

## Putting the Past Out to Pasture: Nostalgia, Regional Aesthetics and the Mutualist Imagination of the 1890s

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“Nostalgia, it can be said, is universal and persistent; only other men’s nostalgias offend.”

– Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*

“Among the Corn-Rows,” a short story appearing in Hamlin Garland’s *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), opens with a telling dialogue between homesteader Rob Rodemaker and Seagraves, a local newspaper editor. At one point during their exchange, Rodemaker explains why he left his native Waupac County in Wisconsin to settle further west in the Dakota Territory: “We fellers workin’ out back there got more ’n’ more like *hands*, an’ less like human beings. Y’ know, Waupac is a kind of summer resort, and the people that use’ t’ come in summers looked down on us cusses in the fields an’ shops. I couldn’t stand it.”<sup>1</sup> Rodemaker, in other words, complains that as Waupac became more of a tourist destination for urban affluent visitors to indulge their pastoral fantasies, it also transformed into a place of agricultural peonage. For the tourists, the farmers became just part of the scenery – reified synecdochally as mere “hands” for the visitors to gaze at like “the cussed European aristocracy” looked upon their peasants (92). At moments like this one in the text, Rodemaker alludes to the clashing perceptions of the rural region – the Middle West specifically – that framed the debate over the status of regions and regional writing both in the 1890s and in contemporary discussions over the form. Rodemaker’s observation begs the question: is regional writing fundamentally a touristic genre that nostalgically transforms places into imaginatively “possessible property” for the leisure class, as Richard H. Brodhead has influentially argued, or can it instead serve the economic and cultural interests of the marginalized people that inhabit these spaces?<sup>2</sup> The question this passage seizes upon runs through nearly all of the short stories published in *Main-Travelled Roads*.

Such a question, however, has implications that extend well beyond the field of American regionalism. Regional writing, and Garland’s writing in particular, functioned as a genre through which turn-of-the-century readers could contemplate the relationship between time and space and between history and aesthetics. Contemporary commentators often have likened regional writing to ethnography for this reason, suggesting that “the process of arriving at the region entails a backward movement” to “nostalgically charged spaces.”<sup>3</sup> Regionalism, when read from this perspective, granted its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban readers with what Johannes Fabian refers to as an “allochronic” perspective whereby the observer inhabits a time distinct from the object or site of observation.<sup>4</sup> By imaginatively moving from the city to the American countryside, the regional reader moves in space as well as back in time. But while the leisure class may “deny” rural regions’ “coevalness” by casting it as a pre-industrial agrarian space, Garland continually uses characters like Rodemaker to affirm the Middle West as a region coterminous with the rest of the nation.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, previous commentary on Garland has underscored these moments, drawing upon them to distinguish him from other late nineteenth-century regional and local color writers.<sup>6</sup> Responding to the local color writing that unabashedly trafficked in pastoral and idyllic portrayals of lost rural worlds to pawn them off to urban readers, Garland conversely casts the rural as a space of “toil” where “the poor and wary predominate.”<sup>7</sup> Consistent with his late nineteenth-century Populist political education, so this account goes, Garland “rejects nostalgia” for the past.<sup>8</sup>

But contrary to this prevailing view, I argue that Garland actually embraces nostalgia in his short fiction and enlists it in the service of his Populist project. Garland knew that Populism had a

fundamentally ambivalent relationship to nostalgia. On the one hand, the concept could operate ideologically by masking the industrialization of rural regions and by temporally alienating these spaces and their inhabitants from the urban Northeast. The Populists, on the other hand, often displayed their own nostalgia for Jeffersonian agrarianism, which they used to decry the roles corporate monopolization and commercial farming played in eroding this ideal. Addressing this ambivalence and the Populists' seemingly contradictory attitudes towards nostalgia, Garland maps out metacritically the conventional concept and emplotment of nostalgia in *Main-Travelled Roads*. After establishing the features of nostalgia's conventional conceptualization in the 1890s, he proceeds to transform the concept from an affect into an aesthetic practice that creates a mutualist imagination that serves, not undermines, Populist ideology.<sup>9</sup> This form of mutualist nostalgia, rather than satiating the consumptive desires of the vacationing leisure class, produces a shared collective memory of the past that could bond together a range of seemingly discrete groups such as rural farming associations and urban labor organizations.<sup>10</sup> In this way, Garland's use of nostalgia aesthetically overcomes what the Populists sought to overcome politically: the "division and opposition of city and country, industry and agriculture," which Raymond Williams insists "developed under [capitalism] to an extraordinary and transforming degree."<sup>11</sup> Finally, Garland also seizes upon what Svetlana Boym describes as nostalgia's "democratic" character by demonstrating that everyone can potentially participate in the aesthetics of nostalgia.<sup>12</sup> This democratic dimension of nostalgia is crucial for Garland as he believes, in the words of Friedrich Schiller, that the "problem of politics in practice" must be "approach[ed] through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom."<sup>13</sup> In other words, while most previous commentators insist that Garland could not reconcile his politics with his aesthetics, I maintain that his use of nostalgia wedded these two commitments together and enabled him to create a collective memory of the past capable of serving the aims of the modern Populist political movement.<sup>14</sup>

By carrying out this project in his short fiction and critical essays, Garland invented a form of nostalgic aesthetics that later writers of the 1920s and 1930s – the New Regionalists principally among them – would continue to modify and draw upon.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Garland's short fiction challenges us to reevaluate our understanding of the relation between regionalism and nostalgia, its contribution to later forms of modernism, and the longstanding assumption that modernity and nostalgia represent two contrary modes of temporality.<sup>16</sup> But before delving any further into Garland's fictionalized exploration of nostalgia and its critical implications, we should first establish how the concept has been understood in the 1890s as well as in contemporary theoretical and critical discourse.

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Nearly thirty years ago Christopher Lasch upbraided nostalgia in terms that still resonate today for "substitut[ing] sloganeering" for serious "social criticism" of the past by reducing the idea of history to "outmoded styles of consumption."<sup>17</sup> Even after the canonical and theoretical upheavals that have taken place over the last thirty years within literary and cultural studies, critics have almost uniformly dismissed nostalgic literary works for depicting the past in an ill-conceived and aesthetically simplistic manner. While the 1990s saw the rise of an expansive body of scholarship on the aesthetics and politics of sympathy and sentimental literature once eschewed by the critical establishment, nostalgia – with a few very noteworthy exceptions – has remained largely unfit for scholarly study. Renato Rosaldo also has provided one of the more recent and most persuasive indictments of nostalgia, condemning it as an imperialistic affect displayed by western subjects mourning the loss of the very cultures that they destroyed.<sup>18</sup> Whether cast as an impoverished aesthetic form bereft of ambiguity or as an instrument of imperialism, nostalgia has been seen consistently as an antimodern or retrogressive longing for the past. Nostalgia, so it would seem, continues to be used as a label defined only by negation, an antonym for literary and cultural complexity. Why, so long after the cultural turn, a word used as pervasively as nostalgia remains such a denigrated concept is one of the questions I address

later in this essay by suggesting that nostalgia's aesthetic engagement with history is severely at odds with the way we generally understand the relationship between the literary work and its historical context. For now, we must know a little something of the conceptual development of nostalgia to establish how Garland transforms it from an idle affective longing into an active mode of emplotting the past to challenge the inequities of the present moment.<sup>19</sup>

The conceptual genealogy of nostalgia has been charted extensively elsewhere, so I highlight only those details of its development particularly relevant to my analysis.<sup>20</sup> All of these studies begin by crediting the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer with first coining the neologism *nostalgia* by combining the Greek words for home, *nostos*, and longing, *algia* in 1688 to describe what he regarded as a psychological disorder frequently exhibited by soldiers. In his historical account of the concept, Fred Davis explains that Hofer and other physicians described this disease as a "painful yearning to return home" with the accompanying symptoms of "despondency, melancholia, lability of emotion, including profound bouts of weeping, anorexia, a generalized 'wasting way,' and, not infrequently, attempts at suicide."<sup>21</sup> While the diagnosis was relatively rare, physicians throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contended that soldiers – especially French and German soldiers from rural districts – often fell victim to nostalgia after acquiring combat experience. Thus, from its inception as a medical concept, nostalgia always seemed tied both to specific regions and to sites of conflict.

