were the terror of all that hill country west of town. There wasn't anything they wouldn't do" (OT, p. 180). The oldest boy was sentenced to the electric chair for murder, another son was fleeing from a posse as he had assaulted a sixteen year old girl attending a Holy Roller meeting, a third son had set fire to a celluloid collar worn by another boy. The next to the youngest of the four sons comes in and demands some money. When Old Man Seagrave asks him why he wants the money, the boy replies, "Lissen here, you goddam old simp! Are you goin' to jar loose with that jack, or am I going to have to bust you one to get it?" (OT, p. 191). The boy's attitude toward his father is evident in his words. His threatening tone and his choice of words indicate that he does not have any amount of respect for his father. It might also be said that the comment from the boy characterizes him as a rough and undesirable character. Old Man Seagrave is so wrapped up in his apricot brandy and Scriptural quotations that he does not realize what kind of boys he has reared. He says that

if anybody had worked hard bringing up a passel of boys, learning them to fear God and drink pure liquor instead of this rot-gut like some of them

is selling nowadays. I reckon they'd understand them boys of mine. Them boys ain't mean boys, Judge. They're just playful (OT, p. 192).

Old Man Seagrave has allowed his boys to do as they please, and the results are obvious. In the one instance he blames rot-gut corn whiskey for his boy's assault on the girl. Many observers would probably lay the man's failure to his apricot brandy. But the attitude of the story contradicts this.

"Inquire Within" is a very skillful story which also is about familial relationships. Like most of the stories of No More Trumpets, "Inquire Within" is divided into sections. The story opens as Mrs. Harmon, the narrator of the story, is showing a new, modern house to a young married couple. Mrs. Harmon, a very loquacious woman, tells the couple that, after her husband died, her children attempted to get her to go various places. They think that the house Mrs. Harmon lives in is too big and that she will get lonely. They keep trying to get Mrs. Harmon to leave; and, when it is apparent to her that they are literally going to pack her suitcase for her, she consents by telling them, "'No, thank you: if you're bound to move me right out of my own house, at least have the consideration to let me take the things with me I want to take.' So they did" (NMT, p. 230). In using the words move me right out of my house, Mrs. Harmon did not realize how prophetic these words were.

In Section II, Mrs. Harmon tells about her ride to her daughter's house in Fort Madison, Iowa. Although Mrs.

Harmon enjoys her visit for a while, she soon begins to talk about returning home. But her children keep persuading her to remain the whole summer. The summer drags on, and finally Mrs. Harmon decides to go home in spite of the urgings of her children.

Without saying nothing to nobody, I went to my bedroom. They had give me a room down stairs instead of upstairs like I had been used to. And I started packing my clothes. When I had got ever' thing in, I put on my black satin dress [a dress bought for the trip to Iowa], and picked up my suitcase, and came on out (NMT, p. 237).

Mrs. Harmon's daughter attempts to persuade her to stay a little longer, but Mrs. Harmon insists on leaving that day. And she does so.

In Section IV Mrs. Harmon makes the return trip home. She is eager to get back to the house in which she and her husband had lived for forty-seven years, but she finds that during her absence her children have had the old house torn down and a new brick house built in its place. Mrs. Harmon is heartbroken.

As soon as it dawned on me that my old house was gone, the bottom of my heart just seemed to drop out. I thought for a minute there I was going to faint . . . how I ever kept from breaking down and crying is more than I can tell. . . . My old home was gone! I kept thinking that it was one of these nightmares I always woke up from, and it was two or three days before I got out of the notion that it wasn't just a bad dream (NMT, p. 241).

Mrs. Harmon does not like her new house. Ironically, she decides to rent the house and spend the remainder of her days with the children who were kind enough to build her the

new house. As she says, "And if I space my visits out far enough, the rent on this house will be enough to keep me in traveling expenses" (NMT, p. 243).

It is apparent that this story is built on an ironic reversal. Mrs. Harmon's children mean well, but they learn that they should have listened to their mother when she told them how much she enjoyed the old two-storied house with its flower beds, mocking birds, and garden. They failed to realize that by destroying the house Mrs. Harmon had lived in for so long they also destroyed the past associations with her family, her husband, and her whole life. As she says, "But I had lived the biggest part of my life in the old house, and me coming into this new one to live was just like my going off somewhere and getting married again, at my age" (NMT, p. 242). Mrs. Harmon was contented and happy in the old house, but her children did not attempt to understand her. The failure of a younger generation to understand the older forms the central idea of "Inquire Within."

One of the most striking things about "Inquire Within" is the characterization of Mrs. Harmon. As the story is told from the first person point of view, the reader can understand Mrs. Harmon's feelings about her old house and the new brick house. In the passages quoted, Mrs. Harmon's language characterizes her as a plain, ordinary housewife. She is not well educated; yet she is able to express her thoughts with clarity. One facet of Mrs. Harmon that influences the structure of the story is her garrulity.

Mr. Harmon told Mrs. Harmon that she chattered on without anyone's knowing what she was saying. But in "Inquire Within" Milburn uses this device wherein he is able to give the reader all the details about Mrs. Harmon's past that are necessary for the reader's understanding of the story. Milburn has blended characterization and point of view to express effectively its theme.

While "Inquire Within" is a much better story than "Those Seagrave Boys," "Sugar Be Sweet!" is one of Milburn's finest short stories. In the story, Milburn juxtaposes scenes and attitudes to gain the total effect of the story. The story opens with a comment about Spring.

Spring was a soft green cloud hovering over the willow tree in the corner of Whalen's front yard the day that Marion died. . . . There were still to be rain and bitter days, it is true, but the notes of renasence were in the air. All about there was a quickening stir, and it was inconsistent that a body should die at such a time. It refurbished all the platitudes about death (NMT, p. 116).

This quotation juxtaposes death and spring, and as juxtaposition is used throughout "Sugar Be Sweet!" the pattern for the story is set. The interest of the story focuses upon the fact that Walter Whalen is the last person to hear his daughter, Marion, speak. In his recollection, Whalen recalls that he had heard these words because he had made a scene about their being no toothpicks in the ruby glass tumbler in which they were kept. Mrs. Whalen has retreated to the kitchen chastened. "That was how it came about that

the father was the only one to hear the girl's last words" (NMT, p. 118).

In Section II of "Sugar Be Sweet!" the focus of attention shifts to Walter Whalen, who is similar to George F. Babbitt. Whalen has decided to walk to work that day instead of taking his car. He is overweight and he says to himself,

"I've got to take off some of this belly.  
Must begin to get out and take more exercise."  
But he contented himself with bringing his  
rubber heels sharply down on the concrete sidewalk, feeling a satisfying resilience (NMT, p. 120).

In Babbitt, George F. Babbitt pursues youthfulness through an affair with Tanis Judique. Walter Whalen also pursues youth, but in a more mundane fashion. He combs his hair so as to cover "the shining pink encroachments of his forehead" (NMT, p. 121).

Another similarity between Babbitt and Whalen is the trip that each takes to work. While Babbitt does ride in a car and Whalen walks, both smoke cigars and greet various members of their respective business communities as they go to town. But Whalen, who gets to the main business street of the town, finds the area decorated with pennants. In a conversation with Virgil Clay, the local undertaker and furniture store owner, Whalen learns about the Lucky Moon Coupon scheme. The system is like that of modern day trading stamps, only the people bid on goods at a weekly auction instead of trading them in at a redemption

center. This is a bit of foreshadowing in that Whalen asks jokingly if the farmers will kill their families to get coupons for buying a coffin from Virgil.

In Section II of "Sugar Be Sweet!" the relationship between Mrs. Clara Whalen and Marion is developed. There were bonds between the mother and daughter which went beyond the ordinary, and this often made Whalen feel like a stranger. Mrs. Whalen has just nursed Marion through the last winter of her life. "The doctor said that the mother's constancy had probably brought Marion through the winter" (NMT, p. 129). Mrs. Whalen was "a noiseless, mousy woman who had not had an independent thought in twenty years" (NMT, p. 128). She is completely subservient to her husband's will, as the incident about the toothpicks illustrates. That day she was the one to find Marion dead. The neighbors thought the girl's death incongruous on a day when life was beginning anew for the earth.

In Section IV, the auction for the Lucky Moon coupons is held. This sale occurs two weeks after Marion's funeral. Among the merchandise to be sold is a hundred pound sack of sugar from the participating grocer. In small towns farm auctions are social as well as business events, "and the Lucky Moon Sale resembled a farm auction closely enough to be an enjoyable occasion" (NMT, p. 133). Local auctioneers are noted for their ability to joke with the people and get them to spend their money. The auctioneer in this story is no exception.

Section V begins the evening of the sale. The hundred pound sack of sugar has been delivered to the Whalen's house. When Whalen tells his wife that he has spent eight hundred dollars' worth of coupons, Mrs. Whalen is amazed.

"Eight hundred dollars' worth? My goodness! Where did we get eight hundred dollars' worth of coupons?"

"Where do you suppose?" Walter said, sharply, his head turned down toward his plate. He reached out for the sugar bowl to sweeten his coffee. His spoon grated the bowl's crusted inside.

"Walter, you don't mean from--"

He flung down his spoon and interrupted her loudly, "Clara, you've let the sugar bowl get empty again?" (NMT, p. 135).

Mrs. Whalen does not get up from the table nor does she fill the sugar bowl. Whalen swears at his wife and then goes to the kitchen to fill the sugar bowl. "Clara Whalen sat very still, her eyes hard with loathing" (NMT, p. 136).

This final episode in "Sugar Be Sweet!" is juxtaposed to the one that takes place earlier in the story when the tumbler of toothpicks becomes empty. Thus, Mrs. Whalen's response to the empty sugar bowl and her husband's demand is more poignant for the reader. Mrs. Whalen will no longer be submissive to Walter Whalen. His own crudeness and lack of tact in using the coupons from the purchase of Marion's coffin have destroyed the relationship between him and his wife. The sugar he bought with the coupons will not be sweet. The sugar serves as a symbol of the division that separates Walter and Clara Whalen the rest of their lives.

"Sugar Be Sweet!" is one of George Milburn's most skillfully constructed stories. He juxtaposes the attitudes of the Whalens, the empty toothpick holder and the sugar bowl, and spring and death. He also juxtaposes the style of the story. In Sections I and II, the language used evokes a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. These scenes stand in direct contrast to Scene III in which Whalen goes to town and Scene IV in which the auction takes place. In these sections the language is robust. These differing attitudes toward life conflict in Section V and form the ending of the story. In each section, Milburn has made sure that each event leads the reader toward the inevitable conclusion.

As shown in this chapter, Milburn has used setting, diction, and a lean narrative line to satirize the social forces of religion, race, Rotary, and family. By using a small town in Oklahoma, Milburn has shown the reader that these forces affect people who live in small midwestern communities. He also used diction to a good advantage in allowing it to characterize the people in the town. As always, Milburn used a well-constructed story and juxtaposition to attain the irony so prevalent in his work. Thus, he combines the characteristics of a local-color artist with the attitude of a satirist in these stories and sketches about race, religion, Rotary, and family.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert E. Spiller in A Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller and others (New York, 1946), p. 1017.

<sup>2</sup>Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1895-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature (Great Neck, 1958). Heiney classifies both Ellen Glasgow and William Faulkner as regionalists.

<sup>4</sup>Ray B. West, Jr., The Short Story in America, 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1952), pp. 92-93).

<sup>5</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 269.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Shockley, Southwest Writers Anthology (Austin, 1967), p. 226.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>See Cynthia Pearl Maus, Christ and the Fine Arts (New York, 1938).

<sup>9</sup>George Milburn could have been influenced by race riots in Tulsa. According to Angie Debo in Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capitol (Norman, 1943), "In 1921 an estimated fifteen hundred men stole out of Tulsa to watch a bombastic Ku Klux Klan initiation ceremony in the outlying hills where the headlights of many automobiles converged upon a cross of fire. The same year racial bitterness culminated in a riot that brought the city unpleasant publicity throughout the United States. White men invaded the Negro district stretching like a sector of a circle northeast of the Union Station, and laid it waste by fire. The Negroes made an armed attack against the downtown district. For two days the city was under martial law. Ten whites and twenty-six Negroes are known to have been

killed. After order was restored, the more farsighted white leaders gave systematic assistance to the Negroes in rebuilding their ruined community." p. 101.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Schramm in 50 Best American Short Stories, ed. Edward O'Brien (Boston, 1939), pp. 901-902.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (New York, 1922), p. 50.

## CHAPTER IV

### MANIPULATION OF MATERIAL

Anecdotes are short narratives which detail particulars of an interesting episode or event. They differ from short stories in that they do not have complicated plots and yet still have a unity of the elements of time and place in their relationship to a single episode.<sup>1</sup> A different definition for anecdotes is that of Henry James. According to Leon Edel there were for James

two kinds of short narratives--the "anecdote" and the "picture." The anecdote, he said, was an account of "something that had oddly happened to someone." To remain an anecdote, it had to point directly to that person, and keep him at the very centre of the story. . . . The story which was a "picture" differed from the "anecdote" in that it was not susceptible of becoming a dramatic action. It was usually a composition in a small frame--a foreground, a background, a centre of composition.<sup>2</sup>

By this definition, the short stories in this chapter should probably be described as anecdotal.

George Milburn uses the anecdotal method quite well. In this chapter emphasis is placed on one use of the anecdotal method. These stories center on an individual so as to reveal the traits of the central characters which make them unusual individuals. Thus, it would seem that George Milburn has some affinities with Sherwood Anderson, for as the characters in Winesburg, Ohio, are grotesque, even so

the characters in some of Milburn's fiction are grotesque. There is also a similarity in form, as Anderson's stories are "character-plotted, and the action reveals the essence of the central figure's being."<sup>3</sup> There are, however, two important differences. First, Anderson wrote what Foster-Harris in The Basic Patterns of Plot would call the literary plot, which "looks back through time, not forward."<sup>4</sup> This technique allows the reader to perceive what has happened to the character and why he is the sort of person he is. In Anderson's short stories, the reader knows why the character is grotesque. In Milburn's short stories, usually only the present condition of the character is described, as there is no attempt to explain why the character is grotesque. The second difference is the final effect. In Winesburg, Ohio, the usual final effect upon the reader is pessimistic. In most of Milburn's work, the reader becomes fully aware of the unpleasantness; but often he is left with a bit of wry humor.

In the first group of stories, the effect of greed upon the characters is the main emphasis. Milburn has used his material to show that the greed of the people warps them. One of the bitterest stories about greed and its effects upon the relationship of a father and a son is "Willie Chalmers." Old Man Chalmers, who runs the local cotton gin, "was so tight he wouldn't spend money for equipment that the gin needed badly. All the pulley belts were patches and laced until they would scarcely hold together"

(OT, p. 35). Old Man Chalmers has three sons. Both the oldest son and the youngest son have been disappointments. The middle boy, Willie, is a good boy who works for his father at the gin. Willie is injured when the fly wheel in the gin gets hold of his overall suspenders and beats his legs to a pulp. A Negro man puts Willie on his wagon load of cotton and hauls him to the doctor's office. When the Negro returns to the gin and attempts to sell the cotton, Old Man Chalmers refuses to buy it even when the farmer points out to Old Man Chalmers whose blood is on the cotton.

"I don't care if it's blood from Jesus Christ," said old Chalmers. "It's done ruint your load of cotton. Drive on off them scales. There's another wagon waiting to get weighed" (OT, p. 37).

Because Old Man Chalmers is more interested in money than his own son's welfare, his greed for money has made him into an abnormality.

The structure of "Willie Chalmers" also contributes to its total effect. The story opens by mentioning Willie Chalmer's having to scoot around town on a platform with rollers. The next sentence points out that Willie's father is the wealthiest cotton buyer in town. Then the story proceeds to discuss the gin, Old Man Chalmers' greed, and the accident which cripples Willie. As the reader becomes aware that the subject of the story is Willie and his father's greed, Milburn shifts from the present to the past with little effort.

The setting is also a reflection of Old Man Chalmer's greed. The action takes place at the cotton gin. While the gin itself seems to be malicious in maiming for life the only son of Chalmers that would amount to anything, the blame lies with the father and his greed, not the machine. Thus, while some naturalists might tend to write the story so as to place the blame on the machine, Milburn has chosen to emphasize the human element.

There is also an emphasis on human greed in "Iron Filigree." Vince Blanc is a blacksmith who

got the contract to build the steel cells for the new county jail. He lost money on the job, because he had to underbid the jail contractor in Cincinnati, but the work he did on these steel cages made the county jail the show-place for years. He decorated one of the cages with lacey, wrought-iron scroll work. He wanted to finish them all that way, but the county commissioners were in a hurry for the job (OT, pp. 67-68).

