

**The Literary Reception of the Chicago
World's Columbian Exposition, 1893**

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1 Introduction

On May 1, 1851, the first world's fair opened its gates to the public.¹ The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, held in London, displayed natural resources and industrial products as well as art from all over the world in an extraordinary glass building, dubbed "Crystal Palace" and located in Hyde Park. As the event was intended primarily as an impetus for commerce and as a display of British economic superiority, organizers and visitors alike were confident that the Exhibition also heralded a new age of peace and prosperity for all mankind. While these hopes clearly did not stand the test of time, the great event proved to leave behind a heritage of a different kind. A veritable world's fair movement sprang up, and many nations wanted to host their own international exposition. This development left a lasting impression especially on the second half of the nineteenth century. In an age before the advent of audio-visual mass media in the modern sense of the term, the fairs were one of the very few means of disseminating hands-on information about new inventions, new products, new ideas. Paul Greenhalgh emphasizes their significance as follows: "They were the largest gatherings of people - war or peace - of all time. On both a high and popular level they ranked amongst the most important events held in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; they remain

¹ In this thesis, I will follow Paul Greenhalgh's terminology. Greenhalgh classifies the fairs in different traditions, referring to the British events as "Great Exhibitions," the French as "*Expositions Universelles*," and the American as "World's Fairs." The various traditions, according to Greenhalgh, are influenced by the respective character of their predecessors, the national industrial exhibitions. On the traditions of fairs in the various host nations, cf. P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, passim. When speaking about the events in general, I will adopt the term "world's fairs" for the sake of readability.

unsurpassed in their scale, opulence and confidence."² World's fairs thus have always been a forum for international communication, but at the same time they were a source of self-assertion for nations, societies, and various social and ethnic groups. Also, they have invariably had a strong tendency to influence the cultural life of the host nation to a considerable degree.

On another level, these events provide modern scholars of both history and cultural studies with a unique insight into the economic, industrial, political, social and cultural conditions of many nations as well as the values and ideals of their times.

The United States were seized by the world's fair fever immediately after the 1851 London exhibition. Having been outrun by Great Britain in the race for the first international exposition, the United States built their own version of the Crystal Palace in New York City, with showman P.T. Barnum in charge. Sadly, the "Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations," held in 1853-54, was a failure. Attendance was low, and the exhibition building was a poor copy of the famous and enchanting London model. The roof leaked incessantly, annoying visitors and damaging exhibits, and Barnum lost more than \$300,000. The United States would have to wait for another twenty-three years until their successful world's fair debut, the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial. Between 1876 and 1916, American world's fairs counted almost one hundred million visitors.³ This amazing figure - especially in an age when public transportation was limited to railways -

² P. Greenhalgh, 1.

³ Cf. R.W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 2.

makes it easy for today's observers to gauge the significance of these events.

For the era we are talking about, there is no clear definition of the term "world's fair." Before the *Bureau International des Expositions* with its headquarters in Paris was established in 1928, there were absolutely no rules as to what makes a fair a world's fair and when, where, or how often the events were to take place. After that date, all prospective hosts had to register with the *Bureau* in order to avoid several events to coincide with one another. However, all expositions with any international claim that took place before the *Bureau* took up its work in coordinating international efforts are generally classified as world's fairs.

Apart from the well-known major events in Philadelphia (Centennial International Exhibition, 1876), Chicago (World's Columbian Exposition, 1893), St. Louis (Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904), and San Francisco (Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1915), R.W. Rydell includes into the list of early American world's fairs some minor expositions which claimed to have an international scope but operated on a lower budget and were mostly regionally organized. These minor fairs, according to Rydell, were those held at New Orleans (World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884-85), Atlanta (Cotton States and International Exposition, 1895), Nashville (Tennessee Centennial Exposition, 1897), Omaha (Trans-Mississippi Exposition, 1899), Buffalo (Pan-American Exposition, 1901), Portland, Oregon (Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair, 1905), Seattle (Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, 1909), and San Diego (Panama

California Exposition, 1915-1916).⁴ The San Diego Exposition in 1915-16 marks the eve of World War I for the United States as well as a watershed in the world's fair movement in general. The hopes for peace through progress that had been paraded at the international expositions in the previous six and a half decades were shattered by the devastating war, and the next major scale world's fair was not to take place until 1929 in Barcelona.