But nostalgia also was always in some sense an aesthetic term. The disciplinary boundaries between psychology and aesthetic philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were of course far more permeable, and those who wrote about nostalgia often drew upon aesthetics more specifically when outlining the disorder's pathology. For example, when first defining nostalgia in the seventeenth century, Hofer believed that a "separation from the homeland" coupled with "an 'afflicted imagination' was an important cause" of nostalgia.<sup>22</sup> From Hofer onwards, physicians continued to regard nostalgia as a disease of the imagination, which suggests that nostalgia from its inception occupied a liminal intellectual ground, standing at the disciplinary intersection of philosophy, psychology and aesthetics. For this reason, literary sources appeared alongside empirical case studies to illustrate the various symptoms of the mental disease. In his 1859 *Treatise on Theism*, Francis Wharton cites passages from Oliver Goldsmith's poetry to support the claim that people who originally come from mundane and "inhospitable climes" suffer from nostalgia when they leave their native lands more so than people who came from beautiful parts of the world.<sup>23</sup> And in his historical survey of nostalgia in the field of psychology, George Rosen insists that novelists from Richard Smollett to Balzac used the novel as a medium for exploring and "extend[ing] the concept of nostalgia."<sup>24</sup> The fact that medical journals and novels participated in a shared conversation about this "affliction" of the imagination suggests that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, writers placed nostalgia within aesthetics as much as they did within the field of medicine.

We can situate nostalgia's place within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics even more precisely though. The way in which texts described nostalgia suggests the concept had become tethered to the overlapping discourses of faculty psychology and Scottish Enlightenment moral and aesthetic philosophy. Evidence of nostalgia's connection to these discourses can be found in both works about the aesthetics of sentimentalism and about nostalgia itself. Within the discourse on sympathy, the concept emerges indirectly in discussions about national feeling. Thinkers like Francis Hutcheson associated the benevolent bonds of filial love with national feeling, which "form[ed] the basis not only of social ties but political ties as well."<sup>25</sup> While Hutcheson does not actually use the word nostalgia in his writings, he underscores the importance of what he calls "national love" in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises* first published in 1725.<sup>26</sup> What makes his discussion of "national love" so germane to the conceptualization of nostalgia in particular as opposed to the formation of nationalism in general is the way in which he frames his account of this type of feeling. Hutcheson actually insists that feelings of nationalism really only emerge "when [one] ha[s] left his native Country" or when one imagines doing so.<sup>27</sup> In other words, it is only through the longing for home – nostalgia – that one comes to possess or imagine as belonging to that home. And Hutcheson further emphasizes that the nostalgic love for one's native country serves

as the original conduit through which other “Associations, Friendships, Family, natural affections, and other human Sentiments” form.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, Hutcheson’s implicit association between nostalgia and the formation of social bonds would become more explicit in the United States. In an article that appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, for example, George Combe in fact describes nostalgia precisely as a “condition” that plays a vital role in creating “the bond of union among men, and gives rise to society.”<sup>29</sup> With the influx of immigration and the migration of settlers westward across the continent, writers routinely invoked nostalgia to describe a person’s persistent attachment to home. Many of the essays published about various immigrant groups in the *Catholic World*, for example, reference the concept. An article on nostalgia published in *The New York Times* also begins by noting that “everybody knows what is commonly meant by home sickness, and very many who have traveled abroad have experienced that longing for the things of home which the word implies.”<sup>30</sup> These examples reveal that nostalgia – even while remaining in one sense “one of the rarest diseases” afflicting soldiers after its epidemic during the U.S. Civil War<sup>31</sup> – increasingly became perceived as a universal affect that could bond people together as portrayed in popular nineteenth-century songs like “Home! Sweet Home!”<sup>32</sup>

This brief history of nostalgia emphasizes two important features of the term’s development. First of all, even when the concept was used in medical discourse, it was in some sense always a formal or aesthetic concept. And secondly, its particular connection to the discourse of sentimentalism reveals that the term played a crucial role in the imaginative formation of national and other forms of non-national communities. Both of these features of nostalgia would contribute crucially to Garland’s particular use of the concept as a way to craft a mutualist aesthetics capable of serving the aims of his Populist politics.

Before turning to Garland’s fiction, two recent and illuminating studies on nostalgia bear mentioning because they theorize nostalgia in conflicting but productive ways. The first, Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), largely aims to recuperate the term from its negative connotations. Central to her understanding of the concept is a distinction she establishes between so-called “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia.<sup>33</sup> Simply put, restorative nostalgia is bad nostalgia; it is the desire to restore one’s lost homeland or past. Boym contends that this nostalgic tendency drives nationalistic movements and seeks unreflectively to produce a totalizing reconstruction of the past. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, is individual rather than national in character and consists of a perpetual longing for an irrecoverable past. To an extent then, reflective nostalgia is nostalgia in its purely aesthetic form – a kind of nostalgia for nostalgia’s sake. In the book *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (2003), however, Sylviane Agacinski allows for no such distinctions among various forms or tendencies of nostalgia. For her, nostalgia always functions in restorative terms and consequently exists in opposition to what she refers to as the idea of the ephemeral or the one-way passing of time. Thus, while Boym constructs an account of nostalgia that in some sense is compatible with the emergence of modernity, Agacinski casts the temporality of nostalgia and modernity as irreconcilable opposites. For Agacinski, moreover, the temporality of modernity is by definition ephemeral, suggesting that modernity lacks a historical consciousness – whether that historical consciousness be restorative or reflective.

Both Boym’s and Agacinski’s theoretical accounts of nostalgia take important steps towards a richer understanding of a term that largely remains unexamined in contemporary literary and cultural discourse. And as we will see, Garland’s work both conforms to and complicates their accounts of nostalgia. In particular, Garland’s short fiction both blurs the distinction between Boym’s notions of restorative and reflective nostalgia, and it challenges the traditionally held binary opposition between modernity and nostalgia that Agacinski reexamines in her book. Yet her notion of the time of modernity as being one characterized by the ephemeral is useful, not because it functions as the antithesis of nostalgia but because nostalgia is itself an expression of this form of temporality. By briefly sketching out the general contours of their work, we will have a frame of reference through which to revisit their theories of nostalgia as we turn to Garland’s work.