Vince is married to a fat woman named Martha, who grows fatter as Vince grows thinner. He dies unexpectedly, and Martha Blanc soon becomes bedfast. Two neighboring families, the Riggses and the Stufflebeans, take care of Martha, who becomes cross and cranky. Each family distrusts the other, and "When the two families began to speculate on whom Mrs. Blanc was going to favor in her will [,] the enmity burst forth in all its bitterness" (OT, p. 70). Mrs. Blanc continues to grow fatter; and when she dies, there are two coffins for her. Each coffin is from a different family. Because the Stufflebeans had measured Martha last, their coffin is large enough. Ironically, "Martha Blanc left her

money to the county, specifying that it be used to finish the iron scrollwork on the cells in the county jail" (OT, p. 71).

As is obvious from the plot summary, Milburn has manipulated the subject matter of this story in such a way as to lay stress upon the greed of the two families. While in "Willie Chalmers" it is apparent that the subject is greed, in "Iron Filigree" the treatment of the subject is a little more subtle and not quite as bitter; consequently, the reader is left with a smile at the conclusion of "Iron Filigree." One other nice touch to the story is that as Martha Blanc grows fatter, the Stufflebeans and the Riggses become more bitter and more greedy.

In "Early Abernathy," there is a combination not only of greed but also of death. The first part of the story points out how Early Abernathy, the local undertaker, attempts to stay ahead of his competition. He takes an embalming course at the state college, he makes patriotic speeches during the war, he builds a new funeral home, he buys a new hearse which can be converted into an ambulance by removing the carved wooden sides, and he begins his own cemetery, since the Odd Fellows Cemetery is always rundown. The cemetery is not successful at first; but when a local serviceman dies, Abernathy reserves a plot for the man in his new cemetery and erects a monument over the man's grave. This act aids business a great deal.

Gerald Norton has been a young and successful businessman working in Kansas City. When he dies, Abernathy has charge of his funeral. He makes certain that everything at the funeral is done correctly. At the conclusion of the funeral he says,

It was a terrible thing that a fine boy like Gerald had to pass on. It certainly was. But I'll say one thing, Mrs. Norton. We give him just as swell a funeral as they could of give him in Kansas City and maybe a little sweller (OT, p. 85).

The crudeness of Abernathy's remarks is indicative of his egotism and his full awareness that this particular funeral will aid his business.

Abernathy's aggressiveness is evident in the paragraph which describes the funeral.

It was a big funeral, all right. Earl Abernathy had charge of it. He was everywhere. He didn't forget anything. He issued the pallbearers white cotton gloves. He cautioned them not to tilt the casket. He arranged the flowers in a great bank around the coffin. He acted as head usher at the Presbyterian church, where the funeral was held. He calmed Miss Naydine Fritts, who had been Gerald's childhood sweetheart and who was on the program for a solo. He was at the wheel of the funeral car. At the graveside he collected all the cards from the floral offerings and brought them over to the automobile where Mr. and Mrs. Norton were sitting, very stiff and white (OT, p. 85).

In this passage, Milburn has used active verbs requiring objects to a good advantage by using them to characterize Earl Abernathy. The reader can see Earl Abernathy bustling around the church and cemetery much as an officious businessman bustles around his place of business.

The main character in "Soda-Water Green" is also another businessman who is motivated by greed. Soda-Water Green, who owns the local pop factory, is a rather indolent businessman, a contrast to Earl Abernathy. When Green buys the pop factory, he hires a union bottler and a boy as a bottle washer and then "spent most of his time in the mahogany inclosure in the front part of the First National Bank talking about business conditions" (OT, p. 117). One day the bottler, Heavy Myers, becomes tipsy of Jamaican ginger mixed with soda pop. He tells Bud Merrick, the bottle washer,

"I'll tell you there's something funny about this man Green we're working for," said Heavy. "Sits around there in the First National Bank all day trying to look like Big Money. I found out the other day that he's got a five-thousand-dollar fire insurance policy on this goddam dump. And this goddam dump ain't worth a thousand. I wouldn't give five hundred for it. . . . The other night I come back down here to get my pipe. I'd forgot it. And Green was back there fooling around in the goddam engine room. He didn't have no lights on. I tell you there's something mighty goddam funny going on in this goddam dump" (OT, p. 118).

This conversation, which characterizes Heavy as a typical laborer, foreshadows later events in the story. Green closes the pop factory temporarily; then one day two weeks later he rehires Bud Merrick to clean up the building.

"That afternoon about three o'clock, S. W. Green came to the street from the pop factory and came into the lobby of the Kentucky Colonel Hotel" (OT, p. 119). Ten minutes later, Bud rushes to the hotel and tells Green that the

factory is on fire. The fire department is summoned, but the building burns. The boy is questioned by one of the men of the town, Delmer Dilbeck. Bud tells about Green's tampering with the engine. Delmer accuses Bud of setting the fire with a cigarette when he was smoking in the back of the pop factory. Bud denies this, but no one believes him until "a month later when Soda-Water Green collected his insurance money and ran away with a telephone girl, leaving his wife and children on the town" (OT, p. 123).

In "Soda-Water Green" Milburn allows the reader to observe the characters as they are. Green is a crooked, immoral man who takes advantage of a boy. Delmer Dilbeck, who appears in a story named after him previously discussed in Chapter II, chooses to ignore Bud's truthful description of what happened at the pop factory, although there is reason to believe Bud, for Green had been tampering with the gasoline engine the day of the fire. When Bud says that the accusation about his setting the fire is "a goddam lie" (OT, p. 123), Dilbeck's response is to tell Bud that he is a disappointment to his family. These are hardly suitable words for a boy who is honest. Green's behavior prior to the fire and the foreshadowing in "Soda-Water Green" demonstrate the hypocrisy of the older men whose characters are warped by their own greed.

The plot of "Soda-Water Green" is well controlled, as Milburn has allowed each incident and conversation in the story to lead to an almost inevitable conclusion. The

ending is not ironic, because it fits the pattern that is established earlier in the story. Like most local-color artists, George Milburn has told a good tale; in addition, he has allowed the reader to see beneath the outward appearances of some small-town businessmen.

"Banker Brigham" is another story about a small-town businessman. The first sentences of the story indicate the idea behind it: "Old Man J. W. Brigham was never wrong about anything. He was that hard-headed" (OT, p. 143). The story illustrates this with three examples. First, Brigham, who is the local banker, makes an error when he cashes a check for a farmer. When the farmer proves to Brigham that he has made an error, Brigham refuses to admit it. A second incident which illustrates Brigham's stubbornness is his refusal to admit that coupe can be correctly pronounced coo-pay. When a woman from Rhode Island attempts to correct Brigham's pronunciation, he replies, "Well, you may of called it coo-pay back east, but out here we call it coop. And that's what it is--coop" (OT, p. 144). A third illustration is given in the story when a man points out that Brigham has not computed his own age correctly. Brigham insists that he is seventy-three, although according to the birth date he gave the man he is actually sixty-three.

It is Brigham's insistence on his infallibility that finally kills him. There is a weed patch in the town, and Brigham maintains that criminals can hide in it. This is a

standing joke in the community. "Old Man Brigham always thought he was so right about everything. Some of the wits thought it would be a good thing to give the old man a scare when he was passing the weed patch" (OT, p. 146). These wits load a shot-gun shell with red berries; and when Old Man Brigham comes by the weed patch on his way home from the bank, the best shot in the bunch shoots Brigham in the chest. He falls forward, convinced that he has been mortally wounded. The doctor attempts to convince the banker that he has just had a bad scare, but Old Man Brigham is convinced that his lungs are full of buckshot. "Banker Brigham died that night. Dr. Boyle said that he had a cerebral hemorrhage" (OT, p. 147).

As is evident, Old Man Brigham's pride and stubbornness are the cause of his death. The story opens with Brigham's making a simple error. As it proceeds, the errors become more serious; and Brigham's refusal to admit that he has made a mistake kills him. This movement from a simple error to the final event makes the story credible, as the narrative line of the story moves from the trivial to the serious.

Of the stories on egotism, "Garlic" is the most amusing. The protagonist of the story, Tom Proctor, is a farmer who is not very well liked

because he was one of those hateful persons who always make their brags and go ahead and do the impossible things they said they were going to do. Every one there knew that Tom was just like the other farmers, that he had come to Oklahoma

without a pan to wash in or a window to throw water out. But Tom was always talking about being a diversified farmer. He had done well. He had started as a tenant farmer and now he owned sixty acres of the best bottom land around there (OT, p. 165).

The last diversification Tom Proctor plans is the raising of garlic, as the previous year it had been in great demand. The garlic Tom plants grows very well, but that fall no supplier buys very much garlic from him. Consequently, Tom stores the garlic in his barn; and in due time, the garlic begins to rot. The people in the community begin to tease Tom about his crop and its odor. The next spring he does not plant a crop. The local mail carrier, who is hard of hearing and cannot smell, had first spread the word around the community about Tom's new crop. He innocently makes the mistake of asking Tom about the success of the garlic crop. Tom attacks the mailman, who loses control of his car, and "It careened through the Sunpoint Farm gate" (OT, p. 170). Tom Proctor's pride is so strong that he refuses to admit that he has failed. He thinks that he is a much better farmer than the rest of the people in the community. Tom's pride costs him the regard of the community. His wife and children also leave him when he beats his wife because she makes a comment to Tom about the garlic crop.

"Garlic" is interesting from a structural point of view. The story begins with the local mail carrier's asking Tom Proctor what he plans on planting in the spring. In this fashion, the subject of garlic is brought into the

sketch. The story ends with the same mail carrier innocently asking about the success of the garlic crop. The mail carrier's conversation serves as a frame which gives "Garlic" a humorous ending and which ties the whole narrative together.

Published in The American Mercury, "The Critic" is an amusing story which looks in a humorous vein at an egotistical man. The main character in the sketch, Major Bollinger, is an auctioneer who "would have made a good United States Senator if he hadn't been such a good auctioneer. He had the grand manner and the broad expanse of stomach."<sup>5</sup> Major Bollinger's ability as an auctioneer is superb, as no one in the community can cry either a farm sale or a pie supper as well as he. A second ability that the Major has is that of judging corn. He is one of Oklahoma's authorities on prize corn, and "His criticisms were so dogmatic that they [the farmers] found it difficult to doubt his authority in making them."<sup>6</sup> At the county fair, however, there are two ears of corn that are identical. "It was as if Nature was out to confute Major Bollinger."<sup>7</sup> When the loser questions the Major, he says that the man's ear of corn was slightly off color. The farmer tells Major Bollinger,

" . . . you're just like some preachers I know. You think you can't make no mistake about nothing. You're just narrer-minded."

"No, Charley," said Major Bollinger calmly. "I ain't narrer-minded. I'm right."<sup>8</sup>

In "The Critic," Milburn has described an individual found in many small farming communities. The Major is a rather shallow man who cannot admit that he can be wrong. The story is not a study of any real depth because the subject of the story is not. The tone and the attitude as found in the first paragraph and cited earlier are indications of the tenor of the whole story.

The most amusing story which has pride or egotism as its subject is "Captain Choate." The story opens with a comment on Captain Choate's ability to tell tall tales.

It didn't take much to get Captain A. J. Choate started and when he did get strung out he was an interesting talker. He had come to Oklahoma in the early days, and, to hear him tell it, he had done a little of everything (OT, p. 124).

Captain Choate also claims to have known any person who has achieved any sort of notoriety in the Southwest within the last hundred years. When the Muskogee paper prints a story about an Anti-Saloon League man "who had been a Federal enforcement officer in the Indian Territory's early days" (OT, p. 125), Captain Choate claims to have known the man, and he tells a yarn about the time he hauled whiskey from Arkansas. A few days later, the same newspaper prints an item about the possibility of Leon Trotsky's being in the United States prior to the Russian Revolution. The men of the local barber shop decide to see if Captain Choate will claim acquaintance. He falls for the plot, and begins to tell how Trotsky wore carpet slippers and an old sleazy

coat while he worked at one of the local stores. He concludes his spiel by claiming that when Trotsky was complaining about the bankers' getting rich off the cotton farmer he told him, "Well, looky here, young man, if you don't like the U. S. A. and the way we run things, why don't you go back acrost the pond?" (OT, p. 128). The correspondent for one of the daily Tulsa newspapers submits the story told by Captain Choate as true. "And the following Sunday there was a full page in the Tulsa Globe-Telegram's magazine section. . . . The account was headed 'Oklahoma Man Knew Trotsky'" (OT, p. 129). The rival newspaper became aware of the hoax, and the Globe-Telegram had to publish a correction.

Old Captain Choate had been proud of the Sunday magazine story, but the Globe-Telegram's apology made him angry. "Ain't that just like them lying newspapers!" he said.

He went around town telling everyone, "Well, it might not have been the same Trozitski, but I knowed a Trozitski here all right. But all them Rooshuns has got names just alike, so how are you going to say for certain?" (OT, p. 130).

This quotation from Captain Choate illustrates one of its best aspects, the use of diction. After reading the anecdote, the reader knows that this response is typical of him. He attempts to save face by claiming that the man he claims to have known could have been someone else. In a quotation cited earlier, the attitude of Captain Choate in telling Trotsky to return home is not unfamiliar. In 1970 the slogan "America, Love It or Leave It" has been bandied

around the nation. It seems apparent, then, that the attitude of Captain Choate expressed is not new to the American fabric, and that George Milburn would not be surprised to see the slogan on so many bumpers. These two quotations make it evident to the reader that Captain Choate's attitudes, feelings, and responses form the story. Had he not been so vain and so gullible, there would have been no story.

"Bill Hartshorn" is a rather sad story about a man who is murdered by the callousness of a community. When Bill has a physical examination to qualify for a life insurance policy, the doctor tells him that he has tuberculosis and that he should go to Arizona if he wishes to live. Bill works as a pharmacist in Doc Bascombe's drug store; and when Bill asks Doc Bascombe for a loan, Bascome says he does not have the money. However, he tells Bill,

You can take over my Jamaica ginger business. They've been getting on me for selling it lately, and the sheriff said he'd have to close me up if the W. C. T. U. made another complaint. But everyone likes you. . . . Within six months time you can have enough money to go to Arizona and live high (OT, p. 132).

Bill agrees to the proposition, but the W. C. T. U. does succeed in having Bill arrested. The judge sentences Bill to six months in the county jail. When Bill's defense lawyer objects to the sentence because the jail is damp and sunless, the judge fines the lawyer fifty dollars for contempt of court. Bill dies before his term is completed,

but before he dies he says that he does not want to go to Arizona because

That Arizona is j-j-just a d-desert. It ain't n-n-never got s-s-suh-civilized yet, and it ain't no p-place f-for a h-high-class trap drummer like me (OT, p. 135).

The tone and attitude of the anecdote elicit sympathy for Bill, for he is a victim of the town. Doc Bascombe is to blame for Bill's death because he must have known that Bill would be arrested; the W. C. T. U. ladies make sure that Bill is not warned of his impending arrest; and the judge who sentences Bill does so knowing that he is condemning Bill to a horrible death. The only individual who shows any concern is Bill's lawyer, and he is punished for that. In "Bill Hartshorn," George Milburn has certainly characterized the people of the community as cruel, narrow-minded bigots. They truly have been shorn of their hearts.

Part of the impact of the story is marred by the quotation given above. Bill Hartshorn's comment about his ability to play the drums in Arizona is an almost flippant remark about his own condition. The story would have had a better total effect had Milburn not attempted to attain the wry, humorous ending that is characteristic of his fiction. Usually the endings are appropriate; but in this instance, it is strained.

Bigotry and narrow-mindedness of a different sort are at the center of "The Crutchfields." Old Lady Crutchfield is a very hard working woman who supports her family by doing laundry. Old Man Crutchfield, who ran a livery barn,

is a worthless drunkard. Old Lady Crutchfield dies of heart-failure, and "The children scattered. One of the boys stayed around town as an assistant to the scavenger. The others all went their ways" (OT, p. 18). The youngest girl, Velma, goes to Tulsa where she works as a waitress in the Acropolis Cafe. She returns to the town driving a Buick and wearing furs. She tells the postmaster that she has married the owner of the cafe, Nick Porcupoulos. When Old Man Crutchfield comes to the post office to see if he has any mail, the postmaster begins to praise Velma for having done so well. Old Man Crutchfield tells the postmaster,

I reckon you ain't heerd about me and Velmy, have you, Mr. Elder?

Why, no I hadn't.

Well, I've disowned Velmy. I ordered her out of my place this morning. Any woman that can so fur forget hers'f as to marry a goddam Greek ain't fitten to be no daughter of mine (OT, pp. 20-21).

This response of Old Man Crutchfield shows his true character. It is obvious that he is illiterate by use of such expressions as ain't heerd about me and Velmy and ain't fitten. Also, Old Man Crutchfield is bigoted in regard to the man his daughter married. He apparently considers people of Greek descent to be inferior to poor white trash, since Milburn says that is the socio-economic class to which Velma belongs (OT, p. 19). Once again, Milburn has allowed a character's own words to say more about him than might have been said through auctorial comment.