Considering the importance of the early world's fairs in their time, it is not surprising that they have repeatedly been the focus of scholarly interest. The US-American world's fairs in general and the Chicago 1893 event in particular have been analyzed in the past with a vast number of different aspects in mind. Mostly, the emphasis has been put on architecture. As I will explain later on, the Chicago exposition city, very often referred to as "White City" due to its most remarkable attribute, led to controversy among architects during its time, and discussions about the designers' merits and failures remained fierce for decades after the buildings in question had burned to the ground. Yet, the White City undoubtedly had a great influence on the American concept of urban planning. Studies which analyze this particular aspect of the fair are numerous and include Carl W. Condit's *The Chicago School of Architecture* and William H. Wilson's *The City Beautiful Movement*.⁵

The history of the World's Columbian Exposition has been retold in great detail by Robert Muccigrosso, who puts it

⁴ Cf. R.W. Rydell, 2, and R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, *Fair America*, passim.

⁵ Carl W. Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture : A History of Commercial and Public Building in the Chicago Area*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964; William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

into its appropriate context by adding relevant information about the history of the United States and especially Chicago as well as biographies of many people involved with the project.⁶ John E. Findling has written a volume on the histories of both the Columbian Exposition and the Century of Progress International Exposition 1933-34, also at Chicago, in which he compares the two events.⁷ In *Perfect Cities*, James Gilbert juxtaposes the White City and its "mother" city Chicago and analyzes the former as a utopian blueprint.⁸

As far as the social and cultural history of the United States in this period is concerned, Thomas J. Schlereth has published a very useful volume on life in America during the Victorian period.⁹ He discusses several aspects of everyday life such as working, housing, communicating, etc. These systematic chapters are framed by vignettes of the 1876, 1893, and 1915 world's fairs - short chapters which describe the respective event and list the many ways in which it influenced the American way of life. Apparently, Schlereth considers the world's fairs as sufficiently outstanding and significant as to mark turning points in the life of many Americans while at the same time providing a strain of continuity to it. I have already quoted Paul Greenhalgh's systematic analysis of a large number of international fairs between 1851 and 1939. In *Ephemeral Vistas*, instead of dealing with the events in a chronological manner as most other studies do, he picks out some problems or phenomena common to all expositions, such as how the fairs helped in displaying a national profile, how they were funded and organized, and how they encouraged consumerism.

⁶ Robert Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World*, 1993.

⁷ John E. Findling, *Chicago's Great World's Fairs*, 1994.

⁸ J. Gilbert, *Perfect Cities : Chicago's Utopias of 1893*, 1991.

Greenhalgh also discusses what the fairs did to promote colonialism and imperialism, mainly by exhibiting people from so-called "uncivilized" cultures in native village replicas. Robert W. Rydell has discussed this aspect in detail in several of his works.¹⁰ Rydell also focuses on the problem of Black representation - or rather the lack of it - at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. Prior to the exposition, there had been a heated debate between Blacks and Whites, but also among the black community, about the way Blacks should be represented at the fair. Rydell has edited a collection of pamphlets by Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass that provide the reader with background information about this controversy.¹¹ Christopher R. Reed has recently published a volume on the same subject.¹²

In addition to the emancipation of Blacks, the emancipation of women as well as the question of women's suffrage played an eminent role at the Columbian Exposition and at other world's fairs. Studies of this problem include Jeanne Marie Weimann's *The Fair Women* and Virginia Grant Darney's *Women and World's Fairs*.¹³

There are a number of useful and concise overviews over the field of world's fairs in general. The *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions*, edited by John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle, offers a short

⁹ Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America : Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915*, 1992.

¹⁰ R.W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 1984; R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, *Fair America*, 2000.

¹¹ Robert W. Rydell (ed.), *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition : The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature*. Urbana etc.: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

¹² Christopher Robert Reed, *All the World Is Here : The Black Presence at the White City*. Bloomington etc.: Indiana University Press, 1999.