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Hamlin Garland's interest in nostalgia stems in large part from his struggle to suture his political beliefs to a particular philosophy of aesthetics. Garland has always held a tenuous place within late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature. William Dean Howells, though a supporter of his work, felt Garland's sketches of Midwestern life fell short of perfection. In particular, Howells faulted Garland for always producing prose that displayed "a certain harshness and bluntness" (4).<sup>34</sup> And yet some of Garland's other contemporaries complained that his stories lacked historical and empirical veracity because they simplified life on the prairie. Both of these criticisms, while seemingly contradictory, stem in part from Garland's attempt to adhere to his own idiosyncratic theory of literature that conformed neither to the generic expectations of American literary realism nor naturalism. He assigned the rather inelegant label of "veritism" to his theory of literary representation, and while the label never caught on, the substance of this aesthetic theory to some degree did. To a great extent, veritism was really the product of Garland's study of two books on two very different subjects: *Progress and Poverty* (1879) by the Spenserian economist Henry George and *Aesthetics* (1879) by Eugène Véron.<sup>35</sup> George's book converted Garland to the cause of Populism, a political movement that comprised of a loose alliance of trade associations and third political parties calling for national economic reform to rescue farmers and wage laborers in the South and Midwest from lives of poverty. Garland essentially wedded this economic outlook to Véron's aesthetic theory, which railed against the kind of realism endorsed by Howells. Véron defined aesthetics in a manner that recovered the term's original eighteenth-century meaning, as the study of "sensations and perceptions."<sup>36</sup> In *Aesthetics* he also argued that literature ought to produce a highly individuated "vivid impression – whether moral, intellectual, or physical" instead of a mere imitation that only aspired to represent the world with empirical accuracy.<sup>37</sup> Synthesizing George's economics with Véron's aesthetics, Garland developed his own theory of literary composition that placed value on impressionistic and regional literature because these works did not subsume the particularities of the region under the universalizing umbrella of the nation. Consequently, veritism became a way for him to challenge the economic and literary supremacy of the metropolitan Northeast.<sup>38</sup>

Having briefly sketched out Garland's aesthetic and political thought, we can consider how these ideas shaped his use of nostalgia and how they bear upon his prose. Towards the end of one of these stories, "Under the Lion's Paw," the narrator makes a declaration echoed throughout most of *Main-Travelled Roads*: "there is no despair so deep as the despair of a homeless man or woman" (141). To varying degrees, many of Garland's protagonists find themselves in a state of perpetual homelessness, which inevitably produces homesickness or a nostalgic desire to return home. While homelessness and homesickness may be universal conditions for Garland's characters, they do not ever assume the transcendental status that they would just decades later in the theoretical work of Georg Lukács.<sup>39</sup> Homesickness for Garland's characters, at least initially, is a corporeal rather than a transcendental condition. Most of Garland's work accordingly begins with passages that recall nostalgia's psychiatric designation by introducing characters longing to be at home. No story in the collection better exemplifies this aspect of Garland's fiction than "The Return of the Private." Set in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. Civil War, this short narrative describes the return of an army private, Edward Smith, to his farmhouse in rural Wisconsin. The story is doubly nostalgic insofar as it both portrays the Midwest before the economic upheavals of the late nineteenth century and revolves around a homesick soldier – the exemplary sufferer of nostalgia. Throughout the narrative Smith displays many of the hallmark "symptoms" of nostalgia. At the opening of the story, Garland stresses that Smith suffers from "a sickness at heart" when he opines on "the joy of homecoming" (114). Later in the story he also succumbs to a fit of involuntary reverie when he returns to his farmhouse. The narrative describes the soldier as becoming "lost in a dream" as "his wide, hungry eyes devour the [pastoral] scene" around him (126). Other stories contain similar episodes – both Will Hannen in "The Branch Road" and

Howard McLane in “Up the Coulee” become “seized” by “a thought” of their old Midwestern homes, expecting at first their old homes to have remained unchanged (63).<sup>40</sup> In both of these stories, we get a snapshot of the concept of nostalgia operating within the two modalities of time and space. While the protagonists sate their spatial nostalgic desires for home by returning to the Midwest, they also yearn to return to an earlier point in time. And in “God’s Ravens,” spatial nostalgia becomes almost completely eclipsed by temporal nostalgia when a couple relocates from Chicago to Wisconsin in the hopes of finding a pre-industrial oasis.

That nostalgia functions both spatially and temporally in Garland’s work aligns his understanding of nostalgia – an understanding shared by his contemporaries – with the disciplinary project of ethnography. Nearly all of Garland’s protagonists initially suffer from a form of nostalgia that leads them to deny coevalness to their rural birthplaces, fixing these spaces at a certain moment in time. The conceptual collusion between ethnography and nostalgia has occupied a central place in the critiques of anthropology performed by Fabian and Rosaldo. Those critical of regionalism, in fact, have largely used these critiques as a way to align regionalism’s use of nostalgia with the imperialist project of ethnography. Consequently, laudatory readings of Garland rush to point out that he rebukes these nostalgic moments by representing the rural as a place of “Herculean toil” (139). But to dismiss these moments of nostalgia from the text is to ignore, somewhat arbitrarily, the aesthetic dimension of Garland’s stories by focusing solely on his political commitments. Such an approach to his work inadvertently also simplifies his use of aesthetics – nostalgia especially – as a way to complicate and create politically inflected communities. True to his own idiosyncratic veritism, Garland introduces and sustains multiple narrative perspectives, declining to privilege any single narrative consciousness. By creating these fictive constructs, he challenges the idea of a uniform national temporality that binds the nation together as one imagined community. It is precisely nostalgia’s potential to create temporal ruptures and discontinuities that Garland explores in order to fuse together what at once might seem like divergent communities and points of perspective. But in order to arrive at a place where we can appreciate the way Garland complicates national time, we must first understand how he treats nostalgia as a mode of emplotment rather than solely as an affective condition.

Nostalgia generally and specifically in the case of regionalism often gets automatically wedded to a conservative or retrogressive ideology, but Garland’s work demonstrates that nostalgia can function as a pliable narrative readily coupled with a range of ideological or political perspectives.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, Hayden White’s analysis of nineteenth-century historiography can function as an especially useful lens through which to read Garland’s work and late nineteenth-century nostalgia more broadly. While Garland does not approach nostalgia with the same structural rigor that White does, he implicitly differentiates what White would refer to as the mode of emplotment or the “kind of story” that nostalgic narratives tell and their mode of ideological implication.<sup>42</sup> White can provide us with a useful problematic through which to arrive at an understanding of the nostalgic mode of emplotment even though he did not outline this specific mode in his own study. By drawing upon White’s general analytic framework, we can appreciate how Garland’s stories define existing nostalgic modes in order to re-imagine them in ways that serve the aesthetic and political aims of his fiction.

Most of the pieces in *Main-Travelled Roads* operate within a nostalgic narrative structure, but the story that executes Garland’s nostalgic mode of emplotment the most vividly is “Up the Coulee.” This story chronicles the return of Howard McLane, an affluent cosmopolitan actor now living in New York, to his native Wisconsin. Although he blithely expects to reunite with his family and reacquaint himself with the beauties of his boyhood home, Howard arrives in Wisconsin to find his brother Grant and their mother in a downtrodden state from the pressures of Midwestern farm life. Due to financial difficulties, they also had to sell their old farmhouse and the adjoining farmland in order to make ends meet. Much of the unfolding story revolves around the conflicting views of the prairie as exemplified by Howard, who wistfully admires the “majesty” and “breadth” of the surrounding landscape, and Grant, who views the land as a site of unrelenting toil (45). But rather than simply dismissing Howard’s perspective as obtuse and empirically unsound, the story always remains enclosed within a

nostalgic framework that engages both perspectives dialogically. For this reason, if we map the story's overall structure, we can arrive at a metahistorical and narratological understanding of nostalgia.