"The Butcher, the Baker--" also deals with a father who rejects his daughter. Olla Obenchain is a German girl whose only suitor is "a stolid bachelor about forty years old. Old Man Obenchain liked Hank [the suitor] fairly well because he was the only eligible German in town for Olla" (OT, p. 79). All the other girls in town were getting their hair bobbed, and Olla's father tells her that he will throw her out of the house if she bobs her hair. She does have her hair bobbed, and Old Man Obenchain is true to his word. When Olla leaves town on the train, she meets a young brakeman who marries her at the next junction. When Hank hears about what has happened, he says that Old Man Obenchain was too rash. He would have married Olla even if she has bobbed her hair.

While it is plain that Milburn is poking fun at a man who is willing to marry a girl who bobs her hair, there is an incident in "The Butcher, the Baker--" which may explain why Olla felt herself forced to leave town. As has already been pointed out, Obenchain is a German.

During the war it got around that he had a picture of the Kaiser hanging up in his parlor, and the patriots in our town came very near to lynching him. They had him tied to the back of a Ford truck and were dragging him through the streets when the officers rescued him. Ellis Grice, the United States marshall, took him to the Federal jail at Muskogee, where the butcher proved that the picture was a tintype of his father taken back in Germany years before, OT, pp. 78-79).

The behavior of the people is reprehensible. Their irrational behavior is obvious, but the actions they took were

not uncommon during World War I or even World War II. It is not without significance that Milburn used the word patriots to describe those who attempted to lynch Old Man Obenchain. Super patriots have long been the cause of much irresponsible behavior, and this brief incident reveals the cruel and vindictive nature of the people in a small town. It is ironic that the people would be so afraid of the local butcher and not their own passions.

"Yellow Paint" also deals with bigotry which centers on an anti-German feeling in a small Oklahoma town. The story opens with the town's celebrating the news that an armistice has just been signed with the Germans. The merchants of the town agree to close their stores, and a troupe of draft-exempt men begin "to shoot off firearms" (OT, p. 60). The farmers of the community have come to town to do their shopping, and a small number of them persuade Old Man Farnum to open his store and sell them "some of the things they had to have, like kerosene and dry salt meat and compound lard and coffee" (OT, p. 61). The U. S. Marshal, Ellis Grice, sees Old Man Farnum selling the goods to the farmers, and he tells the men at the barber shop what he has seen.

"Old Man Farnum has opened up his store and is selling goods out the back door," Ellis said.

"And it Armistice Day, too!" someone said.

"That old man ain't got no respect for nothing."

"He ought to have someone go tell him the kind of a dirty slacker he is," Hart Summers said.

"They ought to paint his store front yellow," said Clarence Everts, a boy who had been in the last draft, but who hadn't been called.

"If someone will paint it, I'll pay for the paint," said Ellis Grice (OT, p. 63).

The store is painted, and Farnum has some trouble removing the paint from the store front. He begins to lose his trade because he insists on explaining to his customers why he sold the goods to the farmers on the day the armistice was announced. Finally, Old Man Farnum learns who bought the paint. When Ellis Grice comes past the store on his way to the Justice of the Peace's offices, Farnum stops him and hits him across the face with a soda-water bottle. Ellis Grice cries and attempts to tell Old Man Farnum that he did not do it. "It took Doc Boyd quite a while to get the glass picked out of Ellis' face, and his nose never did get set straight again" (OT, p. 66).

Unlike other stories in this chapter, Milburn uses juxtaposition to develop it. He points out that the men who celebrate the armistice so enthusiastically have not gone to the war. The boy who suggests painting Old Man Farnum's store yellow did not volunteer for the war. Juxtaposed to these items is the involvement of Old Man Farnum's sons in the war. One son "died of influenza in training-camp." The other son "turned up in the United States Veterans' Hospital in Muskogee with his arms and the lower half of his face blown off" (OT, p. 64). It is obvious that the painting of the store is an outrage. Once again George Milburn has commented on the false

patriots of the United States. Old Man Farnum is far more loyal to his country than the men who are responsible for the painting of his store. It is ironic that the men felt it necessary to do what they did after night and then deny any responsibility. Thus, Milburn satirizes a whole community in "Yellow Paint."

"The Contortionist's Wife" also deals with some anti-German feeling and the hypocrisy of a small town. In this story a contortionist abandons his wife and child. The people of the town show their bigotry by refusing "to have anything to do with that show woman" (OT, p. 12). A German couple, Mr. and Mrs. Norden, do show some compassion and allow Mrs. Zerko, the contortionist's wife, to run their son's cleaning and pressing shop while he is gone to the army. When the town learns that Mrs. Zerko smokes cigarettes, "Everyone was pretty sure that she was going to play fast and loose in our town. A number of men felt especially sure" (OT, p. 13). The men attempt to obtain Mrs. Zerko's favors through her little girl, but she foils them. The Nordens find Mrs. Zerko to be a good woman; but the community does not believe them, as they are German. One night Hart Summers goes to Mrs. Zerko's and asks her to go for a ride.

Mrs. Zerko pulled a .44 automatic out of her kimono and began prodding Hart in the belly with it.

"You drive away from here pronto," she said, "or I'll fill you so full of holes you'll look like a Swiss cheese! You goddam rube, you!"

She stood there in the back door cussing him while Hart knocked down two privies driving out of the alley (OT, p. 14).

Finally, Mrs. Zerko receives a telegram from her husband, who is in St. Louis. She borrows a suitcase from the Nordens, but she fails to return it.

In "A Contortionist's Wife" Milburn points out how a small town can be cruel and crude in its treatment of a woman who needed its help. The town does not exhibit Christian concern, and most small Oklahoma towns claim to be charitable. It is ironic that a German family comes to Mrs. Zerko's rescue, for since World War I is in progress, the Nordens have more cause than most to shun people, although their son is in a training camp. Milburn further points out the hypocrisy of the people of the community in the attempt of the men to seduce Mrs. Zerko. Because she smokes cigarettes, the town labeled her as a woman of loose morals, when actually their morals were worse than hers. In "A Contortionist's Wife" Milburn has used a not infrequent situation to show the reader how hypocritical a small, midwestern town can be.

In the stories discussed above, George Milburn has focused upon a single character in such a manner as to show the abnormality of a small town, the egotism of a character, or how greed has warped a character. The characters in the next four stories are peculiar, but in addition they are almost grotesque. Marty Titsworth is one of the most grotesque. "Marty Titsworth" opens with an interesting

statement: "Hart Summers didn't know that Marty Titsworth was like that when he hired him to work at the De Luxe Barber Shop. He didn't find out for a month or two" (OT, p. 54). The remaining portions of the sketch explain the reasons lying behind the opening paragraph. Marty Titsworth first becomes suspect when a man talking to Marty begins to open his umbrella in the barber shop. Apparently this act has some evil meaning for Marty, for he becomes unduly alarmed at the man's action. A further indication of Marty's peculiarity is that he believes that he can cure warts. The small boys of the town come into the barber shop and sell their warts to Marty for a cent. One afternoon when Old Man Cobb has come in for a shave, Marty tells Cobb that, since he is a college-trained barber, he can shave him in five swipes of his razor. He tells Cobb this as he is stropping his razor. Cobb is terrified since it has become common knowledge that Marty is peculiar. He jumps out of Marty's chair and cries, "Get that man out of here! He's plumb crazy!" (OT, p. 57). This trick ruins business at the barber shop, but Hart Summers is too scared of Marty to fire him.

When Marty goes to a picnic, he gets into poison ivy. He says that it cannot harm him because he is "the seventh son of a seventh son" (OT, p. 59). Marty does become violently ill, and he loses one of his eyes. But as soon as he recovers, he tells Hart Summers,

I guess you think I'll be wanting my old job back again, don't you? Well, I don't. I been reading in the paper about a rattlesnake farm down in Texas, where they mek this here snake-bite medicine. I'm going down there to get me a job. A man with a powerful charm like I got ought to be he'ping mankind instead of wasting his time in a barber shop (OT, p. 59).

Marty Titsworth is a psychological type not infrequently found. He believes that he leads a charmed life, and he refuses to accept his failure. The story makes this quite clear, for it opens with a rather common superstition about opening umbrellas inside a building and ends with a trip to a rattlesnake farm. Thus, the impact of Marty's irrational behavior is impressed upon the mind of the reader.

Also published in Oklahoma Town, "Indian Steve" is a story similar to "Marty Titsworth." Indian Steve is a Creek Indian who has two affectations: he wears a blanket, and he pretends that he cannot speak English. Indian Steve gets drunk on Jamaican ginger and is put in jail to sober up. When a winter wind blows out the fire in the jail's gas heating stove one night, the coroner says that Indian Steve has died from asphyxiation. But he is not dead; he moans, rolls over, and sits up on a slab at the morgue. The superstitious people in town begin regarding Indian Steve with awe, and he establishes a reputation as a hypnotist. He claims to charm catfish out of the water. "Steve's greatest feat, however, was the hypnotizing of a dominicker hen to make her lay a double-yoked [sic] egg" (OT, p. 184). When a professor says that Indian Steve cannot really do that, Steve replies by saying that he can

hypnotize the professor and make him lay the egg. Steve leaves the town and joins a medicine show. After he leaves the medicine show, he begins giving lectures on psychoanalysis to ladies.

Indian Steve's claims are amusing, whereas those of Marty Titsworth are not. Indian Steve probably knew what he was doing, and the people of the town were gullible enough to believe him. The story implies that the hen's laying a double-yoked egg is a rumor. Indian Steve's challenge to the college professor goes unaccepted, as he probably very well knows it will be. Part of Steve's act is to appear as if he is not too bright, and this is reflected in the diction of the story. In response to the professor's accusation, Indian Steve says,

. . . Hum, he say I can't hypnotise a hen to make her lay a double-yoked egg? Well, you get me him down here and I hypnotise him and make him lay a double-yoked egg (OT, pp. 184-185).

These words of Indian Steve sound as if they come straight from a cigar store Indian or a John Wayne movie. He talks as the white people of the community expect him to talk, and thus he is able to fool them into believing he is what they want to believe he is.

Not all of the stories George Milburn wrote are funny or ironic. "Shorty Kilgore" is a good example of this. Shorty Kilgore, a mechanic at the Ford garage, physically resembles a monkey. "But he was quite a hand with the women" (OT, p. 88). One night a man comes to the Ford garage to have the timing on his car set. He has a girl

with him. "'What have you got on for tomorrow night, sister?' he [Shorty] said to the girl. The girl smiled and said, 'I don't know. What you'" (OT, p. 87). The man with the girl slapped Shorty, who stabs the man with his razor.. Shorty and the girl leave town in the car and are never heard of again.

The story has no purpose, as there is no adequate motivation given for the stabbing. As a character, Shorty is drawn with a few deft strokes, but that does not redeem the sketch. In his work George Milburn consistently writes stories which are free from extraneous material; in "Shorty Kilgore" he seems to have gone too far in the attempt to remove all unnecessary detail, as the story has meaning only as a story about a senseless murder.

While "Looie McKendricks" is amusing, it is almost as pointless as "Shorty Kilgore." Looie is a weak-minded man who is fascinated by the opposite sex. He falls in love with his fourth grade teacher, and he quits school when she gets married. By this time he was a young man. His huge head was covered with a mat of bright red hair. Some school bully had knocked out all his front teeth, and his mouth is sunken and twisted like an old man's. His eyes, bathed in rheum, will cock at painful angles, giving his face a grotesquely coy expression.

Looie is satisfied with his appearance. For a long time no misgivings as to his attractiveness to women ever entered his mind. "'Women are funny,' he told a bunch in

the Economy Drug Store one night. 'When they get crazy about you, you cain't do nothing with them. Women sure do get me bothered'" (OT, p. 28).

Looie is courting one of the local girls, Lulu Sampler, a name that is amusing in itself. But when an article appears in the county newspaper asking when Lulu and Looie are to be married, Lulu brutally tells Looie to leave. Looie says, "I got enough sense to know where I ain't wanted. Nobody don't have to knock me down with a hint" (OT, p. 29).

Like "Shorty Kilgore," there really is not much of value in "Looie McKendricks." He is an amusing character, because he is not a normal human being in regard to appearance, intelligence, or sexual matters. While many small boys fall in love with a grade school teacher, they are more than willing to pass to the next grade and find a new teacher to love. Furthermore, normal little boys do not love a grade school teacher the way the story implies Looie loved his fourth grade teacher. Thus, seen from one angle, "Looie McKendricks" is a psychological abnormality, and this George Milburn has drawn very well in an anecdote about a really insignificant occurrence.

"Revenge" demonstrates Milburn's ability to develop an insignificant occurrence into a good story. Part I of "Revenge" opens with the beginning of a new school term. The pupils in the sixth grade have a new teacher, Miss Manchester. She is a recent college graduate who does not

believe in whipping students. She has her own methods of punishment, one of which is to make a pupil sit under her desk for two hours.

In Part II the pupils become aware of the effects of her methods. Miss Manchester is near sighted, and frequently she punishes the wrong pupil. The only boy to escape her wrath is Lopy Crashaw, the meanest boy in school. But because he is crippled, the teachers do not punish him. He is also smart enough to avoid detection. The students call him Lopy because his crippled leg makes him look lopsided. In addition, "He was good in his books, and that gave him time to think up tricks while school was going on" (NMT, p. 101). Miss Manchester, however, and Lopy become "victims of a strange revenge--strange because neither the ones whom it caught, nor the one who caused it, knew the score had been evened" (NMT, pp. 101-102).

There is a new boy in the sixth grade that year, Rolland Gentry. Rolland is a big country boy who started school late, but he is intelligent enough to make two grades a year. Rolland takes Lopy's place as the brightest boy in the class; but he looks funny to the other students because he is so large, and he has kidney trouble. The narrator points out that Miss Manchester uses a wooden paddle hung by the door with "In" on one side and "Out" on the other as a device to regulate the flow of students to and from the restroom. One day Lopy becomes aware that Rolland must go to the restroom, and he quickly leaves the

room. Rolland asks for permission to leave, but Miss Manchester refuses. Rolland cannot control his kidneys, and he sits at his desk sobbing. When the pupils leave the room, Rolland is still sitting and sobbing at his desk.

In Part II, Lopy gets in trouble with Miss Manchester because he yells that one of the girls has on a corset. He has to sit under the desk for punishment. The same day the narrator has to stay after school for chewing gum. The local Baptist minister has come by the school to keep Miss Manchester company. While Miss Manchester is cleaning her desk, she removes the center desk drawer and turns it upside down. According to the narrator,

We all three saw it at the same time: a sentence about Miss Manchester chalked across the bottom of the drawer. It had one word in it that caused the preacher and the teacher both to turn red. It was written in good handwriting, almost as good as that in the copybook. Lopy Crashaw had been left under the desk that afternoon, and, since Rolland Gentry had left school, Lopy was the only boy in the room who could make such a graceful capital F (NMT, p. 101).

A month later while the class is having an oral spelling examination, a girl standing next to Lopy, who is seated at his desk, loses her underpants, which she kicks under his desk. The students all begin to giggle. The girl accuses Lopy of bringing them to school to tease her. Miss Manchester believes the girl, and she sends Lopy for switches, after she accuses him of writing on her desk drawer. Lopy brings in some saplings that have been planted recently. When Miss Manchester attempts to whip Lopy, he leaves. Shortly, Mrs. Crashaw enters the room

and proceeds to switch Miss Manchester. The principal enters the fracas, but he and Miss Manchester are forced to retreat. In a few minutes, the principal returns to the classroom and dismisses the class for the rest of the year.

In Part IV, the students leave the school; and they decide to go for a swim. They see Rolland Gentry, who looks and acts his age. When the narrator asks Rolland what Miss Manchester said to him the afternoon he had his accident, Rolland says that she left without saying a word. Then he adds,

All I hope is that the blamed old heifer found that about her what I chalked on the bottom of her desk drawer. I told her what she could go do, all right. If she ever sees that, that'll fix her (NMT, p. 115).

Thus, Rolland is able to get his revenge; but the circumstances around it are unknown to him.

There are several aspects of "Revenge" which indicate Milburn's ability to manipulate his material, including point of view, setting, and diction. The last two, of course, are devices employed by local-colorists and are the primary techniques of analysis in this paper. This story, like much of Milburn's short fiction, is told from the first person point of view, or what Norman Friedman calls the "'I' as Witness."<sup>9</sup> The narrator is a student in the school in which the events take place. Milburn has allowed the boy to become deeply enough involved in the schoolroom antics to make him credible; yet, he remains far enough removed from the action to be an unbiased observer. In

this way Milburn is able to tread the narrow line necessary in the use of the first person point of view. This use of the first person narrator also allows the reader to see that the narrator is a young, sensitive boy, as is Rolland Gentry. But Rolland is different from the narrator in that he is older and seeks identification and recognition by society. As a result of the experience, he rejects a portion of society. It should be also noted that "Revenge" is episodic; thus George Milburn has used some elements of the initiation story, although this is not the theme.

Another interesting facet of "Revenge" is the setting. Milburn used a public schoolroom as the primary setting. This allowed him to limit the number of participants in the action, and yet a schoolroom can have such a cross-section of personalities to allow a writer to select those which are appropriate to the ends he is attempting to achieve. And Milburn chose to call the reader's attention to those students who were necessary to the plot. One might also add that he deliberately chose a schoolmarm who would ask for trouble. Thus, Milburn provided all of the ingredients necessary to create a volatile situation in a classroom.

Diction is also used effectively. Miss Manchester's speech characterizes her when she speaks to the students for the first time:

. . . you two boys sitting in the back seats  
bring your books up here to the front seats.  
I know about boys who always take the back

seats the first day of school. I like to have them up here by me (NMT, p. 97).

The quotation is a typical speech given by many teachers the first day of school, both in choice of words and in opinion, as most sixth grade students can tell.

Further evidence of Milburn's ability to use diction is seen when Mr. Butler, the superintendent, dismisses the class after the fracas between Mrs. Crashaw, Miss Manchester, and him.

"Miss Manchester is not feeling well," he said, "and she will not be able to give the final examination in arithmetic. But she asks me to tell you that you all are passed to the seventh grade next year." He smiled thinly. "So it will not be necessary for you to come back to school any more this term. Your report cards will be mailed out to your parents. Pass quietly so as not to disturb the other rooms. Dismissed!" (NMT, p. 112).

Mr. Butler sounds like a typical pedant. His use of the passive voice is a good indication of that. Indeed, his choice of words is not much different from that used by many public school administrators today. Instead of telling the students in direct, simple language that they are dismissed, he chose to be more verbose.

Milburn also uses language suitable to sixth graders. When Lippy attempts to dance with Anna and she repulses him, he cries, "Oh, Anna's got on a corset! I felt it on her just then. Anna's got on a corset! Anna's got on a corset!" (NMT, p. 106). The last two sentences are typical of children's taunts. It does not take much imagination for the reader to see the rest of the students repeating

the cry in a sing-song manner. Milburn also allows Lippy's own words to characterize him when Miss Manchester tells him to come to her so she can whip him. "Yah, what do I want to come there to you for, you blamed old near-sighted fool you. You won't lay a hand on me!" (NMT, p. 110).

Lippy's attitude toward people in general is evident, and his words express what other members of the class feel about Miss Manchester. An earlier quotation also helps to characterize Lippy when he says,

"I cain't h'p what they cost," he said sullenly. "You told me to get switches, and them's switches, ain't they. . . . I never done nothing, and I ain't going to take any whupping of you, you danged old fool!" (NMT, p. 110).

These two separate quotations are evidence of Lippy's defiant attitude. He knows that he has been treated unfairly, and his meanness and his sullenness come to the fore. These quotations are also interesting because, although Lippy is a good student in class, he speaks in a rather illiterate manner.

That Lippy learned this way of speaking at home is clear when Mrs. Crashaw speaks to Miss Manchester.

"Did you strike this pore little cripple' child of mine?" said Mrs. Crashaw in a loud, trembling voice.

Miss Manchester was startled. "Why, I--" she said.

"Do you know what ought to be done with any grown woman what would whip a cripple' child?" Mrs. Crashaw stooped over and picked up one of the sticks from the small bundle in the corner. She began switching Miss Manchester around the legs. Miss Manchester

started screaming and grabbed Mrs. Crashaw by the hair (NMT, p. 111).

Thus, not only are Mrs. Crashaw and Lippy alike in speech, but they also resemble each other in action.

The actions of the characters make "Revenge" interesting; and this allows the theme of the story, revenge, to be evident to the reader. The story turns on an ironic reversal, for Lippy gets what is coming to him as does Miss Manchester. Yet, it is plain that neither Lippy nor Miss Manchester is aware of the course of events which leads to their being punished for their treatment of Rolland, even as he does not know how he has gotten his revenge. "Revenge" is an example of George Milburn's ability to combine various materials and to use them in such a way as to illustrate the human personality.

It is apparent, then, that Milburn does use the anecdotal method effectively. Most of the stories in this chapter have a similar structure. They usually focus on a single character whose physical features, situation, or other aspects pertinent to the anecdote are given first. This gives the reader the information necessary to understand the remaining portions of the story. After the story has been told, frequently there is a line or two which gives the story a frame; or the story ends with an ironic or humorous comment. While the use of the anecdotal method does not always allow the story to develop to any real depth, it does allow the reader to see an aspect of man

which may be illuminating, for the characters are not unique, but they can be found across the face of the United States.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> William Flint Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, rev. and enl. (New York, 1960), pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Edel, ed., The Complete Tales of Henry James, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> David B. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1967), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Foster-Harris, The Basic Patterns of Plot (Norman, 1959), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> George Milburn, "The Critic," in "From the Oklahoma Saga," The American Mercury, XX (June, 1930), 187.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction," PMLA, LXX (1955), 1171. Friedman says, "The witness-narrator is a character on his own right within the story itself, more or less involved in the action, more or less acquainted with its chief personages, who speaks to the reader in the first person."

## CHAPTER V

### HUMOR

One of the characteristics of local color is humor. According to Walter Blair, "Bret Harte actually asserted that the local color story derived from American humor."<sup>1</sup> In commenting on the rise of the short story, Bret Harte said,

. . . [Humor] was at first noticeable in the anecdote or "story," and after the fashion of such beginnings, was orally transmitted. . . . Wherever met it was so distinctly original and novel, so individual and characteristic, that it was at once known and appreciated abroad as "an American short story." Crude at first, it received a literary polish in the press, but its dominant quality remained. It was concise and condense, yet suggestive. It was delightfully extravagant or a miracle of understatement. It voiced not only the dialect, but the habits of thought of a people or locality. It gave a new interest to slang. . . . By degrees it developed character with its incident, often in a few lines gave a striking photograph of a community or a section, but always reached its conclusion without an unnecessary word. It became--and still exists--as an essential feature of newspaper literature. It was the parent of the American "short story."<sup>2</sup>

While Bret Harte gave too much credit to humor as a force in the growth of the short story, Blair points out that humor is influential in local-color writing.<sup>3</sup>

Like other local-color artists, George Milburn uses humor in his fiction. In "Muncy Morgan," the humor is

based on an ironic turn. Muncy, who works at the local blacksmith shop,

was a strong boy. He never had any trouble getting the shoes on a horse. He would get hold of a horse's leg and clamp it between his thighs, and it didn't do the horse any good to kick after that. There wasn't a horse in the county that could break Muncy's grip. He could take a steel plow-beam and muscle it out with one hand (OT, p. 136).

Muncy does not intend to make his living as a blacksmith; he wants to become a professional wrestler. There is, however, no one in the town with whom Muncy can practice.

When the carnivals come to town, Muncy is usually too shy to wrestle in public; but one wrestler's taunts do affect Muncy because he accuses the men of the town of being yellow. When Muncy steps forward to wrestle, the barker continues to tease Muncy in order to increase the size of the crowd around the tent. Muncy wants to wrestle the man in his street clothes, but the barker insists that Muncy put on a pair of faded red tights like those the wrestler is wearing. During the wrestling match, Muncy grabs a leg he believes to be the wrestler's in a toe hold. Something cracks, and Muncy turns gray. When the local doctor examines Muncy, he finds that Muncy has broken his own leg. The crowd of men around the tent becomes wild, and the carnival is virtually destroyed that night.

"Muncy Morgan" is humorous because the unexpected happens. The reader expects Muncy to defeat the wrestler, but he has no reason to expect the ending, although the description of Muncy's strength and attire make the ending

plausible. The incongruous occurs in "Muncy Morgan," and the reader is amused at the strange turn of events.

In "Clark Peavy," Clark's peculiarities form the brunt of the anecdote. Clark, the son of a tenant farmer, becomes the branch manager of the local lumber yard. The people of the town resent Clark because he does not behave the way they think the son of a tenant farmer should. This is apparent in the opening lines of the story.

"Whenever I get up to Tulsa," Clark Peavy said, "I always look me up that Chinese restaurant they got up there, and get me a plate of chop suey. I like chop suey oncet in a while. It's something different."

People made fun of Clark Peavy. They knew he didn't have any call to put on airs like that. They didn't understand how he could hope to get away with it (OT, p. 148).

The incongruity of Clark's interest in the unusual and his familial background make the story amusing. The refusal of the townspeople to believe that a member of a community could look and have aspirations beyond those to which he is born is also apparent. In another incident, Clark attends a party where a girl in a Spanish costume recites a poem asking questions about what is right and wrong ending with the Spanish question, Quien sabe? The girl smokes a cigarette during the performance, and this makes the performance even more daring. At the conclusion Clark says,

Say, who was this Queen Sade? She must have been a humdinger, smoking cigarettes and all. I wisht I knowed a woman like that. A woman like that would be something different (OT, p. 151).

Clark's misunderstanding of the meaning of the question and his diction are humorous. But Clark's words have an ironic meaning for the reader, too. In Oklahoma during the time "Clark Peavy" was written, women who smoked cigarettes in public usually left themselves open to public censure. This is what the girl has done, and she has inflicted punishment on herself, for small towns can be very cruel.

The last two words are a favorite expression of Clark's and they are really an understatement in this case. Clark uses the same expression to describe New York City, again an understatement when New York is compared to a small Oklahoma town. Clark Peavy is a representative of the country bumpkin who does not understand what is going on about him. His frankness and naivete make him an amusing character.

There are some pieces in Oklahoma Town and No More Trumpets which are simply a retelling of familiar jests. "The Drummer's Shoes" is one of these. In this joke, a country girl, Lois Schaefer, picks up a drummer who sells shoes. Since the weather is unpleasant, she takes the drummer up to her room in the attic, which is right above the bedroom of her employers. Its floor is composed of loose boards; and as one might expect, the drummer loses his balance and falls through the plaster ceiling into the bedroom below in the middle of the bed. The man, his wife, and the drummer all attempt to escape through the same door at the same time; and they become wedged. The drummer finally gets loose and runs out of the house. The drummer

had removed his shoes before going upstairs; and since he left rather hastily, he left his shoes. Mr. Esterbrook attempted to wear the shoes, but he is not successful. Apparently, he cannot fill the drummer's shoes.

This is a representative of one of the many jokes that are commonly told about traveling salesmen. In "The Drummer's Shoes," the employers, Mr. and Mrs. Esterbrook, are people who ignore Lois Schaefer's sexual activities because they have had some difficulty keeping girls, because

A country girl who had come to town to get a kitchen job would be insulted when she heard Mrs. Esterbrook calling her the maid in front of visitors and when she found out that she was expected to eat alone in the kitchen (NMT, p. 183).

The girls also resented the room in the attic being called servants' quarters. To the more sophisticated, the attempt of the Esterbrooks to call a country girl a maid and to call a room in the attic servants' quarters is ludicrous. These things add to the humor of "The Drummer's Shoes."

"A Young Man's Chance" is also a joke about sex. In it, Julian Reynolds, a young man employed as a clerk in Abe Herzog's store, is invited to go 'possum hunting with one of the customers, Old Man Barker. Julian is rather shy; and when he meets Barker's granddaughter, he is so bashful that when eating supper he has a lump in his throat. "He didn't eat much. When they got up [,] he was still hungry, and he noticed that there were some beans left in the pot" (OI, p. 160). After the night of hunting,

Julian is even hungrier; but they all go to bed. As there is only one bed in the shack, Barker sleeps in the middle between Julian and the granddaughter. There is a commotion in the yard. When Barker gets up to see about it,

Julian lay there in his underwear, trembling.  
The bed creaked. Hot whispers brushed his cheek:  
"Now's your chance! Now's your chance!" . . .  
[Julian] jumped up and ate the rest of the beans!  
(OT, p. 162).

"A Young Man's Chance" is based on folklore that is almost as old as the hills and is still being told today. Milburn did use the familial oral frame in telling the joke, as the first paragraph indicates.

Abe Herzog used to tell this story on Julian Reynolds, one of his grocery clerks. It may not be true, but Abe told it on him for a long time. It tickled Abe, because the clerk was so bashful  
(OT, p. 158).

The use of the oral frame is an ancient device in the telling of jokes, and in the jest itself Abe's placing stress on certain aspects keeps the frame a viable part of the jest.

"The Nude Waitress" is a variation of a standard joke. The chief figure in this anecdote is a photographer who knows many tricks with the camera and has a reputation with the women. The men of the town like him too, as "he always had a new pocket trick" (OT, p. 177). He is able to place a billiard ball in his mouth, pass his hand over his mouth, swallow, and then have the ball roll from his trouser's leg onto the floor. One day Captain Choate has a picture of "a naked woman couched in the rim of a big new

moon" (OT, p. 179). The woman cannot be identified, as her dress is over her head and face. When Floyd Evans, who has recently married a local waitress, sees the picture, he attempts to remove a spot under a woman's right breast. But it is part of the picture. That night, Evans asks the photographer, Orville, to do his billiard ball trick. When Orville places the ball in his mouth, Evans hits him with his fist, and the ball pops inside Orville's mouth. The doctor has to pull six of Orville's teeth and to use hot packs to remove the ball. "Several people asked Floyd Evans what he meant by striking Orville Burke like that, but Floyd never would say anything and Orville didn't either" (OT, p. 180).

"The Nude Waitress" is a retelling of a jest commonly told by men. What George Milburn has related in the story is not really new. One could change the names of the characters, the setting, and not alter the joke significantly. Yet, jokes such as this have a place in the literature of the common people. And as such, the recording of them helps retain a bit of Americana.

In "Myrtle Birchett" there are three separate episodes. In the first, Myrtle's father asks the postmaster not to write any more money orders for Myrtle, as she has been buying fancy clothes from the mail-order houses. He tells the postmaster that the girl's underclothes are very scanty, while making it clear that his observation is based on what he has seen on the clothes line. Myrtle always

seems to attract attention from the boys. On Sunday nights, she goes to the Baptist Church, where she sits and writes notes in the hymnal to the boys behind her. One night the minister "looked out over the congregation, and said solemnly, 'Shall we pray'" (OT, p. 40). Myrtle says "No" a little too loudly, and the young boys in the church start giggling. She gets up and leaves the church with her heels clacking in the aisle. In the third incident, Myrtle has purchased some striped, silk stockings. When a local man asks her if she can tell him how far the stripes go up on her legs, Myrtle says no, "But I know a man from Red Arrow who can tell you how far they'd go on your wife" (OT, p. 40).

The unexpected response ends this story with a note of laughter, but there is not literary value in "Myrtle Birchett." It has neither theme, meaning, nor symbol to make it valuable. The inclusion of the anecdote in Oklahoma Town is hard to justify. It does record with accuracy the behavior of girls and boys who sit in the back of churches on Sunday nights; but beyond that, its value is negligible.

Unlike "Myrtle Birchett," "An Outlaw's Letter" shows Milburn's ability to tell a humorous story and have something to say about life. The outlaw in the sketch, Lonnie Blair, is a bank robber. People in the small Oklahoma town are interested in Lonnie because he is a local boy and because he still has a cousin living in the community, Jud Spafford, the town marshall. Ellis Grice, the U. S.

Marshal, and Rance Sherman, the deputy sheriff, both want the ten thousand dollar reward money offered for Lonnie Blair. Everyone expects Blair to pay the town a visit to see his cousin. One member of the law, Rance Sherman, likes to talk about what he would do if Blair shows up.

"Lonnie Blair knows better than to try it, the yellow skunk!" Rance Sherman, the deputy sheriff, said.

"Yeah, what would you do?" City Marshal Jud Spafford asked Rance.

The deputy sheriff patted his Colt .44. "I'd just let this here do my talking for me," Rance said.

"How would that there know what to say when they wouldn't be no one nowheres around to get it to talk?" said Jud Spafford (OT, p. 104).

This conversation lays the basis for the rest of the story. Rance is a man who brags about what he would do, but probably will not do when the occasion arises. Jud Spafford's attitude toward his fellow lawman indicates this.