"Up the Coulee" immediately envelops the narrative nostalgically by depicting its affective manifestation and by anchoring this affect to a particular narrative structure. The story opens with Howard on board a train headed west across the state of Wisconsin. As he gazes out across the "fields of barley being reaped," he allows his "newspaper to fall on his lap" (45). In the succeeding sentences, the scenery occupies much of the description, looming larger than Howard does in the story. The landscape thus appears more active and invested with greater agency than Howard does who can only passively drop his newspaper – the metonym for the empty, calendrical time of the nation – and marvel at the rural world around him.<sup>45</sup> As the uniform temporality of the nation escapes Howard's grasp, his mind then races "ahead of the train to the little town, far on toward the Mississippi, where he had spent his youth" (45). Instances such as this one, while entailing at least a momentary denial of coevalness, establish the protagonist's relationship to the surrounding environment. In this case, the individual becomes blissfully lost in and ultimately overpowered by the landscape in a moment of sweet surrender. Unlike White's Romantic mode of emplotment, which contains characters who transcend their environment, Garland's nostalgic mode of emplotment introduces a protagonist who embraces the sensory world around him.

Even as the beauty of the countryside transports Howard nostalgically backwards to his childhood, the narrative stops short of depicting Wisconsin as a bucolic paradise, recognizing even in these nostalgic episodes that people work the land. In this way, the nostalgic mode of emplotment resembles what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the idyllic mode. According to Bakhtin, the agricultural idyll departs from "conventional pastoral" depictions of the rural as a region unburdened by work by drawing "upon the real life of the agricultural laborer."<sup>44</sup> This idyllic dimension of the story deserves mention because even Garland's more conventional nostalgia still imagines the rural as a place of production.<sup>45</sup> Farming, in this idyllic sense, remains to varying degrees "idealized and sublimated" nonetheless; the barley may be reaped, but the hardship of harvesting goes unnoted at least initially.<sup>46</sup> Such idyllic moments become all the more reinforced by Howard's repeated comparisons of the surrounding landscapes to the paintings of Jean-Francois Millet, known for his exalted portrayals of laboring French peasants in works like *The Gleaners* (1857). In these opening paragraphs, Garland essentially establishes the traditional emplotment of conventional nostalgia: the protagonist, weary of the frenetic and atomized life of the city, returns to his idyllic homeland where he yearns to immerse himself in the community and in the natural beauty of the rural. What begins as a process of reflection actually becomes in the end the enactment of a plot resembling what Boym describes as restorative nostalgia because the protagonist returns and seeks to restore his childhood home physically.

But while the conventional nostalgic plot would chronicle the journey home and terminate at the point of restoration, Garland's story and enlistment of nostalgia has only just begun. As soon as Howard reaches his destination, the story begins reinventing the conventional mode of nostalgic emplotment. When Howard pulls into the train station, Garland disrupts the story's earlier allochronic tendencies. Upon exiting the train, Howard observes some idlers on the platform and likens them to those "standing before the Brooklyn Bridge," reaffirming the coevalness of the urban and rural (46). The idyll of the previous paragraphs also gives way to a starker depiction of modern agricultural life. Surveying the "squalid" town's main street, he finds the road lined by "two rows of the usual village stores, unrelieved by a tree or a touch of beauty" (46). Such moments seem to confirm established readings of Garland that suggest he sets out to sabotage any misguided and naïve nostalgic desire from the onset, but this depiction immediately becomes eclipsed by Howard's renewed nostalgic appreciation of the surrounding bluffs. This contentious oscillation from ugly squalor to natural beauty and from the coeval to the allochronic is precisely what defines Garland's own brand of nostalgic emplotment.

The discrepancy between Howard's nostalgic conception of the region and his brother Grant's cynical resignation becomes acutely apparent when Howard marches out to help his brother bail hay. Before reaching his brother and the other farmhands, he pauses to admire "the shaven slopes of the

hill” and the animals feeding upon them and concludes that “there was something immemorial in the sunny slopes dotted with red and brown and gray cattle” (60). Time once again stands still for Howard as he indulges in the aesthetic and nostalgic pleasures of the countryside. His pleasure becomes instantly diminished when he realizes that “Grant would ignore it all,” suggesting that Howard knows that the farmers cannot share in his appreciation of the landscape at least for the present moment (60). Howard’s distance from his brother becomes further accentuated when Grant finds his clothing ostentatious. Donning what he refers to as his working “regimentals,” Howard receives a rebuke for wearing such expensive clothing in the fields (61). This rebuff leads to a series of invidious comparisons and ultimately Howard’s dismissal from the scene of work. Grant expresses his disbelief that people in New York “lay around . . . and smoke and wear good clothes and toady to millionaires” while “the country’s goin’ to hell” (62). And yet rather than abandoning the nostalgic emplotment entirely, the story once again depicts Howard finding solace in the “vast fleckless space above,” escaping both from his brother’s indictments and the “mental unrest of a great city” when he nostalgically stumbles upon “an old road which he used to travel when a boy” (63). Following this road to its end, Howard finds his old boyhood house now occupied by German immigrants. Upon seeing his old home, he immediately becomes overwhelmed by a “swarm of memories,” feeling “sick to the heart” as he yearns “to be a boy again” (65). The emotional force of this experience affects him so greatly that Garland explains “he was like a man from whom all motives had been withdrawn” (65). This moment, which recalls nostalgia’s manifestation as a mental disease that caused “weeping, sighing, or groaning” along with immobility or “paralysis,” is a crucial one in the story for Garland’s larger project.<sup>47</sup>

By portraying Howard’s mental breakdown as one incited by nostalgia, Garland tests the limits of nostalgia both as an affect and as a mode of emplotment. Essentially, he sets out to answer the following question: can nostalgia be used progressively in a transformative manner, or must it always result in the deprivation of agency and the production of regressive escapism? This question surfaces in various forms throughout his work, especially in the essays he composed for *Crumbling Idols* (1894).<sup>48</sup> In the case of “Up the Coulee,” Howard’s loss of motive initially indicates that he has become stuck in the past, suggesting that nostalgia cannot stimulate a transformative imagination that could serve the aims of Garland’s political and aesthetic projects. But this moment proves to be a fleeting one, and this episode of nostalgic reverie actually produces a newfound desire “to see his mother back in the old house, with the fireplace restored” (65). Howard’s nostalgic experience thus becomes a moment of anagnorisis for him and for the conceptualization of nostalgia itself; rather than incapacitating him, his nostalgia inspires him to act in the hopes of restoring his boyhood home and his family’s financial security in the process. In this way, Garland imagines nostalgia as an affect and mode of emplotment capable of solidifying political commitments in the name of restoring the past.

From the moment Howard experiences this nostalgic episode forward, nostalgia – imagined not just as the futile yearning for an irrecoverable past but as a satiable longing to restore the past to improve the conditions of the present – propels the story forward. The conflict of perceptions between Howard and Grant persists, but other contrasts become apparent. Although Howard’s nostalgia transforms him into an agent, making plans to purchase the old home, Grant remains fixed in place and morosely obsessed with his brother’s past unwillingness to support their family economically. Grant also remains a prisoner of his condition, complaining at one point in racially charged terms that “this cattle raisin’ and butter-makin’ makes a nigger of a man” (76). Grant, in other words, seems caught within a captivity narrative, or some “great tragic poem,” while Howard’s “memories of harvest moons, of melon-feasts, and of clear, cold winter nights” harden his resolve to restore his family to their old home (77).