One afternoon, a telephone operator allows Rance to hear a conversation between Blair and Spafford. Blair wants Spafford to help him escape. He is mailing Jud Spafford a registered, special-delivery letter. Rance tells this to the local postmaster in an attempt to get the postmaster to give him the letter. The postmaster refuses, even though Sherman offers him a small portion of the reward money. The postmaster does tell Sherman that he can wait in the lobby and take the letter away from Jud Spafford. This Sherman says he will do. When the mail arrives,

Spafford comes to get the letter. Earlier, the postmaster has seen Sherman "slip around the corner of the post office building" (OT, p. 108). Spafford signs for the letter, and he leaves the post office. "As soon as Jud Spafford was out of sight" (OT, p. 109), Rance enters the post office. "'Did he get it? He's done been and gone, ain't he? Did he get the letter?' the deputy sheriff began in a hoarse whisper. He was trembling. Sweat was falling off his face" (OT, p. 109). When the postmaster tells him that Spafford has the letter, Rance accuses the postmaster of having lost him the reward money because he has refused to give him the letter. Rance Sherman's accusation is false, for he is a coward. The attitude of Jud Spafford and Rance Sherman's response to the postmaster's suggestion prepare the reader for a humorous ending in the tradition of O. Henry, as the reader does not expect the events of the narrative to turn quite the way they do.

Two aspects of "An Outlaw's Letter" are the acting and the language of Rance Sherman. This is apparent in Sherman's response to the postmaster's suggestion.

Rance Sherman clamped his jaws together and squinted his eyes. He put his hand on his pistol and studied a while. "All right, I reckon that's what I'll do. I'll come around here before the 5:45 runs and I'll lay for Jud. Now don't you say nothing to no one. 'Cause if that old Ellis Grice heerd what was going on he would high-tail it around here and try to horn in on that reward. And I've good as got that ten thousand" (OT, p. 108).

This bit of acting on Rance Sherman's part is amusing. Almost anyone who has seen the westerns that used to play at the movie theaters on Saturday afternoons has seen histrionic acting like this by the tin star. Rance Sherman's word choice is interesting, and the expressions are amusing when one reads the story a second time, for his comments and braggadocio are incongruous with the actual action he takes. Also, this particular speech sounds as if it came from a western, as high-tail it and try to horn in on that reward show. Indeed, the whole story is such that it could very well be a part of a western movie. If Jud Spafford were to meet his cousin and capture him, the whole narrative would be typical of a Saturday afternoon western. George Milburn, however, uses part of a stock western to tell a humorous story which reveals a bit of human nature.

As in keeping with the usage of local-color writing, the anecdotes in this chapter are concise. They also reflect the habits and thoughts of the people of a locality, although some of these attitudes can be found in other geographical areas. They also end with an ironic and humorous turn. In some of these humorous stories, Milburn makes a comment; others are merely jokes in an oral tradition long prevalent in the lives of the American people.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Walter Blair, Native American Humor (1800-1900)  
(New York, 1937), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Bret Harte, "The Rise of the 'Short Story'" from  
Discussions of the Short Story, ed. Hollis Summers (Boston,  
1963), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Blair, p. 131.

## CHAPTER VI

### GEORGE MILBURN'S NOVELS

Like many other writers of short stories, some local-color artists wrote novels, E. W. Howe's The Story of a Country Town and O. Henry's The Gentle Grafter being examples. Howe's novel, set in Kansas, focuses on the religious, social, and moral life of two separate communities. According to Jay Martin,

The critical response to Howe's novel strikingly illustrates the way which literature Westerners rejected the myth that Easterners had made of the West. Westerners saw in its disillusion a true reflection of Western life. Twain insisted upon its fidelity to bitter fact; while in his letter to Howe, Howells called the novel "a remarkable piece of realism."<sup>1</sup>

O. Henry's novel is a picaresque novel in that the chief characters are rogues; like The Story of a Country Town, it is episodic in nature. Claude M. Simpson in The Local Colorists, 1857-1900 points out that the attempts of the local-color artists to write novels were not always completely successful, and he points out why he believes this is so.

Their [the local colorists'] difficulties may suggest reasons why the short story was a better vehicle for their aims: either their long fiction was episodic--almost resembling a collection of tales--and so lacked unity, or they achieved an organic structure by subordinating local-color

interests to some other unifying principle. . . . Provincial manners can successfully dominate the single episode, and it is perhaps for this reason that the short story is a better medium than the novel for their exploitation. This is not to say that the local colorists lack interest in the more universal aspects of human nature, but that his major emphasis is on differentiae, not on the generic.<sup>2</sup>

In both of George Milburn's novels, there is a use of local-color techniques. In Flannigan's Folly, local-color materials predominate; but the novel is not episodic, as a discussion of it will show. In Catalogue: A Novel, the use of local-color material is prevalent; but the episodic nature of the novel is a part of its art.

### Flannigan's Folly

Flannigan's Folly is a novel set in the fictitious town of Buried Hatchet, Oklahoma. Frequently, George Milburn uses setting to reflect the lives of the characters. In Flannigan's Folly, the setting does function in this manner, for in the novel the description of the countryside and the farmer's struggle with the soil is not depicted, as the novel is not in the realistic vein of Milburn's short stories. Flannigan owns a small, rocky farm. On one side of his farm is that of Angelica Mudge, an eccentric spinster who swears, wears a diamond solitaire the size of an egg, and tills her two hundred fertile acres herself. On the other side of Flannigan's farm are the one hundred and sixty acres of Alice Pilgrim, a young and attractive widow with a small boy. Flannigan hopes to

marry Alice Pilgrim for herself and for her land. He has, however, a set-back in his plan when she hires Joe Griffen, a handsome G. I. just returned from World War II, to assist her. Joe Griffen works hard on Mrs. Pilgrim's farm, and he is so successful that Flannigan becomes aware that Joe Griffen is beginning to win the favors of Alice Pilgrim. Flannigan attempts to impress Mrs. Pilgrim with his knowledge of farming and entertains her son in an attempt to win her heart. In some desperation, Flannigan tells Joe Griffen that the local people are talking about Joe and Mrs. Pilgrim. The people are actually amused by Flannigan's being out-done by Joe Griffen in regard to Mrs. Pilgrim. Joe decides that it will be best for him to spend Christmas with his parents in Chicago. At the same time Flannigan is telling Joe about the gossip, Angelica Mudge tells Alice Pilgrim the same thing, because she is jealous and wants Flannigan for herself. Joe does go to Chicago, but Flannigan's suit is not successful. He takes pneumonia, and Mrs. Pilgrim nurses him back to health. When Flannigan finds a letter that the carrier put in his box by mistake and has lain in the box during his illness, he sends the telegram. Joe returns to Buried Hatchet. With these ingredients, the end of the novel is not hard to predict. Joe and Mrs. Pilgrim are to be married. Flannigan decides to court Angelica Mudge, who has been waiting for Flannigan to start paying attention to her.

It is apparent from the plot summary that Flannigan's Folly is not a realistic novel, nor is the ironic turn of events characteristic of Milburn's earlier fiction found. The characters are well-delineated. Flannigan's peculiarities of expression, his tales, and his Irish humor are all pleasing. Joe Griffen, the other male character, is quite different from Flannigan. Joe can probably be best described as a typical "all American" boy full of modesty and sincerity. Alice Pilgrim is also a stock character. She is a model widow who grieves for her husband the right length of time, and then finds a suitable husband. Alice Pilgrim and Joe Griffen are both realistic characters, and this does not allow them to be fully rounded characters. Angelica Mudge, who is eccentric both in her behavior and her language, serves as a good opponent and counterpart to Flannigan.

The humor of the novel lies in the language and actions of the two principal characters, Flannigan and Angelica. One passage which illustrates the humorous features of Flannigan is found in the beginning of Chapter Two, as Flannigan is first awakening.

The kisses hung wet on the soles of Flannigan's feet. His face crazed with wrinkles as he smiled and twitched his hands back under the tattered quilt.

Dawn was sifting pink notes through the cabin window. Its glow made Flannigan's face the face of a voluptuous saint. His faded red hair, fanned out on the dingy pillow, became a glory of crinkled rays.

He sighed in his sleep. His long, gilt-bristled upper lip stretched flat, his pale lashes squeezed tight, and his mouth clopped softly.

The kisses followed him under the quilt, tickling his feet. Flannigan giggled once. But it was more than a man could bear. He sprung up in bed and sat for a moment, wide-eyed and blinking. The rumpled mound at his feet lay quiet. Sticking out from under the covers at the edge of the sagged bedstead, gleaming in the early light, was a smooth fat rump.

Flannigan leaped from bed in his long underwear and stood shivering with anger.

"Bessie!" he howled. "How come you in here? Dang you for a misbegotten muck, anyhow!"

He flailed out with his bare right foot and landed a kick on Bessie's plump bottom. The force of the blow hoisted her full on the bed.

Flannigan grabbed his toes and went prancing about the room on one foot, grunting with pain.

The shoat gave a muffled oink, scrambled off the bed, and hit the plank floor with all trotters working. She scampered toward the door, trailing the ragged quilt.<sup>3</sup>

What makes this passage humorous is the incongruity present in the scene. The fact that Bessie is a pig not only makes the scene funny, it also comments on the state of the Flannigan household, for people who allow pigs in their houses are not noted for their cleanliness.

In Flannigan's Folly, Milburn has used diction to a good advantage in characterizing Flannigan, as is evident in the opening of the novel when Flannigan tells a story to Mrs. Pilgrim's son.

"Would you please tell me a story, Flannigan?" she heard her son ask.

"That I would, Rickie, my boy. And which story would you like this time?"

"Tell me the one about Barney Connors and the three witches."

"Oh, that one?--Well, sir, onct upon a time, and this was in the old days, there lived a spalpeen who went by the name of Barney Connors, and the reason of him going by that name was that his dad was named Connors, and so was his granddad, and so was his granddad, and a long line of Connors before them went by the same name, no doubt. Now the curious thing about Barney Connors was that his legs reached all the way to the ground and he had a habit of wearing his head under his hat, . . ." (FF, pp. 39-40).

This brief passage illustrates Flannigan's garrulousness and his kindness. His stock of Irish lore and his singing of Irish songs all add color to the novel and help make him a viable character.

Angelica Mudge is the other character who is amusing. It is primarily her language which is amusing, for her chatter is replete with vulgarity. The people in *Buried Hatchet*, "held Angelica Mudge in awe, she spoke as she pleased, even before Baptists. She was a native, and she was the last of her line" (FF, p. 24). In an argument with Flannigan, Angelica's command of English is seen at its best.

"And don't try handin' me none of your blarney, neither," she yelled, grasping the steering wheel and jouncing up and down on the seat in a frenzy. "You hike your ass right up the road and get them pigs off my property. I've got 'em penned up in my wood lot now. . . . If you'd keep your fences up, they wouldn't get out. Try fixin' your fences, you shiftless old no-account mackerel-snapper you! . . . and I goon sic the sheriff onto you. And I'm not bird-turdin' you, neither!" (FF, p. 18).

When Angelica Mudge speaks in Flannigan's Folly, she almost always uses language similar to that above, and yet she is so amusing that her language is not really offensive.

Angelica, of course, knows what she is doing. And her behavior toward Flannigan is calculated. Whenever she sees Flannigan, she swears at him, for she knows that this will make him lose his temper. As soon as Flannigan loses his patience, she drives away while he swears at her in a state of fury.

Angelica's appearance is almost amusing. She is a spindly spinster who does not act like a lady, nor does she look particularly refined. She dyes her hair in an attempt to attract the attention of Flannigan. The essential quality Angelica Mudge lacks is femininity. All of her feeble attempts to look feminine are negated by her language and her actions. The incongruity of these things makes her a pitiable, but amusing woman.

Although Flannigan's Folly is an amalgam of setting, humor, diction, and a formula plot, it is not a good novel. There is neither character development nor social satire in it. The book does not have a theme nor really any valid point to make. According to Welborn Hope, who knew George Milburn, Milburn wrote Flannigan's Folly with the intent that it be the great American farm novel. Milburn, says Hope, was really a romantic at heart.<sup>4</sup> But because the bitter and sardonic attitudes of George Milburn's earlier fiction are not present, it is hard to believe that the man

who wrote Oklahoma Town and No More Trumpets wrote Flannigan's Folly. Unlike the short fiction discussed in earlier chapters, the central characters of this novel are normal, average people. Before, George Milburn had written about people who were grotesque or who faced a crisis in their lives such as the crises faced by the protagonist of "A Position on the Staff" or "Sugar Be Sweet!" Milburn published Flannigan's Folly a few years after his other work; and while the use of local-color material is quite important, the satire is missing.

#### Catalogue: A Novel

Published in 1936, Catalogue is a novel which effectively combines the ideas and methods George Milburn used in his short fiction. It is different from the ordinary novel in that parts of it can be removed and arranged so as to form a short story. Yet, the removal of any section or sections of it affects the remaining portions. Catalogue, however, can best be discussed by taking each of the strands of the novel separately and showing its development up to the final episode of the novel. Then an analysis of this episode will show how these various strands are woven together so as to form a coherent novel. "The Wish Book" is discussed first, since it was published separately as a short story. The order in which the remaining portions of the novel are discussed basically follows the order of the earlier chapters of this dissertation.

The best known portion of Catalogue is "The Wishbook." Although there is no central character in this short story, Spike Callahan is the most important, as his presence is one unifying factor. The story begins at the railway station. Homer Slover has come to the station to get a box of shotgun shells ordered from the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue. When he picks the shells up, he mentions to the railway agent the dance that Herman Gutterman is giving. In the next episode, the train that brings Slover his shells only disembarks one passenger, R. W. E. Ledbetter, the local newspaper owner and editor. Spike Callahan, who runs the local jitney, is at the station to pick up any passengers. As Spike starts to leave, Ledbetter hails him in order to get a ride back to town. As the two men ride back to town, Spike Callahan delivers a tirade about Red Currie, Ledbetter's assistant at the newspaper.

"He's too damn smart-alecky to suit me!" Spike snarled. His blotched lean face was set and his bitter lips had gone white. "Soon as you learnt him to run that linotype he got too big for his britches. I went in there today with a piece for the paper and he got awful smart with me. Said I'd have to pay to get it in."<sup>5</sup>

Ledbetter asks to read the piece; and after he has read it, he says that there is usually a twenty-five cent charge for a card of thanks. Spike asks about his usual fare for hauling Ledbetter, and the editor agrees to waive the charge. Then he reaches for a scrap of paper and scrawls, "Ye. ed. businesssed in Tulsa Friday" (Catalogue, p. 201).

Red Currie has ordered a pair of trousers from the catalogue. As he is waiting for the mail, he sees Irene Pirtle, a girl in his high school class. She asks Red Currie to get her package for her. He does so, and each shows the other what he has bought. Red had purchased a pair of "sizzle-pants;" Irene has purchased step-ins with rose buds. When Red mentions the dance at Gutterman's, Irene says that she does not have an escort, as her father will not let her date Eagle Catoosa, a rich Indian. Irene's father arrives to take Irene home, but she whispers to Red Currie to pick her up at seven-thirty.

When Spike gets home from his run, he sees his small son who is blind and has no fingers on one hand. Spike fondles him and then goes inside the house, where his wife is cooking supper. Spike reminds her to return the layette they had purchased from Sears. After supper he leaves for town to see if he can pick up some more taxi fares. While uptown, Spike goes to Ira Pirtle's service station. When he asks Ira Pirtle for a rag and a wrench, Ira gives Spike for a rag the step-ins his daughter has just received from Sears. As Spike is working on his car, Eagle Catoosa comes by and offers Spike five dollars if he will tell Irene to meet him at the culvert below the Gutterman place. Since Irene is with Red Currie, Spike relishes this.

While Spike is at the service station, his wife opens the mail-order catalogue and reads the information about the layette. She begins to cry. Then she turns to another

part of the catalogue and reads the page which describes the contraceptive devices sold by Sears. She lays her head down on the catalogue and begins to pray.

"Oh, dear God," she prayed. "I'm not sure, but I've got to be sure. You see everything that happens in the world, God, so won't you please help me . . . help me. . . ." (Catalogue, p. 218).

By this time, Spike is already in Gutterman's kitchen. Homer Slover comes in the back door and leaves his loaded shotgun in the kitchen when he goes into the room where the dance is in progress. Red Currie comes into the kitchen and asks Spike where Irene has gone. When Spike says he does not know, Red Currie shows Spike the rag he found in Spike's car. Spike laughs at him, and then Red Currie picks up the shotgun and threatens Spike. Spike attempts to get the gun away, but Red Currie murders Spike, sets the gun where he has found it, and slips out the back door before anyone enters the kitchen.

At the same time Spike is killed, his wife is still crying. The alarm clock she has set to remind her to give her son his medicine goes off as the cuckoo clock cuckoos at the Gutterman's. "As she turned on the light and walked across to the kitchen shelf[, ] she saw that it was just ten o'clock" (Catalogue, p. 239).

In An Approach to Literature, Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser, and Robert Penn Warren discuss "The Wish Book." They point out that this story is more indirect and complicated in methods than most because, in most stories,

there is a central character; but in this story this is not so. The characters of the story "are sharply defined and recognizable."<sup>6</sup> This indicates that, while Milburn can draw character, he avoided the emphasis of a central character for a purpose. This same purpose affects another feature of the story.

In most stories there is a kind of central movement of action, a natural and clear sequence from part to part and scene to scene. . . . The reader picks up a strand of action and pursues it to the end.<sup>7</sup>

In "The Wish Book" there are eight separate scenes which are separated by portions of a mail-order catalogue and not joined by ordinary transitions.

The structure of the story is a little like a puzzle with the parts falling into place when the key piece is touched. All of the characters are connected by the events in the Gutterman kitchen, but these events are not the central fact of the story.<sup>8</sup>

The central fact is the "wish book" or catalogue. The merchandise ordered from the catalogue is the unifying factor. "These objects, like a kind of evil mechanism, are set loose in the community and bring about a catastrophe involving several people."<sup>9</sup> The articles are supposed to bring happiness to the people, but they bring unhappiness instead. Thus, the fulfillment of the wishes granted by the wish book is ironical, the basic effect of the story.

The quotations from the catalogues serve a purpose above that of separating the eight scenes of the story. They are part of the irony, for they hold forth the promises of the wish book.

But their irony is not merely dependent upon the facts that the objects ordered on this particular occasion are contributing elements in a futile place of violence. . . . The general irony, as the author apparently intends, involves the relation of the simple people who buy from the mail-order catalogue to the advertising experts whose occupation is not only to answer a need of these people, but to play on their weaknesses. . . . The author has, by implication, brought many of the qualities of general American life to focus in his story; one aspect of his skill is demonstrated by the arrangement of his material and not by direct statement.<sup>10</sup>

It is apparent, then, that "The Wish Book" is not about a single character nor constructed in an ordinary fashion. The articles from the catalogue knit the story together, but the irony in the story is gained by the author's attitude and by the positioning of the people of the story in juxtaposition to a way of life that lies outside the community in which they live.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike "The Wish Book," which is composed of eight scenes from Catalogue, the narrative about Waldo Ledbetter is composed of one section and the concluding section of the novel. The section which focuses upon Waldo's struggle is "160c3030 Speed Model Bicycle." Waldo Ledbetter, the son of the newspaper editor, is a sensitive boy. One of his favorite pastimes is lying on the floor of his bedroom with the mail-order catalogues and dreaming. Waldo's dreams get him into trouble, however. At first, Waldo looks at his geography book and dreams that he is "R. W. Emerson Ledbetter, the millionaire circus owner" (Catalogue, p. 78). He makes lists of animals that his circus

would have. This soon pales, and Waldo's interest shifts to travel. He begins sending for free travel brochures. In sending for these brochures, he tells the companies that he is interested in travelling around the world. The steamship companies send him their brochures, although Waldo's father says that his son is lying.

That proved that his father did not understand. Waldo did not even attempt to explain that when he was writing those cards he was R. W. Waldo E. Ledbetter, Sr., the famous millionaire globe-trotter (Catalogue, p. 79).

The steamship companies sent agents to the town to see Waldo. At first Waldo's father is amused, but one day he has too many agents disturb him at the office. When he comes home, he punishes Waldo for his lying by using a razor strap on his son.

That should have taught Waldo a lesson, but Waldo turns his attention to the catalogues. At first, Waldo pretends he is a trapper. One day when Waldo is dreaming, his father tells him he will never get a nickel looking at the catalogues. This statement gives Waldo an idea. He wants a bicycle, and he begins to seek ways to make the money necessary to order a bicycle from Montgomery Wards. Waldo sells magazine subscriptions for a short while, but that source of income is soon exhausted. When the teller at the Conchartee National Bank hires Waldo to drive his cow out to the pasture that spring, Waldo finds several other cows to drive. He has such a good income that he orders his bicycle. Waldo's father accuses him of forgery,

as Waldo omitted the Jr. on the order blank. Ledbetter tells his son that he will go to reform school for his action. When the summer drought comes, Waldo is not able to meet his payments on his bicycle, since no one wants his cow driven to a dry pasture. Waldo begins to avoid the local sheriff, as his father's comments have scared him. One Sunday morning, however, Waldo does run into the sheriff, who jokingly asks Waldo when he will be ready to go to the reform school at Pauls Valley.

As in most initiation stories, Waldo struggles against his environment. He is struggling against his father, who represents the psychological environment of the story. R. W. E. Ledbetter, Sr. is a man who is rather indifferent and then callous to his only son. He is a man with a limited amount of imagination, and he cannot understand his son because Waldo does have an imagination, an imagination that is an important part of Waldo's personality. Thus, it is inevitable that they clash. Waldo's mother is caught between the two, and she does not attempt to ameliorate the situation. Waldo is apparently defeated by his natural environment also. He orders the bicycle with the idea that by driving the cows to pasture each day he will make enough money to pay for his new bicycle. But the usual summer drought causes Waldo to lose his source of income, and he cannot make his August payment. As in "The Wish Book," the ordering of merchandise that is to bring happiness brings sadness. Waldo orders a new wheel; and he is

ecstatic about it until he cannot pay for it. Thus, Waldo's father, the Oklahoma weather, and the mail-order catalogue all work against Waldo.

George Milburn's ability to write effectively about a young boy is evident in this section of Catalogue. He captures the fears, frustrations, and the joys of an adolescent boy. He records the awe with which Waldo regards his father, and he still allows the reader to see the father's foibles, as well as those of the boy. Waldo is a young boy who is maturing. In his reveries about being a circus owner, a globe-trotter, and a trapper, Waldo acts as a normal adolescent, for what boy has not had similar dreams. And these dreams are a necessary part of a young boy's life provided he realizes that they are dreams and not reality. The dreams Waldo has make the sketch episodic, another trait of the initiation story. These episodes are united primarily by the presence of the protagonist. One of these episodes forms the opening and the closing of "160c3030 Speed Model Bicycle." As it opens, Waldo goes into the town pharmacy to buy an ice cream cone with the nickel his father has given him for Sunday school. The narrator of the story tells how Waldo has felt the "shadow of the reform school hovering over him" (Catalogue, p. 74). The conversation between Waldo and his father about the forgery is given, and Waldo's despair is described. Some mornings when Waldo awakens, he dreams that the summer is

just a nightmare, but he knows that is not so. "Dreaming could be used to make unreal things real, but it would not work the other way" (Catalogue, p. 76). The story demonstrates how Waldo's dreaming has gotten him into trouble. At the conclusion of "160c3030 Speed Model Bicycle," the sheriff steps out of the pharmacy just as Waldo is going in to buy his cone. He kids Waldo about reform school. The narrative closes with Waldo's fate in a state of uncertainty. In "Unparalleled in Publishing," Waldo solves his dilemma.

Another episode of Catalogue is that about Ira Pirtle and the Widow Holcomb. In "The Wish Book," Ira is the father of Irene, the girl who accompanies Red Currie to the dance at the Gutterman's. One reason Ira does not want Irene to see Eagle Catoosa is that Eagle is also courting the Widow Holcomb. Ira is also attempting to court the Widow. During the time the novel focuses on these two people, the Widow Holcomb has not been able to date either Ira or Eagle because the roots of her hair are not black. She attempts to order some hair dye from Sears, but the Negro girl who works for her places her letter in the trash can, as the postmaster has placed a sign above the can with the words "PLEASE PLACE LITTER IN THIS BARREL" (Catalogue, p. 73). The girl places the letter in the barrel, as to her the words litter and letter are synonyms.

Ira has ordered some rubber collars from Sears; and the night of the dance the Widow Holcomb calls him. The

two of them attempt to catch Eagle and Irene together, but for different reasons. When they find them, Irene has hidden under a blanket; Eagle is searching for his keys in the car with a lighted match. When Ira starts to remove the cover under which Irene is hiding, Eagle touches the match to Ira's rubber collar, which ignites and burns Ira. Eagle finds his keys and drives off as Ira is comforted by the Widow.

The sections of Catalogue which form this narrative tell a rather disgusting, yet amusing story. The Widow Holcomb has deceived herself into thinking no one knows that she dyes her hair. As one of the girls in the post office observes, "When you think you got ever'body fooled as bad as she thinks she has, you don't even want to face a strange drug clerk any more than you do a drug clerk who knows you" (Catalogue, p. 155).

In his characterization of the Widow Holcomb, Milburn skillfully draws a woman familiar in small towns. When the rural mail carrier delivers a catalogue at the Widow's house, her appearance is described.

The Widow Holcomb came down the walk, her pink kimono parting at her plump bare ankles, a lacey boudoir cap pulled down over her ears. Slemmons eyed her covertly, a large handsome woman with ample flesh curving smooth and warm under a silken sheath. The unkind morning light traced fine wrinkles at the corners of her dark, heavy-browed eyes and a pad sagged under her chin. But when she let go the top of her kimono to unlatch the front gate, Slemmons caught a glimpse of her fine big bosom, and his hand was

jittery as he gave her the mail. He jammed in his clutch and sped away, hardly acknowledging the Widow's gold-flecked smile of thanks (Catalogue, p. 40).

This passage allows the reader to appreciate Ira Pirtle's and Eagle Catoosa's seeking the favors of the Widow, as she is a voluptuous woman. She also has part of her late husband's life insurance money. Her sensuality and wealth are quite enough to tempt many men.

Ira Pirtle is perhaps the most realistic of the people in this particular episode. In "33F8244 Rubber Collars," Ira and Irene exchange a few remarks about Eagle and the Widow Holcomb. Ira has forbidden Irene to see Eagle, and she says that she will not go out with Eagle because "he's been dating that old slut of a Widow Holcomb. . . ." (Catalogue, p. 57). Ira is offended by this remark. Irene implies that her father has been intimate with the Widow. The situation is ironic in that a father and his daughter are both engaged in pursuing undesirable liaisons. In fact, this is what makes the story in Catalogue so interesting. Eagle is pursuing Irene, but he dates the Widow in order to irritate Ira, who really wants the Widow Holcomb. She is not impartial, as she will be satisfied with either man, although she does enjoy having both men pursue her.

The night of the dance at Gutterman's, Ira does win the Widow Holcomb. After the rubber collar ignites, the Widow screams at Ira to roll in the dust to extinguish the burning collar. Eagle and Irene drive off in the dust.

"Oh, honey! Oh, sweetheart!" the Widow cried, sitting down in the road and pillowing Ira Pirtle's singed neck in her lap. "Did that mean old Indian hurt you?"

Ira Pirtle opened his eyes and looked up at her. "Is the fahr out?" he asked.

"Yes, you put it out," she said. "Only a savage Indian would think of a trick like that. I wouldn't have nothing more to do with a savage Indian that would pull a trick like that. Oh, honey, he ain't kilt you, has he?"

"Ah," said Ira Pirtle, snuggling his head down into the Widow's warm lap (Catalogue, pp. 231-232).

Ira has won his contest with Eagle Catoosa, but he has been outmaneuvered by Eagle Catoosa, as Eagle gets both revenge and Irene. The Widow realizes that Eagle did not really want her after all, and she apparently will be satisfied with Ira.

A second love story is that of Slemmons and Birdie Hollinsworth. Birdie has married a man who is very jealous and refuses to take her to the various dances held in the community. She lives on Slemmons' mail route. She keeps enticing him when he delivers the mail each day. The night Herman Gutterman has the dance, she and Slemmons are out in a shed behind the Gutterman house. When Red Currie shoots Spike, Birdie thinks that it is her husband who has fired the gun. Slemmons pulls up his trousers and starts running across the field towards town. His suspenders catch on a scrub oak, stretch, then flip toward him and strike him in the middle of his back as a gun is fired a second time. He is sure that he has been shot. His suspenders catch on a

barbed wire fence, and he believes that he has been shot by Orin Hollinsworth. He finally reaches town and runs down an alley behind Banker Winston's house.

There was a sound of wood breaking. The ground gave way under him and darkness closed around him.

"This is the end!" he gasped as he sank into the earth. "Orin Hollinsworth killed me back there and now I'm going to hell!" (Catalogue, p. 244).

W. S. Winston is roused from his sleep by a cry of fire. When the fire department arrives, the men find Slemmons in Winston's cesspool. When W. S. Winston asks why Slemmons yelled fire, "Mr. Winston," Slemmons said, mournfully, "do you reckon anybody would of come if I'd a yelled 'shit?'" (Catalogue, p. 240).

This humorous narrative from Catalogue is one of the most effective. The attempt of Slemmons to escape from the man he thinks is pursuing him is amusing because he is running from his own suspenders. This is a feature of a tall tale. The tone of the story indicates to the reader that Slemmons is a victim of his own conscience, and he gets what he deserves when he falls into W. S. Winston's cesspool. Slemmons' laconic question makes the situation more ridiculous. This is a good use of diction by Milburn. This section takes on an added meaning as the section which describes Slemmons' flight immediately follows Red Currie's murder of Spike Callahan. Thus, this section serves as a bit of comic relief to the senseless murder which has just

occurred, and the reader, instead of thinking he has reached the climax of Catalogue, is prepared for the actual climax of the novel.

"12F1299 Silver G String" is about a man to whom fiddling is a necessary way of life. When this section opens, four people are on their way to visit Matt Keefer: Mrs. Whipple, Mrs. W. S. Winston, Mrs. R. W. E. Ledbetter, and the Reverend Harley Grotts. The purpose of their visit is to see whether or not Matt Keefer qualifies for county relief. As they arrive, Matt is playing his fiddle. Mrs. Whipple, Mrs. Winston, and Grotts hope that Matt is ready to quit playing his fiddle and to go to work. When Mrs. Ledbetter points out that Matt Keefer has kept the countryside in music, the other women claim that what Matt plays is not really music.

When the four meet Matt, he greets them courteously. Grotts explains the reason for the visit.

The old man straightened his drooping shoulders. "I'm by meself here; that's true, Reverend," he replied with cool dignity, "but I ain't starved to death yit--and I ain't put in fer no free aid, neither" (Catalogue, p. 126).

Matt's dignity is respected only by Mrs. Ledbetter, who comments on his music. He points out that he cannot play for a dance unless he can buy a new G string for his fiddle. And all he has are a few coins his dead wife saved. Meanwhile, the other two women are going through Matt's kitchen. They find an empty lard pail and one shriveled potato. There is no other food. Matt admits to

not having eaten since the previous morning. Grotts tells Matt that he needs relief, but he must meet Grotts' qualifications.

Now it's up to you to show that you deserve it. Now you put that fiddle away and git to work-- around here on your own place if nowhere else. . . . But I'm telling you right now, Matt, if you don't quit fiddling and start to work, I'm going to see to it that you don't git an ounce of relief. We'll be going now (Catalogue, pp. 128-129).

As she is leaving the house, Mrs. Ledbetter gives Matt fifty cents to last until it is time for food to be distributed to those on relief. He rushes to his bed, finds the catalogue, and then hurries toward town. He goes to the post office and asks the postmaster to send a money order to Sears for the G string for his fiddle.

In "12F1299 G String," Milburn shows the tension between a man who ~~regards~~ regards his art as more important than food and a self-righteous hypocritical man. Harley Grotts is a completely insensitive man who neither understands nor attempts to understand the reason why Matt Keefer regards his fiddling so highly. Grotts believes that unless one works, and it must be work Grotts thinks is valuable, he is not entitled to relief. Of course the fact that Grotts lays an emphasis upon the word deserve says a great deal about his attitude. Matt is entitled to relief regardless of what Grotts thinks because he is impoverished financially, although not morally or aesthetically.

Of course, what Milburn has touched upon in "12F1299 G String" is the role of the artist in society. On one

hand the Reverend Harley Grotts is a representative of what Matthew Arnold would call a Philistine, as he has a complete disregard of culture and beauty. When the story opens, Matt is attempting to play his fiddle. Grotts, Mrs. Whipple, and Mrs. Winston are provoked by Matt's fiddling when they think he should be working. Only Mrs. Ledbetter recognizes the value of what Matt Keefer has done for the community, and she says that she would "as soon hear Matt Keefer play as I had Fritz Kreisler. I don't know--I might enjoy Matt's violin more" (Catalogue, p. 124). Mrs. Ledbetter understands the value of Matt Keefer's art, and she does what she can to support it. She also respects his dignity, something neither Grotts nor the other two women do. In "12F1299 G String," Milburn has satirized those people who do harm in the name of good and the Philistine element of a community which does not recognize the value of regional art.

George Milburn wrote satirically about religious hypocrisy in "12F1299 G String." In "86D897 Cord Clothes-line," "Model T," "33D340 Fancy Shirt," and "56D4567 Supreme Letter Writer," he wrote about racism. The first section opens with a description of one of the two chief figures in this narrative.

An unshaven man with yellow eyeteeth came pulling a rusty tin wagon down the side street. The wagon was loaded with a bundle tied in a dirty sheet. Its squeaking wheels stopped in front of the post office. The stubble-faced man tongued a quid out of his cheek and tossed

it on the sidewalk. He propped the wagon tongue back and went into the post office (Catalogue, p. 178).