In addition to empowering Howard with agency, nostalgia also seems capable of synthesizing Garland’s aesthetic and political projects. Véron railed against what he regarded as “the realistic theory” that “reduces the artist to the condition of a mere copyist,” and he called for a more “personal” or impressionistic art in place of realism.<sup>49</sup> As we have already witnessed in stories from *Main-Travelled Roads*, Véron’s imperative that art impressionistically depict multiple and relative points of

view guides much of Garland's early fictional and critical work. Garland referred to his aesthetic appropriation of Véron as "veritism," but he also used the more common label impressionism interchangeably with his own neologism in his critical essays. Garland stressed that what distinguished veritism from both "spectacular" and more imitative forms of art was that it would "deal with the people and their home dramas, their loves and their ambitions."<sup>50</sup> The aim of the veritist, moreover, was to capture "the deepening of social contrasts" by recording the "drama" of "a great heterogeneous, shifting, brave population."<sup>51</sup> By portraying Howard's and Grant's conflicting perspectives and sets of interests, Garland follows the dictates of his own theory of fiction. And by highlighting the "social contrasts" and the economic depravity of the rural Midwest, he also serves the aims of his Populist politics.

Howard's nostalgic impressions do more than simply exemplify his own personal perspective or illuminate the inequities that plague the American countryside. His wistful longing for the past also forges bonds between people and creates new forms of community. Nostalgia, as a type of affect and a mode of representation, answers Garland's own call for impressionistic writers to imagine "coming citizens" by calling to mind natural and nostalgic scenes as a way to create local and national communities.<sup>52</sup> In addition to committing individual impressions to the page, the impressionist or veritist also had an obligation to bring these individuals into communion with one another. Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, a Classics and English professor whom Garland cites favorably in *Crumbling Idols*, argued that writers ought to compose works of fiction that seek to "reconcile" rather than "take sides with either the individual or the social spirit."<sup>53</sup> Only by working to expand the social spirit by fostering "sympathy beyond self" could Garland hope to both champion individualism while also imagining alternate forms of community.<sup>54</sup> Nostalgia, if left moored to its sentimental heritage, could help Garland align his aesthetic theory with his political practice. Garland knew that in order to succeed, the Populists of the 1890s must accomplish a nearly insurmountable task – they had to unite several disparate political organizations and factions, establish ties between different regions in the nation, and surmount the social divisions between city and country. Ultimately, the Populist leadership hoped that these various groups would rally under the single banner of the People's Party. In order to succeed, Populism would have to harness the already existing "movement culture" that had driven existing forms of agrarian and urban laborer mutualism by reconciling individual with communal interests in much the same manner that Garland would work towards this reconciliation in his fiction.<sup>55</sup>

Beginning in the 1870s, as the historian Michael McGerr writes, farmers "had long cooperated with one another through a variety of formal and informal arrangements" that eventually led to the establishment of "mutual-benefit associations" like the Grange movement and later the Farmer's Alliance.<sup>56</sup> Populists hoped to fuse these preexisting forms of mutualism in the country with the collectivism of worker's groups and trade unions, like the Knights of Labor, in the city to create a nationally viable political force. Ignatius Donnelly, nostalgically gesturing back to the tradition of the U.S. Revolution, outlined this project in his preamble to the Populist Party platform that he presented first on the anniversary of George Washington's birth and then again on July 4, 1892 at the People's Party convention. In this preamble, Donnelly disclosed the ambitions of his party, which sought to bring about a "permanent and perpetual" union of the rural and urban "labor forces of the United States" by calling for electoral reforms, the nationalization of transportation and communication infrastructure, and the dismantlement of land and industrial monopolies.<sup>57</sup> For his part, Garland toured the country in the 1890s to preach the gospel of Populism, crusading specifically on behalf of George's idea of a single tax.<sup>58</sup> He even explicitly wrote about this political movement in his fiction, notably in his novel *A Spoil of Office* (1892). But in his short fiction, he generally practiced a subtler brand of imaginary mutualism by deploying the narrative and affective force of nostalgia. By establishing sympathetic bonds between characters and producing a certain historical account of the Midwest and the nation, nostalgia could produce a social spirit conducive to the cooperative or mutualist aims of the Populist Party.

In Garland's short fiction, nostalgia fosters this mutualism in a variety of ways. Returning to "Up the Coulee," we find that Howard's nostalgia transcends a variety of barriers to social cohesion. When

Howard, for example, encounters the German woman now occupying his old home, his display of emotion brought on by his homesickness bridges their language gap as she responds to him by uttering “some sentences in German whose general meaning was sympathy” (64). Throughout the rest of the story nostalgia works as a medium for establishing similar connections between Howard and different groups of people. During a social gathering, Howard and several local farmers listen to “old tunes” and folk music that nostalgically produce “a thousand associated memories” (77). This melancholy music ultimately brings everyone together, prompting Howard’s realization “of the infinite tragedy of these lives which the world loves to call peaceful and pastoral” (78). Such epiphanies seem to stimulate the emergence of a class or laboring consciousness by revealing to Howard and the reader “that the struggle for a place on this planet was eating the heart and soul out of men and women in the city, just as in the country” (80). Thus, by reflecting upon a fantasy of a remote agrarian past that he shares with the local farmers, Howard becomes aware that “suffering” is the “universal” condition of the laboring poor (81). And towards the close of the story, Howard’s and Grant’s fraternal relationship becomes rekindled when they both nostalgically recall their shared childhood experiences.

The bonds forged by nostalgia in “Up the Coulee” have their corollaries in much of the rest of the fiction appearing in *Main-Travelled Roads*. In “Return of the Private,” the charged political disputes that divided the Northern and Southern sections of the nation become supplanted by far tamer regional or cultural differences. Rather than making any mention of the debate over slavery and Popular Sovereignty, the characters in the story just contrast – often humorously – the regional differences between Northern and Southern wildlife and livestock. Private Edward Smith, the story’s protagonist, suffers from an intense “sickness at heart” for his home, which produces new regional or sectional mutualisms and antagonisms that speak more to the politics of the *fin-de-siècle* than the Reconstruction-era politics of the story’s setting (114). Edward now resents fighting “for an idea” that compelled him to leave his family on their mortgaged farm “while the millionaire sent his money to England” (120). His return home has thus led him to realize that he now faces “a still more hazardous future” than the “Southern march” he had previously embarked upon (129). The narrative then proceeds to stress the economic differences that divide the rural Midwestern farmer from the wealthy New York millionaire; the differences between the South and the Midwest now seem almost negligible. Consequently, Garland deploys this mutualist mode of nostalgia violently to erase the history of slavery in order to imagine his own kind of reconstruction – one stressing that the economic similarities between the poor whites in the Midwest and the South extend back into the past. It is precisely this kind of imaginary past and regional similarity that the 1890s Populists would draw upon in order to forge their political alliances between these regions. In this way, Garland’s nostalgia works reflectively by imagining a past that never could have existed in order to legitimate his political project in restorative terms. Such a nostalgic past then re-enlists a sentimental aesthetics in an attempt to forge sympathetic bonds between regions.