This unsavory character is C. R. Butts. Butts asks for a package. Since he is so undesirable, the two girls working in the post office answer his request in a desultory manner. Butts asks the postmaster, Shannon, if he will send his laundry to Butts' wife. Shannon says that he sends his washing to Hannah Merrick, a Negress. Butts accuses Shannon of letting a white man starve; Shannon replies by pointing out that Butts' wife and his daughter both support Butts and his drinking. Shannon also points out that the Merricks are industrious and self-respecting, which is more than he can say for Butts. Butts accuses Shannon of being a "nigger lover," and thinking that a Negro is just as good as a white man. Shannon's response implies that Sylvester Merrick is a far better man than Butts is.

At this point, Merrick drives up at the post office door in a Model T Ford. He asks Shannon about a parcel post package. Butts rudely asks Merrick what he has ordered from Montgomery Wards. Merrick says that he has ordered some dress goods and other articles, including a length of clothesline. Butts says,

"Yeah. Well, you better be careful you don't wind up with your neck in one end of that clothesline, black boy."

Sylvester tilted up his moist black face, showing two rows of perfect white teeth and guffawed too loudly.

"I sho' will, Mistah Butts. I sho' will be keeful about letting anything lak that happen! I sho' will!" (Catalogue, p. 182).

Butts then berates Merrick for ordering from a catalogue when he could have bought his merchandise in town. Merrick points out to Butts that he has done the same. Butts threatens to teach Merrick his place, to which Merrick replies, "I'm a black man, Mistah Butts, and I knows my place. You're a white man, Mistah Butts. You keep yo' place and I'll sho' keep mine" (Catalogue, p. 183). Merrick leaves in his car. Shannon tells Butts to quit loitering in the post office and kicks Butts' wagon down the street. Butts runs after it cursing. The girls in the post office warn Shannon that Butts can cause a lot of trouble. Shannon points out that Butts is a "skunk" and Merrick "a self-respecting fairly intelligent man. . ." (Catalogue, p. 185).

After Butts catches his wagon, he goes past the Conchatee County Democrat building. Red Currie is sitting at the linotype keyboard. Butts asks Red to let his wife do his laundry, and he presents the same argument to Red that he has earlier presented to Shannon. Red replies in the negative. "C. R. Butts sauntered on down the alley with the small tin wagon screaming behind him" (Catalogue, p. 189).

This section of Catalogue is developed primarily by contrasting two men: C. R. Butts, the white man; and Sylvester Merrick, the Negro. Butts is a no account, shiftless species of humanity. He is supported by his wife

and daughter. His wife does laundry and his daughter works at the telephone office. He is despised by the two white men with whom he comes in contact. He feels that the community owes him a living simply because he is white. Butts is as repulsive physically as he is personally. One cannot help but notice his name, C. R. Butts. Milburn means to indicate that Butts is the butt end of the community.

By way of contrast, Sylvester Merrick has those qualities that C. R. Butts lacks. He is a conscientious, hard-working man. He is greatly admired by Shannon for his industry. That he is more intelligent than Butts is apparent in the scene at the post office, as Sylvester Merrick actually wins the verbal exchanges, although he is forced to beat a retreat of sorts when Butts reminds Merrick that he is a Negro in a racist community.

In "Model T," Butts goes to the local pharmacy and buys a bottle of bitters with a high alcoholic content. The pharmacist makes certain that Butts intends to pay for the bitters, then he watches Butts leave the store. Butts goes to Ira Pirtle's filling station, where Spike Callahan is working on his car. He agrees to take Butts out to the dance at Gutterman's for a quarter. As Spike is leaving, he runs into Sylvester Merrick's car. Spike blames Merrick for the accident, although the latter had the right of way. As Spike and Sylvester are arguing about who is to blame, Butts slips behind Merrick and pins his arms. Spike tells Butts to release Merrick; but, as Butts does so, he strikes

Sylvester in the face. A crowd of men that had gathered around the accident jeers Sylvester. Art Smiley, the town marshal, breaks up the crowd. As Spike leaves with Butts for the dance, Merrick stands with his blood running down his face. Art Smiley asks Sylvester if he is able to drive.

"Yes, sah, I's able to drive, if my cah'll go. I don't know if my cah'll go with the fron all smashed in lak that."

"Git in, then, and try it. You'll have to git it off the street. I wouldn't let it worry me if I was you. Accidents will happen, and it don't do a man no good to lose his temper about it" (Catalogue, p. 225).

"Model T" is a further development of the conflict between C. R. Butts and Sylvester Merrick. Butts demonstrates his unreliable character when the pharmacist gets his money from Butts before giving him the bottle of bitters. Further indication of Butts' worthlessness is apparent when he sneaks behind Merrick in order to aid Spike Callahan punch Sylvester in the nose. The attitude of the whole community is also apparent in this section. Although Art Smiley does keep Sylvester from being molested any further, he does not make Spike pay for the damage done to Sylvester's Model T, although Spike is at fault. This particular incident involving Spike, Butts, and Merrick lays the scene for "330340 Fancy Shirt."

This section focuses on some of the events following the murder at the dance. Red Currie has left the dance and is in his room at the Widow Tinseley's boarding house. He

removes his blood-spattered shirt and wraps it in a newspaper in which his freshly laundered shirts were wrapped. The newspaper is the Black Dispatch. He snaps off the light and slips quietly out of the house with the bundle. The focus then shifts to the local court house. Butts keeps trying to convince Sheriff Ferguson that Sylvester has murdered Spike for ruining his Model T. The sheriff refuses to arrest Merrick because he does not have sufficient evidence. Furthermore, Sylvester works for W. S. Winston, and the sheriff does not want to incur Winston's wrath by arresting Sylvester erroneously. Butts keeps trying to convince Sheriff Ferguson to arrest Sylvester. Finally, he says,

If us men here done what we'd ort to do, we'd all go out and ketch that nigger ourse'fs without waiting on you, sheruff. And when we ketched him, we'd jist string him up on a telephone pole and save the county all that expense of tryin' him (Catalogue, p. 254).

The sheriff becomes angry at the suggestion of a lynching and threatens to throw Butts in jail. He waits until the bloodhounds arrive from Eufaula to track the murderer.

In the section of Catalogue following "33D340 Fancy Shirt," Red Currie sets a letter in the linotype from the Negro citizens of Conchartee. This letter says that they do not approve of Sylvester Merrick's actions. Ironically, the letter also says that they hope that the guilty will be brought to speedy justice. Ledbetter has written an editorial about Merrick's arrest. Merrick voluntarily turned

himself in to the sheriff, as the community has become aroused. The same day, some small boys found

a bundle containing a blood-stained shirt wrapped in a newspaper bearing Merrick's address label. The shirt bore the trade mark of a mail-order house which the Negro is reputed on good authority to have been a customer of and also was a gaudy [,] striped affair which Negroes often wear. . . . (Catalogue, p. 258).

Red Currie objects to Ledbetter's description of the shirt. Ledbetter asks Red why he is grouchy, but Red says that he is all right. He then begins setting a second letter which is similar to the other letter in that the writer attempts to assure the white people of the community that the local Negroes do not approve of Merrick's actions. The letter concludes with what is for the reader an ironic statement: "I also thank the sheriff for working so faithfully to get the right man" (Catalogue, p. 259). Red thinks that the letter is too long to be printed in its entirety, but Ledbetter wants all of the letter in the paper. He is afraid that the Negroes will not trade with the local merchants and that any disturbance in the community will mar the success of the Home Town Industry Jubilee.

In the last episode of "57D567 Supreme Letter Writer," Hattie Butts, C. R. Butts' daughter, listens to a telephone conversation between Sheriff Ferguson and the sheriff of Okmulgee County. She then locates her father and tells him that Sylvester Merrick is to be moved to Okmulgee the night of the Home Town Industry Jubilee. She thinks that the

sheriff and his party can be stopped at the Arkansas River Bridge.

At this point in Catalogue, it is apparent that Sylvester Merrick will be lynched. This section has several ironic overtones as Red Currie has to set up the type on letters which express satisfaction that justice is being served in the arrest of Sylvester Merrick. Another matter is the shirt itself. Strangely, no one at the dance remembers that Red Currie wore a shirt like that found in the alley. Red Currie knows that an injustice is being done, but he is too cowardly to take any action. In "The Wish Book," Spike refers to Red Currie as a smart aleck. In the episodes which form "The Wish Book" and the narrative about Butts and Merrick, Red Currie is a figure of some importance. He, too, has been through a series of experiences. He has attempted to court Irene Pirtle, he has killed a man, and now he sees that a man is to be lynched for a murder that he committed himself. While Red Currie has remained in the background of the sections in which he appears, he is an important figure in the proceedings, for his actions have precipitated part of the action of the plot. By placing the primary focus on other characters, Milburn allows the reader to gradually become aware that the stories of Irene and Ira Pirtle, the Widow Holcomb, Eagle Catoosa, C. R. Butts, and Sylvester Merrick develop from Red Currie's actions, for their lives have been intertwined with his. The ability of George Milburn to take a

minor figure like Red Currie and use him as a device by which to further the action of the various narratives is an indication of his ability to manipulate character and plot.

The position of W. S. Winston in Conchartee is indicated in Sheriff Ferguson's refusal to arrest Sylvester Merrick for the murder of Spike Callahan. W. S. Winston, R. W. E. Ledbetter, and Postmaster Shannon are all representatives of the business community of Conchartee. Ledbetter's plan for the Home Town Industry Jubilee in "How to Save Sales Tax" plays an important part in Catalogue. This episode opens with Waldo Ledbetter's telling his father about the mail truck's being unable to go up a hill, since the truck is loaded with the last shipment of mail-order catalogues. When the catalogues arrive, Ledbetter and Red Currie are printing the Conchartee County Democrat. Ledbetter stops the printing of the paper and inserts a front page editorial in which he extolls the virtues of the local merchants over the vices of the mail-order houses. In order to include this editorial, the editorial entitled "Can Conchartee Go Forward Without a Sewer System?" (Catalogue, p. 14) is pulled.

The arrival of the catalogues gives Ledbetter another inspiration. He conceives of a scheme for the local merchants. In "It Costs Us," he presents his scheme to them. His plan is for the merchants to offer a dollar in trade for every mail-order catalogue the people turn in to the merchants. At the end of the two weeks during which the

people can redeem their catalogues, there is to be a Home Town Industry Jubilee during which there will be races and the catalogues will be burned at a bonfire. This episode of Catalogue takes place at a meeting of the local Chamber of Commerce. This luncheon resembles the luncheon-clubs satirized in other stories of Milburn's, as there are songs and horseplay. Ledbetter's speech itself is a masterpiece in that George Milburn has unerringly caught the attitude and language of small town businessmen, as the following paragraph shows.

Boys, there is nothing like a little gray matter applied to these situations. Someone has said, if I remember right it was Arthur Brisbane, who makes \$50,000 a year, the highest paid editorial writer in the world, has said, "It takes a combination of four G's to put anything across: Gumption plus Grit plus Git-Up-and GO!" [Laughter and applause.] Well, there is this to be said: I think this scheme of mine has the Gumption. Now all we need is the Grit and Git-Up-and-Go to counteract a tough situation (Catalogue, pp. 145-146).

This attitude of Ledbetter is probably the most important facet of his speech. He is not really concerned with the welfare of the people of the community. Whether or not the mail-order houses meet the requirements of the people better than the local merchants is not mentioned nor even considered. Ledbetter and the local merchants are interested only in getting money from the people. It does not occur to them to see the reason why the people prefer to patronize Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Wards. Thus, Milburn points out the greed of the Conchartee merchants.

Besides the Home Town Industry Jubilee, Ledbetter's other interest is in the proposed new sewer system for Conchartee. This proposal brings him to the attention of W. S. Winston, the town's richest man and president of the Conchartee National Bank. In "153D9372 Wheel Chair," Milburn describes W. S. Winston's pomposity as Winston leaves his house to walk to his bank.

He [Winston] had nothing to do with his thick legs, toiling like pistons beneath him. Each footstep fell heavy and even on a sidewalk crease. Above the gross flesh he rode serene. An unlighted cigar was tilted against his swollen underlip. His bleak gray eyes were set straight ahead. Shrill sparrows in the catalpas aloft went quiet as he passed. Children at play stood off the walk in awe-stricken silence. The slow parade of W. S. Winston and his vast paunch moved on towards town (Catalogue, p. 101).

With the mention of the response of the birds and children, Milburn has skillfully caricatured W. S. Winston. His physical appearance resembles the usual picture of businessmen drawn in comic strips.

Winston's walk involves various contacts. He first goes to the post office and signs for a piece of registered mail. As he is leaving the post office, Waldo Ledbetter rushes into the lobby. W. S. Winston swats Waldo with the envelope and says to Waldo that he can always brag that W. S. Winston spanked him with five thousand dollars. This unwonted act of levity shocks the observers gathered in the post office. This particular act of kindness to Waldo on Winston's part prepares the reader for another act of kindness in the final episode of the novel.

After he leaves the post office, Winston turns his steps toward the barber shop. He meets Cripple Lund, who has given Winston's name as a credit reference. Since Lund does not have a wheel chair but uses a toy wagon, he needs to buy a wheel chair to keep his paper route. Winston promises to give Lund a good credit rating. Once at the barber shop, Winston is treated deferentially. When one of the men mentions the plan to install a new sewer system in the community, Winston becomes angry. As soon as he gets to the bank, he asks the cashier for the details about the sewer and the figures on the town's bonded indebtedness. Since Ledbetter has been pushing the idea of the sewer, Winston also asks about the state of Ledbetter's loan. When Ledbetter comes into the bank, Winston uses the loan as a means to coerce Ledbetter into using his influence to call off the bond election.

W. S. Winston is essentially like many small businessmen. When Ledbetter points out to Winston that some people have had typhoid that summer and that there is a stench in the town, he is unmoved. Winston's only concern is with how much taxes would be raised if the bond election were to pass. When Ledbetter realizes that Winston can foreclose on his note, the man who spoke so bravely at the Chamber of Commerce meeting says,

Mr. Winston, to tell the truth, Postmaster Shannon was the one who suggested that sewer bond idea to me awhile back. He asked me if I wouldn't get behind it and I promised him I would. He's kept after me to get the city

council to act on it. Of course I thought it was a sound proposition at the time, but I don't know--if it's your opinion it'll raise taxes too much--that it might not be to the best interests of the community right now--why I-- (Catalogue, p. 122).

Thus, R. W. E. Ledbetter shifts the responsibility for the sewer election. Like other businessmen, the influence of money is greater than the actual and real need of the community.

There is one portion of "153D9372 Wheel Chair" which deserves comment. When Winston is in the barber shop, he asks that W. F. Slover be sent to see him. When Slover enters Winston's office, Winston asks him why he kept Sylvester Merrick from burning a brush pile in a draw on his land. Slover tells Winston that rabbits swarm in the brush pile and that his neighbors and he could not have lived through the winter had they not been able to kill the rabbits for meat. Slover also points out that the land on which the brush pile is located is of no value to Winston. Winston refuses to listen to Slover's plea and sends him on his way.

This particular portion of "153D9372 Wheel Chair" reveals just how callous Winston is. The fact that three families may starve to death does not affect him at all, for his only concern is for himself and his authority.

"281D8210D Septic Tank" takes place a few days after "153D9372 Wheel Chair." Winston is sitting in his office reading his morning mail. When he comes to the inquiry about Cripple Lund's credit rating, he places the letter

in his desk file. Postmaster Shannon enters Winston's office. Winston begins to talk to him in a kindly way. When Shannon mentions that his only complaint about having Winston as a neighbor is the condition of Winston's cesspool, the matter of the bond election is discussed in a heated fashion. Winston's attitude is that the people cannot afford to pay any more taxes. Shannon points out that the people pay as much in scavenger fees as they would in taxes. Winston then claims that the bank would bear the brunt of the expense; Shannon counters this argument by pointing out that Winston's only concern is money. Shannon proceeds to point out that Winston's cesspool drains down the alley and is covered by an old, rotten board. He concludes his remarks by saying, "If the rest of the community wants to get the same sanitary conveniences you enjoy, you're opposed to it" (Catalogue, p. 135). Winston points out to Shannon that he is a man of some power. Shannon's response is that Winston cannot dictate to him and that he can transfer the post office account to the rival bank. He adds, "And if you don't do something about that cesspool draining down on my place, I intend to take legal steps against you for maintaining a public nuisance" (Catalogue, pp. 135-136). After Shannon leaves, Winston asks Sylvester Merrick about the condition of the cesspool. Sylvester reminds Winston that he has been told that the cesspool is in a bad condition. Ledbetter enters the bank and tells Winston that the bond election will be tabled. Winston

asks Ledbetter if he would like to be the postmaster and says he will arrange for Ledbetter to meet the local Congressman.