Very similar bonds are forged between groups in “A Branch Road” and “God’s Ravens,” the particulars of which we need not delve into except to underscore that in almost all of Garland’s stories he uses nostalgia to emphasize the mutual interests and shared histories that bind various classes, regions and ethnicities together. In this way, Garland demonstrates that nostalgia can be paired with a Populist or mutualist mode of ideological implication rather than being inextricably linked to conservative ideologies or the consumer demand for regional souvenirs. Of course the racially objectionable aspects of Garland’s imaginative mutualism should not be overlooked. He often exoticizes the European immigrants that populate his stories and casts them as a threat to native farmers. His Midwestern landscape is also completely devoid of American Indians even though several violent conflicts broke out between American forces and Midwestern tribes throughout the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. And the oblique reference to slavery as an “idea” in “The Return of the Private” is used to suggest that the Civil War pitted poor whites against one another in the name of a dubious cause.<sup>59</sup> In these ways, nostalgia creates certain social bonds only by abandoning others through a process that Nicholas Dames regards as nostalgia’s “specific forms of forgetting.”<sup>60</sup> But too often nostalgia and amnesia become conflated into a single concept, casting nostalgia solely as a form

of memory loss. In Garland's fiction, however, nostalgia repeatedly and almost compulsively reproduces memories. And while nostalgia recalls the past selectively, it is its ability to produce social cohesion through collective and individual memory that gives it cultural and aesthetic power.

Garland's use of nostalgia, which imaginatively brings different groups of individuals together in the name of a common cause, is also figuratively embodied by *Main-Travelled Roads*' guiding chronotope – the road. Among the various chronotopes that Bakhtin describes, the road figures prominently as the chronotope most closely tied to the “motif of meeting and such motifs as *painting, escape, acquisition, loss, marriage*, and so forth.”<sup>61</sup> Certainly, Garland's work draws upon all of these motifs, dwelling especially on the motif of loss. Another striking characteristic of this chronotope germane to the study of nostalgia and Garland's fiction is the way that the road collapses time and space in an especially crystallized fashion. Bakhtin explains: “on the road . . . the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point,” facilitating “the collapse of *social distances*.”<sup>62</sup> Garland's epigraph to his collection of short fiction echoes Bakhtin's characterization of the road chronotope by depicting the main-travelled road as one “traversed by many classes of people.”<sup>63</sup> As both Bakhtin and Garland describe it, the road mimics the chronotopic dimensions of nostalgia because nostalgia itself telescopes social distances and operates within the dual modalities of time and space. But, in light of Fabian's account of the way that nostalgia and anthropology generally represent different cultures through a denial of coevalness, nostalgia's resemblance to the road chronotope raises two related questions. If nostalgia forges connections between divergent groups of people by eliminating social distance in a chronotopic manner by appealing to a shared but lost past, then does it just substitute spatial distance and difference for temporal distance and difference? And does Garland, despite leveling persistent diatribes against “superficial” portrayals of the rural by the “tourist or reporter,” inescapably petrify these same rural communities by anchoring them to a lost – even if less idyllic – past?<sup>64</sup>

These questions, which bear significantly upon developments in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century aesthetics and culture, cannot be easily answered. The continuing debate over the role of nostalgia at the turn of the century and the various types of art associated with it – from local color writing to the Arts and Crafts movement – is also as much a debate over the status of aesthetics, historiography and the emerging discipline of anthropology during this period.<sup>65</sup> Without getting too mired in this complex network of discourses, I want to establish how Garland attempted to address nostalgia's relationship to space and time as well as to history and political progress in his work. A poignant example of his engagement with this set of questions can once again be found in “Up the Coulee.”

Having finally won Grant's affection by calling to mind their shared memories, Howard nonetheless cannot successfully persuade his brother to allow him to restore the old farmhouse and accompanying acreage. Grant, like many of his fellow farmers, cannot imagine an alternative to the present, albeit economically and socially unjust, relations of production; he and his neighbors are “discontented, yet hardly daring to acknowledge it” or willing to call for change (75). This failure of political imagination means that they can lay no claim to agency. For this reason, Garland concludes the story by depicting an important and final contrast between the two brothers. Even though they embrace one another as brothers again, they find themselves speechlessly staring at one another:

The two men stood there, face to face, hands clasped, the one fair-skinned, full-lipped, handsome in his neat suit; the other tragic, sombre in his softened mood, his large, long, rugged Scotch face bronzed with sun and scarred with wrinkles that had histories, like sabre-cuts on a veteran, the record of his battles. (87)

Separated by a semi-colon, the two brothers fall just short of achieving a complete reconciliation. Recognizing one another, they share the same space but at first glance appear temporally non-synchronous. Donning a fashionable suit, Howard occupies an ephemeral and constantly changing

present – what Agacinski would see as the temporality of modernity – while Grant appears as a racialized bronzed Scotchman who becomes the bearer of “histories.” Such a dichotomy is not an easy one to reconcile. While some commentators read this paragraph as a fundamentally and indisputably ambiguous one that endorses neither Howard’s nor Grant’s point of view, Garland is not really presenting the reader with a choice but with a dialectic.<sup>66</sup> The semi-colon in this passage functions as a copula as much as it punctuates their separation. Howard, as the story’s only character capable of aesthetic appreciation, suffers from a lack of historical consciousness. Grant’s face, by contrast is noticeably scarred. Scars, which have often been associated with memory as a form of *mnemotechnics*, provide him with histories denied to his brother.<sup>67</sup> That Grant’s face possesses these histories, however, does not fix him temporally. Instead they become recognizable – even if not readable – to his brother Howard, becoming the basis for a call to action in the present. In this way, their temporalities converge and the allochronism that frames the first part of the story comes to an end. Grant emerges at this moment as a living repository of memory, a welcomed antidote to Howard’s persistent forgetfulness. Consequently, rather than dividing them in an allochronic and anthropological manner, the story fuses – a word favored by Populists who described their own project of political amalgamation as one of fusion – Howard’s and Grant’s timelines in this final paragraph.

Nostalgia, for Garland, thus comes to function as a form of memory that works aesthetically; one capable of negotiating and bridging the spatial and temporal relativity described in Garland’s short fiction and in the book that contributed to the Populists’ and his own political philosophy, George’s *Progress and Poverty*. But as much as Garland’s use of nostalgia allowed him to bridge these divides, it also exposed and responded to some of the shortcomings present in George’s work. In one of the more influential sections of the book, “The Law of Human Progress,” George makes an anthropological assertion that resonates with Fabian’s critique of the discipline. Attempting to establish a universal understanding of history, he finds the persistence of “fixed, petrified civilizations” that “have no idea of human progress” vexing.<sup>68</sup> He also maintains that many a civilization has regressed or met an untimely downfall when it “lost even the memory of what their ancestors had done.”<sup>69</sup> Within George’s own Malthusian and Spencerian understanding of history as a cyclical process of decline and fall, the possibility of agency seems rather restricted. For this reason, George describes himself somewhat oxymoronically as a kind of optimistic fatalist who repeatedly calls for reform and believes that, while limited, “the human will is an initiatory force” in the law of progress.<sup>70</sup> But even though he devises a tax scheme and a set of proposed economic policies, he concedes that not even his plans may be able to prevent the United States from slipping into a period of protracted decline. Such fatalistic views of history – theories of degeneration notably among them – were of course a dime a dozen in the 1890s and throughout the early twentieth century. And these theories had a direct and explicit literary corollary – naturalism. Preferring his own veritist aesthetic, Garland only occasionally approaches naturalism in his fiction when describing the toil that defines farm life. Given its compatibility with George’s historical outlook, Garland’s refusal to embrace naturalism seems even more remarkable when we consider that Véron praises “naturalism” for being “always open to impressions of a realistic nature.”<sup>71</sup> Garland, however, could not accept a form that preferred to “deal with crime and abnormalities” instead of “with the heroism of labor” and “the comradeship of men.”<sup>72</sup> By devising an alternative to naturalism, Garland departs from both George and Véron because a faithful adherence to them would deprive his characters and his political project of agency. Embedded within Garland’s fiction, in fact, lies an implicit critique of naturalism and what White might describe as the genre’s “mode of argument.”<sup>73</sup>