After Ledbetter leaves, Winston gets a Sears Catalogue from his desk and orders a new septic tank. A bank employee enters the office to take any letters. Winston starts to write to Congressman Stubbs; but as he looks out the window, he sees Cripple Lund talking to Postmaster Shannon. Winston takes Lund's credit inquiry and begins a letter in which he says Lund is "a hopeless cripple without steady income . . . and a very poor credit risk. . . ." (Catalogue, p. 141).

The conflict between Winston and Postmaster Shannon shows just how cruel and ruthless Winston is when it comes to the welfare of the community and money. The man reveals his callousness in having the brush pile burned and in refusing to give Cripple Lund a good credit recommendation simply because he sees Lund talking to Postmaster Shannon. In the two sections of Catalogue in which the focus is on W. S. Winston and R. E. Ledbetter, the reader sees that Milburn is satirizing the small town businessman. R. W. E. Ledbetter, a man who at first impresses the reader as genuinely interested in the welfare of Conchartee, allows his principles to be suborned by money.

In "Catalogue Chronology" a far more humorous picture of W. S. Winston is given. In the opening scene of this section, the prospect of the Home Town Industry Jubilee

is brought to the reader's attention when a man trades in a Sears catalogue at one of the stores. One of the men says that the Home Town Industry Jubilee is

a scheme for these here merchants to git a corner on all the strikin' paper in this part of the country, and after they git all the catalogues burnt up they're goin' to sell all of us this here toilet paper and make us use it like they do at Double S. Winston's house (Catalogue, p. 170).

This comment leads to a discussion of the fact that Winston has a commode in his house. One of the men regards the use of the commode as an unsanitary practice. In fact, one man does not believe that such a device exists; but he is shown a picture in a catalogue. As the men look at the picture, the Reverend Harley Grotts walks into the store. Grotts orders some groceries, and then he says that he has two catalogues he will use to pay for them. Grotts says that he heartily supports the idea of the Home Town Industry Jubilee and that the subject of his sermon next Sunday is "Cooperation." He intends on suggesting to his congregation that "they contribute their catalogues toward getting a new carpet for the front room of the parsonage" (Catalogue, p. 174).

The humor of "Catalogue Chronology" is based on incongruity. In regard to the commode at Winston's house, the man who calls the practice unsanitary lives along the creek bank where there has been some typhoid due to unsanitary conditions. His ignorance about his own living

conditions is amusing when the reader realizes that he calls the pompous W. S. Winston unclean.

The portion in which Grotts appears reveals his shallowness. He trades in his two catalogues for merchandise, but he expects the members of his congregation to use their catalogues for his own material benefit. Further indication of Grotts' character is given when he explains the reason he is buying snuff, for the help, and the quart of grape juice, for communion. Although as was pointed out in "12F1299 Silver G String" he is a hypocrite, Grotts probably considers himself a model of Christian behavior. Had Grotts truly been an admirable character sure of his own position in the community, he probably would not have felt it necessary to explain why he purchases snuff and grape juice.

Although in the episodes of Catalogue in which Postmaster Shannon appears he is a force for progress, like W. S. Winston he is also proud of his position in the community of Conchartee, Oklahoma. Postmaster Shannon regards himself as the representative of the United States Government and the post office building and its facilities as deserving of respect from the community. This is apparent in the opening scene of "Amount of Paper Used" in a conversation between Shannon and Art Smiley.

"Art, somebody stole the post office flag last night or early this morning."

"No!" Art said, straightening up in amazement.

"Yes. We forgot and left it out last night, account of being so busy with the catalogues; first time that's happened since I got my appointment. And it wasn't there this morning."

"Why, Mr. Shannon, what ornery scalawag would pull a low-down trick like that--swipe the flag offen the post office?"

"Well, of course I can't name him for sure, Art. But I'll say this: there's a growing disrespect for the U. S. Government around here, and I'm going to put a stop to it" (Catalogue, p. 67).

Smiley is aghast at the flag's being stolen, but he is more shocked to learn that Postmaster Shannon thinks that Bill Huggins took it. Bill Huggins is a Sunday School teacher and a Boy Scout. Postmaster Shannon had seen Huggins leaving the post office the morning after the catalogues had been delivered. And he had a large bulge in his shirt.

On a Tuesday afternoon, Smiley catches Bill Huggins attempting to burn the flag; and he brings the boy and the flag to Shannon's office. Shannon sarcastically says to Huggins that he intends to teach him "a little genuine respect for the U. S. flag. . ." (Catalogue, p. 159). Huggins points out, that according to a circular issued by the War Department and reprinted in the Boy Scout Handbook, worn-out flags should not be used, but be destroyed. And since the flag used by the post office was frayed, he was merely doing his duty as a patriot. He also points out to Smiley that he desecrated the flag when he stomped on it to extinguish the fire. Both men are at a temporary loss for words. Huggins starts to leave, but Shannon tells him that he will have to pay for a new flag by sweeping the post

office, since the government only issues him a flag every six months. Art Smiley tells Huggins he intends to see that the job is done. As Bill Huggins sweeps the floor, Postmaster Shannon says to Smiley, "I guess there ain't much I can teach that boy about respect to the flag, but I bet you I can give him a good course in respect for public property" (Catalogue, p. 165).

This narrative touches upon a current national problem, the use of the United States flag. Postmaster Shannon and Art Smiley are representatives of an older generation that is self-righteous in its attempt to see that the flag is treated respectfully. Shannon's comments at the end of "6F2603 United States Flag" are ironic, for the two men have not taught Bill Huggins respect either for public property or for an older generation. What they probably have taught him is that adults are hypocritical when it comes to the young. It was an acceptable practice for Postmaster Shannon to break government regulations by flying a frayed flag, but Huggins is punished for following government regulations. In "6F2603 United States Flag" George Milburn satirizes attitudes and practices still found today.

As are many of the narratives in Catalogue, notably those involving love affairs, this narrative about Postmaster Shannon and Bill Huggins is complete. But there are three narratives which are completed in "Unparalleled in Publishing." This section of the novel focuses on the

events surrounding the Home Town Industry Jubilee. "Unparalleled in Publishing" begins by describing the people gathering in Conchartee for the events that are to take place.

The country people began arriving early. Their gray, mule-drawn wagons, with extra plank seats laid across the weathered sideboards, were lined with children, little girls in lye-bleached floursack smocks and tightly braided pigtails; bigger girls wearing starched gingham and stiff straw hats with elastic chin straps; grown girls dressed in georgette crepe or tulle silk; small boys in their Sunday overalls and youths in their first blue serge suits. The young men came on horseback or in buggies with their sweethearts sitting alongside. Not many came in automobiles, but those who did rode in aged flivvers, tattered folding tops fixed with baling wire. The alley hitching racks were crowded. The courthouse square, all but the block on Broadway that had been roped off, was black-fringed with parked cars.

There was a good time coming for all other boys in town. As for Waldo Ledbetter, Jr., he did not expect to have a good time ever again (Catalogue, pp. 262-263).

Waldo Ledbetter is unaware of the events going on around him, as he has been cowed by his father. R. W. E. Ledbetter tells his son to join the celebration. Unmoved by the festivities, Waldo can only walk slowly through the crowd of people. One business concern throws away one hundred dollars in coin to the crowd. When the coins are tossed, Waldo does succeed in getting eighteen cents. When Bill Huggins asks to see Waldo's money, he slaps Waldo's hand and Waldo loses part of his money. He tells Bill Huggins, "I'll get even with you!" (Catalogue, p. 266).

When Waldo sees Bill Huggins walking in a bran sack, he learns that there is a sack race and that the prize is a five-dollar gold piece. Waldo rushes home and gets the big coffee sack he has. The sack is large enough to let him move freely. When the race is held, Waldo is able to win handily. Bill Huggins claims that Waldo cheated because his sack is so much larger than the other sacks the boys used; W. S. Winston intervenes. He says that "Any lad quick-witted enough to outsmart his competitors in the way this lad has done deserves two prizes" (Catalogue, p. 270), and he awards the prize to Waldo. Herman Gutterman gives Waldo a five-dollar bill as a second prize. Waldo takes the money and rushes to the post office. He is going to send a money order to Montgomery Wards to finish paying for the bicycle.

The story about Waldo Ledbetter is the only one in Catalogue which has a touch of sentimentality. There is some irony as R. W. E. Ledbetter's scheme to end the mail-order business in Conchartee makes it possible for his son to pay his bill. The end of Waldo's initiation into manhood is a prelude to later events in "Unparalleled in Publishing." When Waldo tells Bill Huggins that he will get even, one is reminded that Spike Callahan bloodied Sylvester Merrick's nose to get even. The attempt of the community to get even with Sylvester for Spike Callahan's murder brings this episode to an end. At the beginning of this section, George Milburn describes the gathering of a

large crowd. This description lays a part of the scene for that which follows.

At the end of the Home Town Industry Jubilee, the catalogues that the local merchants have gathered are burned. R. W. E. Ledbetter serves as master of ceremonies in lighting the bonfire. The description of the atmosphere following the burning of the catalogues lays an atmosphere for the grisly scene that follows.

The crowd had thinned out since afternoon. So many of the farmers had to get back to see about their stock before dark. But there were several hundred people there, nearly all town dwellers, standing along the flaming ditch, their faces showing drawn and ghastly in the firelight.

The Negroes who had been on the streets in daylight had vanished into the night.

Little ember-spangled wisps of black floated up into the darkness (Catalogue, pp. 273-274).

This is a rather ominous scene. There are some in the crowd who encourage those leaving to stay or they will "miss out on the biggest e-vent of the day" (Catalogue, p. 274). The event is the burning of Sylvester Merrick's mutilated body, as he has already been murdered.

They [the men who lynched Sylvester Merrick] grasped the body and swung it and let it fall into the glowing ditch.

"Ain't it too bad Mrs. Callahan ain't here to see it," one of the women looking on said. "It would jist a done her heart good to see how they brung the nigger to justice."

"Yes, sir!" another woman said. "I don't think they done right, not tellin' Mrs. Callahan to make sure and be here" (Catalogue, p. 275).

C. R. Butts is at the burning; and Bill Huggins, the Sunday School teacher and Boy Scout, asks him how much he would take for the big toe he has cut off Sylvester Merrick's foot. Butts will not sell the toe, but he says that he will sell Bill Huggins a piece of the clothesline rope with which they hung Sylvester Merrick.

"Clothesline rope?" Bill Huggins gasped.  
 "Did you hang him with a clothesline rope, Mr. Butts?"

"You're dang tootin', son. We hung that nigger with his own damn clothesline" (Catalogue, p. 276).

Thus, the major action of Catalogue is concluded on a violent, ironic, and bitter note. Butts' word of caution to Sylvester Merrick in "86D897 Cord Clothesline" has become true. The major conflicts of the novel have been resolved: the people of Conchartee believe that the murder of Spike Callahan has been revenged, Waldo Ledbetter has settled his account with Montgomery Wards, and the conflict between C. R. Butts and Sylvester has been ended. All that remains is for the people to send postal cards requesting new catalogues to Sears and Montgomery Wards and for the novel to conclude with these comments:

This is the story behind this Catalogue . . . the expenditure of time and effort and millions of dollars. These labors have only one aim . . . to illustrate and describe our merchandise with absolute accuracy and truth, and by carrying this conviction to you, to win the privilege of serving you. . . . To serve you and satisfy you. . . (Catalogue, p. 279).

When one considers Catalogue as a piece of satire, it is quite apparent that the book is very bitter in its observation of the people of Oklahoma. Milburn has written about its hypocrisy, its patriotism, its morals, and its racism. Probably only one who has lived in small communities analagous to Conchartee, Oklahoma, can fully appreciate the truth found in Catalogue.

When the novel is viewed structurally, it is clear that it is an unusual novel. Welborn Hope says that it is not a novel at all but a series of short stories.<sup>12</sup> A novel may be defined as a type of prose narrative fiction which is distinguished by action, external or internal, which is structured through a series of realistic events. The characters are dynamic and believable. A totality of effect which results from significant action and character behavior adds up to a truth of coherence which centers around a theme or moral.<sup>13</sup> Catalogue is a novel according to this definition. There are a series of events which are carefully structured to allow the action of the novel to develop. Each of these events is an integral portion of the action. That the characters are dynamic and believable has been demonstrated. There is a totality of effect as the action of the novel and the characterization all add up to a satire of Oklahoma towns. By breaking up the narratives into parts, George Milburn is able to attain a total impression. This is due to the fact that there is no central character in the novel. Red Currie comes the

closest to fulfilling this function, but he only serves as a device to impel the action of the novel. The unifying element of Catalogue is the mail-order catalogue itself as represented by the various quotations; these are the integral part of the book.

The introduction of this chapter points out that Claude M. Simpson believes that successful local-color novels subordinate local-color material if they are successful. In the case of Catalogue, this statement is not true; for setting, language, and humor are all effectively used in the novel. While the discussion of the various portions has not always specifically demonstrated Milburn's use of local-color materials, these uses are inherent. Thus, Catalogue is a novel in which George Milburn not only employs the themes but also the same devices he used in his short fiction.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Claude M. Simpson, The Local Colorists: American Short Stories, 1857-1900 (New York, 1960), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> George Milburn, Flannigan's Folly (New York, 1947), pp. 10-11. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated parenthetically with the abbreviation FF and the page number.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Welborn Hope, Ada, Oklahoma, November, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> George Milburn, Catalogue: A Novel (New York, 1936), p. 199. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated parenthetically with the abbreviation Catalogue and the page number.

<sup>6</sup> Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser, and Robert Penn Warren, An Approach to Literature, 3rd. ed. (New York, 1952), p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>12</sup> Hope Interview, November, 1970.

13 A condensed statement of principles from Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York, 1943), as presented by Dr. D. J. Milburn in English 453 in the summer of 1967.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

When one considers the whole of George Milburn's fiction, it seems apparent that he must have been influenced by Sherwood Anderson. There is a very short piece in Folk-Say IV which indicates this.

The first newspaper job I had, a Jewish girl sat at the desk next to mine. One day she said to me: "What do you think of Anderson's tales?" I said: "I know some of them by heart. I think they're better parables than the ones Jesus told." The Jewish girl nodded approvingly and said: "That's a good line. I'll have to remember that. How did you like his Winesburg, Ohio?" I said: "Hans Christian Andersen didn't write anything about Ohio." She said: "I was speaking of Sherwood Anderson." I said: "Oh, I don't know about him." The only time she ever spoke to me after that was to say: "Good Morning."<sup>1</sup>

Since this particular piece is a part of "The American Joke Book" in Folk-Say IV, it seems fairly obvious that, while Milburn was having a joke at the girl's expense, he was citing a truth about Anderson. H. E. Bates in The Modern Short Story points out that Anderson realized two things. First, he knew that the United States is a country which is quite diverse in its social traditions. This implies that it is almost impossible for a writer to express something national in his work. Second, Anderson also knew that the American writer must "begin the task of exploring and

presenting the lives of his own people."<sup>2</sup> Anderson understood that a writer could take a locale and use it so as to depict the whole world. And in fact what he did in his own work was to show in an organic pattern the American middle-west as he saw it.<sup>3</sup> By focusing on an indigenous American scene, Anderson helped change the direction of the American short story from the formula story of O. Henry.

While Anderson chose to write about the people in Ohio, Milburn chose to write about the people in Oklahoma. His writing may be correctly called local-color because he employed setting, provincial character, and diction which reflect the Oklahoma scene. He is also one of the New Regionalists in that he attempted to present the people from the inside by being concerned with the minds of the characters. As such, Milburn's fiction shows the influence of the realistic movement. For, as J. Donald Adams points out, the local-colorist depends on things which make the people of his region separate from the people of other regions, although they have the same human frustrations and aspirations.<sup>4</sup> The strength of the local-color artist lies in his observation and ability to deal with the unpleasant aspects of life and its problems.

George Milburn apparently saw his time as one in which there were various problems besetting society. Some of these problems are internal problems about initiation, isolation, and love. Others are external problems about racism, the luncheon-club state of mind, and religious

bigotry. In writing about these problems as well as others, Milburn was able to manipulate his material so as to gain the effect he desired. And often that effect is humorous. Thus, his fiction is a blend of form and content. It is true that in some cases there is no resolution of the problems he presents in his fiction; this is probably due to Milburn's attempt to represent the problems, attitudes, and feelings of his locale to make the observations that he wishes to make without suggesting any remedy. He apparently was wise enough to realize that to attempt to present any resolution of these evils present in society would weaken his fiction. In the main, however, he was able to write a good story. Thus, George Milburn's fiction is a blend of local color techniques in the use of setting, diction, humor, and provincial character and psychological insight and serious purpose.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> George Milburn, "The American Joke Book" in Folk-Say  
IV: The Land Is Ours (Norman, 1932), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> H. E. Bates, The Modern Short Story (London, 1945),  
p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-165.

<sup>4</sup> J. Donald Adams, Speaking of Books--and Life (New  
York, 1965), p. 18.

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