In the remaining pages, I extend my examination of Garland’s use of nostalgia beyond just its mode of employment and ideological alignment with Populist mutualism to consider its mode of argument. Garland undermines the deterministic logic of naturalism by anticipating one important dimension of early twentieth-century literary aesthetics. Through this mode of argument Garland both solves the problem of agency present within George’s historical and political thought and helps us begin to understand why contemporary literary and cultural critics continue to eschew nostalgia for its perceived “struggle against history” and its aesthetic simplicity.<sup>74</sup>

"Up the Coulee" again sheds light upon Garland's aesthetic project in this instance by dramatizing the tension between two competing narratives – the naturalist and the nostalgic. Despite their diverging perspectives and the dialectical contrast between them at the end of the story, Howard and Grant share one very important characteristic – they both seem inseparably linked to the environment. Grant, whose many histories gravely affect his outlook, appears to be the embodiment of naturalist pessimism. Jennifer Fleissner succinctly summarizes this prevailing view of naturalism as "threatening the very possibility of a human agency that might alter history's course" through its "immersion in its context."<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, naturalism conforms to a mode of historical argument White refers to as contextualist, which explains events by placing them "within the 'context' of their occurrence" through "synchronic representations of segments or sections of the process" of these occurrences.<sup>76</sup> Contextualism, which also partly draws upon the mechanistic mode of argumentation, and naturalism alike view context – be it historical or environmental – in deterministic terms that invariably limit or completely eliminate the possibility of human agency. Garland explores the challenges this mode of argumentation poses to the Populist project repeatedly in his fiction by introducing characters, like Grant, contained by it. Adhering to a mode of contextualist argumentation or naturalist logic, Grant rejects Howard's offer of help because he deems himself "a dead failure," insisting that "life's a failure for ninety-nine per cent of us" (87). To repel the force of such an outlook, Garland develops his use of nostalgia to render it capable of accomplishing more than just forging mutualist, but possibly ineffectual, bonds between different groups of people.

Nostalgia, in Garland's work, ultimately challenges the logic of naturalism not by imagining a position outside context so much as imagining a different relationship to this context. Howard, just as equally as his brother, remains tied to his environment but in a nostalgic instead of a naturalistic sense. Speaking to his brother, he readily acknowledges that "circumstances made me and crushed you" (86). As demonstrated previously, Howard habitually becomes engrossed and inspired by the natural landscape surrounding him. Unlike Grant, who responds only with "dead silence" when his brother brings up any "idea of beauty," Howard nostalgically aestheticizes the environment in a way that empowers him by altering his relationship to his surroundings. His nostalgia changes his perception of the world around him, enabling him to imagine alternatives to the status quo. And as we also witnessed earlier, nostalgia's capability to foster a spirit of mutualism among previously unaligned groups of people relies upon a reinvention of the past. Nostalgia, for Garland then, displays what Boym would describe as the reflective and restorative threads of nostalgia. Howard's reflections upon the past, in fact, constitute the basis for a restorative or revolutionary imperative to change the present. It is in precisely this way that the terms of Agacinski's critique of nostalgia can also help us further understand how Garland actually fuses the ephemeral nature of modernity to a nostalgic way of understanding the past. Nostalgia, for Garland, looks backward not to demonstrate that the past determines the present but to demonstrate that the present defines the past.<sup>77</sup>

By subjecting the past to the exigencies of the present, Garland's nostalgia provides his characters with an historical agency stemming not from their ability to transcend their condition, but from their capacity to engage their contexts or culture immanently from within. Nostalgia, through its creation of shared collective memories that serve the present, enacts a Schillerian aesthetics that views the capacity for freedom and the capacity to appreciate beauty as one and the same. But unlike other forms of aesthetics, which lend themselves to the establishment of hierarchies of sociological distinction, Garland's nostalgia remains democratically accessible to all. Grant, in "Up the Coulee," may have resigned himself to the misery of his condition, but Garland suggests in other stories that all of his characters have the potential to experience nostalgia. Julia Peterson in "Among the Corn-Rows," for example, finds herself in a state of "bondage" to her parents until she has an aesthetic experience (98). Although she cannot initially imagine escaping her parents' farm, she begins to picture her emancipation shortly after allowing "the beauty" of the Midwestern "scene" to overcome her (99). Shortly after this experience, she encounters a childhood friend, Rob Rodemaker, who she recalls with nostalgic fondness. Their encounter and their nostalgic memories for one another become the pretext for their eventual – even if less than romantic – elopement. What instances like this one in *Main-*

*Travelled Roads* suggest is that even uneducated and impoverished characters like Julia all have at least a latent capacity for aesthetic and nostalgic experience. And it is this experience, rather than the mere fact of their conditions, that enables these characters to imagine alternatives to their misery.

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Garland's understanding of nostalgia and aesthetics and the relationship between aesthetics and history intersects with the thought of some of his contemporaries. Many other Populists also looked backward nostalgically as a way to re-imagine the present and future. Edward Bellamy's utopic novel, *Looking Backward* (1888), comes immediately to mind as an example of the way Populist thinkers even imagined the future through the act of a backward glance towards an imaginary past. And Ignatius Donnelly, in addition to being one of the People's Party's leading agitators, also contributed to the popularization of the myth of the lost continent of Atlantis in *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882), which provided him with an ideal form of civilization by which to judge the present. Beyond Populist circles, scholars within the fields of philosophy and history had also begun to re-evaluate the epistemological assumptions about the relationship between context and form, or history and interpretation. George Santayana, for example, argues in *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), that the aesthetic fundamentally shapes both the democratic political imagination and the historical imagination, observing that "history is not fact, but consists of memories and words subject to ever-varying interpretations."<sup>78</sup> Santayana's critique of history's claims to empirical veracity in his theory of aesthetics were echoed in seemingly the most unlikely of all publications, the *American Historical Review*. Within the pages of the newly founded *AHR*, a succession of turn-of-the-century Presidents of the American Historical Association often composed addresses pursuing metahistorical questions that pondered such subjects as the place of the imagination in American historiography.<sup>79</sup>

Taken collectively into account, Garland's fiction and these other examples both confirm Bill Brown's contention that previous studies of late nineteenth-century U.S. literature and culture have focused too exclusively on naturalism and its brand of historical and biological determinism. But Brown's claim that these omissions stem from a lack of interest in the literature of "social protest" is only half the story; these studies also tend to overlook or demean nostalgia because it radically challenges the way we have come to understand the relationship between form and context in the wake of the cultural turn.<sup>80</sup> Whether in the form of New Historicism or cultural studies, we often view literary works as products of or metonyms for their cultural moments. In this way, an examination of Garland's use of nostalgia both informs our understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and history at the turn of the century and invites us to question some of the metahistorical modes that underwrite our own approaches to literary and cultural studies.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlin Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 92. Hereafter all page references to *Main-Travelled Roads* will appear parenthetically in the body of the article.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 133.

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> See Brodhead, 139-141.

<sup>7</sup> Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*, n. pag.

<sup>8</sup> Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 145.

<sup>9</sup> For a different but astute reading of Garland's aesthetics, see Tom Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 65-78.

<sup>10</sup> See Robert C. McMath Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 73.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 304.

<sup>12</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 9.

<sup>14</sup> For variations of this argument, which privilege either Garland's politics or his aesthetics over the other, see the following: Brodhead, 139-141; Bill Brown, "The Popular, the Populist, and the Populace – Locating Hamlin Garland in the Politics of Culture," *Arizona Quarterly* 50.3 (1994): 89-110; Foote, 38-58; Cheryl Temple Herr, *Critical Regionalism and Cultural Studies: From Ireland to the American Midwest* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 90-95; and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 244-49.

<sup>15</sup> A number of early twentieth-century authors writing during the interwar period were indirectly or directly tied to the New Regionalism, including Mary Austin, Willa Cather, William Faulkner, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren.

<sup>16</sup> For a recent articulation of this view, see Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), xvii.

<sup>18</sup> See Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 68-87.

<sup>19</sup> For an indispensable and illuminating study of British nineteenth-century nostalgia as a transitional concept, see Linda M. Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007). While my account of nostalgia differs from Austin's in a number of ways, I agree with her central contention that nostalgia underwent a period of prolonged conceptual transition

during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth-century U.S. at least, nostalgia was a widely cited phenomenon contrary to Austin's characterization of the term as a residual one in Britain.

<sup>20</sup> For comprehensive accounts of nostalgia's genealogy, see Austin, 1-23; Boym, 1-18; Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 1-29; and David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4-13.

<sup>21</sup> Davis, 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Lee Anderson and Godfrey Tryggve Anderson, "Nostalgia and Malingering in the Military During the Civil War," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 28 (1984): 156.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Wharton, *A Treatise on Theism, and On the Modern Skeptical Theories* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1859), 80.

<sup>24</sup> George Rosen, "Nostalgia: A 'Forgotten' Psychological Disorder," *Clio Medica* 10.1 (1975): 44.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Books, 2004), 115.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>29</sup> George Combe, "Combe on Phrenology," *Southern Literary Messenger* Sept. 1839: 604.

<sup>30</sup> "Nostalgia," *New York Times* 12 May 1874: 4.

<sup>31</sup> "A Death from Nostalgia," *New York Times* 29 Jul. 1898: 12.

<sup>32</sup> Originally written by John Howard Payne for an opera while living abroad in England in 1822, "Home! Sweet Home!" remained one of the most popular and regularly reprinted American songs throughout the nineteenth century.

<sup>33</sup> Boym, 41.

<sup>34</sup> This essay appears as the introduction to the later editions of *Main-Travelled Roads*, including the University of Nebraska Press edition cited in this article.

<sup>35</sup> While he received some formal schooling from a local seminary in Iowa, it is well established that Hamlin Garland was largely an autodidact who, because he could not afford a university education, acquired his knowledge of both George's and Véron's work during the course of his self-guided study at the Boston Public Library. For more information on Garland's early intellectual development and literary career, see Donald Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

<sup>36</sup> Eugène Véron, *Aesthetics*, trans. W.H. Armstrong (London: Chapman & Hall, 1879), 95.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>38</sup> For a nuanced and illuminating analysis of Garland's critique of Northeastern literary hegemony, see Edward Watts, *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 202-215.

<sup>39</sup> See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971).

<sup>40</sup> Following the established critical practice, I use Garland's original 1891 spelling of the story, "Up the Coulee," even though in later editions he changed it to "Up the Coolly."

<sup>41</sup> See Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 82-119.

<sup>42</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 7.

<sup>43</sup> The connection between the nation and Walter Benjamin's idea of calendrical or "homogenous, empty time" is of course a crucial part of Benedict Anderson's highly influential account of nationalism in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 24-36.

<sup>44</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 226.

<sup>45</sup> For an extended account of Garland's and regionalism's engagement with producerism, see Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 189-228.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>47</sup> John Charles Bucknell and Daniel H. Tuke, *A Manual of Psychological Medicine* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1968), 162. The Hafner edition is actually a facsimile of Bucknell's and Tuke's 1858 edition, which became one of the standard diagnostic manuals for nineteenth-century American psychologists.

<sup>48</sup> In this collection, Garland repeatedly looks to preceding artists and writers for inspiration even while simultaneously chiding any writer who remains too entranced by the past. Throughout *Crumbling Idols* Garland appears to search for a balance between what T.S. Eliot would later famously refer to as tradition and the individual talent. The title of Garland's work itself aspires to this kind of balance; his idols may be crumbling, but they ruinously haunt the present nonetheless.

<sup>49</sup> Véron, xxiii.

<sup>50</sup> Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting and the Drama* (Chicago: Stone and Kimball, 1894), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>53</sup> Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, *Comparative Literature* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 371. This book is a reprint of the 1886 edition cited in *Crumbling Idols*.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>55</sup> For more on the movement culture that propelled Populism, see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 20-54.

<sup>56</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.

<sup>57</sup> Ignatius Donnelly, "The Omaha Platform," *The Populist Mind*, ed. Norman Pollack (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), 63.

<sup>58</sup> George believed that by placing a single tax on income derived from rent, the government could essentially render all land common property and redistribute wealth accordingly. While his ideas were never fully adopted by the People's Party, *Progress and Poverty* became a national bestseller and spurred the establishment of several Single Tax Clubs.

<sup>59</sup> To be fair to Garland, he did champion the rights of women, American Indians and blacks in many of his political writings. For example, see Garland, "A New Declaration of Rights," *Arena* Jan. 1891: 157-84.

<sup>60</sup> Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>61</sup> Bakhtin, 98.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>63</sup> Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*, n. pag.

<sup>64</sup> Garland, *Crumbling Idols*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> One of the most authoritative accounts of these myriad discussions and their relationship to modernity remains T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>66</sup> See Foote, 51-56.

<sup>67</sup> For a notable example of the association between scarring or pain and memory, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 54-67.

<sup>68</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth* (New York: Random House, 1938), 481.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 485.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 561.

<sup>71</sup> Véron, 357-58.

<sup>72</sup> Garland, *Crumbling Idols*, 28.

<sup>73</sup> White, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 92.

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer L. Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 38. Fleissner, however, uses the notion of "compulsion" to call these previous studies of naturalism into question in ways that are not altogether incompatible with my account of nostalgia.

<sup>76</sup> White, 18 and 19.

<sup>77</sup> Such a formulation may seem similar to what Frederic Jameson refers to as a "nostalgia for the present." Jameson insists that nostalgia can renew one's understanding of the present, but this process of renewal is essentially an unconscious and retrogressive one that reifies the present. By contrast, I treat nostalgia as a conscious attempt to alter one's perception of the present in order to repossess it. Jameson's account of nostalgia can be found in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 279-296.

<sup>78</sup> George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Beauty* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 88.

<sup>79</sup> For example, see Albert Bushnell Hart, "Imagination in History," *American Historical Review* 15 (1910): 227-251.

<sup>80</sup> Brown, 91.