¹³ Jeanne Marie Weimann, *The Fair Women*. Chicago: n.p., 1981; Virginia Grant Darney, "Women and World's Fairs : American International Expositions, 1876-1904." Diss. Emory University, Atlanta, 1982.

essay on every international exposition between 1851 and 1988, together with many valuable figures and statistics.¹⁴ A well-illustrated book by Winfried Kretschmer catered to the world's fair fever in Germany prior to the Hanover Expo 2000, the first world's fair ever held on German soil.¹⁵ Erik Mattie's pictorial book *Weltausstellungen* has a strong emphasis on architecture, but through its pictures offers a high amount of visual context that is very helpful to keep in mind when thinking about world's fairs.¹⁶

This dissertation focuses on an aspect which has been almost completely neglected until today: the narrative literature inspired by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. This particular fair gave rise to a sheer incredible amount of literature of all imaginable kinds. Carl Smith notes: "The Fair inspired a literary response big enough to have provided an exhibit in itself."¹⁷ One may wonder why this specific fair spawned more literature than any other event of its kind - earlier and later fairs have led to only a handful of novels, as opposed to dozens of novels, short stories, and poems written in the aftermath of the World's Columbian Exposition. Even the London "Crystal Palace" Exhibition of 1851, unique due to its position in history as the very first world's fair, did not lead to any literary response worth mentioning. In an unpublished dissertation dated 1978, Charlotte Krack Green attempted to trace some connections between the Exhibition and the mid-century works of Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, and Charles Kingsley.¹⁸ However,

¹⁴ J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle (eds.), *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851-1988*, 1990.

¹⁵ W. Kretschmer, *Weltausstellungen*, 1999.

¹⁶ E. Mattie, *Weltausstellungen*, 1998.

¹⁷ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 141.

¹⁸ Charlotte Krack Green, "The Great Exhibition of 1851", 1978.

as she has to concede on the first pages, "[n]one of the major writers active in these years [...] wrote anything of consequence about the Exhibition."¹⁹ After a close analysis of some of the three authors' works, her conclusion is that "a deeper examination reveals subtleties with the exhibition spirit."²⁰

In the case of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, the ties are not so subtle at all, and the reader of the literary writings occasioned by the fair does not have to fall back on the "exhibition spirit" but is confronted again and again with the depiction of the event itself. However, all attempts at explaining this incongruous response have to remain speculative. One reason may be found in the physical attributes of the exposition, the gleaming White City and the turbulent Midway Plaisance. The obvious dichotomy between the two parts of the fair captured the public imagination and influenced the literary response, as I shall demonstrate later on. While this clearly cannot be the only explanation, this question will have to remain as a focus of future research.

Carl Smith elaborates on the corpus of writings that sprang up before, during, and after the exposition:

This response included every manner of official and unofficial guide to the Exposition, not to mention more detailed volumes covering the work of special committees, the proceedings of various ceremonies, and the contents of individual buildings. Then there was a secondary range of books of photographic views with gushing captions, plus specialized vademecums with strategies on how to see it all - and Chicago as well - in a short visit. Beyond this were the ponderous multi-volume histories of the Fair, many commemorative issues of newspapers and magazines, and

¹⁹ C.K. Green, 7.

²⁰ C.K. Green, 226.

countless impressions of famous and lesser known visitors. Finally, there was the poetry and fiction of the Fair, including even a small body of dime novels and children's stories [...].²¹

Much of this literature has been collected by the Smithsonian Institution and incorporated into their collection of material about world's fairs in general. These materials were made accessible to international scholars in 1992, when the texts were transferred to microfilm. The Smithsonian Institution compiled a catalogue of its collection and published it in book form, including an introductory article by Robert W. Rydell.²² The catalogue gives an excellent overview of the writings occasioned by world's fairs.

Even more valuable for the preparation of this thesis has been a volume compiled by D.J. Bertuca, D.K. Hartman, and S.M. Neumeister and entitled *The World's Columbian Exposition : A Centennial Bibliographic Guide*.²³ It lists, and partly comments on, more than 6,000 primary and secondary sources, among them sixty-two novels and short stories as well as twenty poems, inspired by the Columbian Exposition alone. In addition, there are poetry and stories published in various collections, histories, and commemorative volumes. Strangely enough, the bibliography names only one drama that was brought about by the fair.²⁴ However, the reason may be found in the fact that, at the time in question, plays were written to be staged rather than to be read; they were thus put to

²¹ C. Smith, 141.

²² Robert W. Rydell (ed.), *The Books of the Fairs: Materials about the World's Fairs, 1834 - 1916, in the Smithsonian Institution Libraries*. Chicago etc.: American Library Association, 1992.

²³ David J. Bertuca, Donald K. Hartman, Susan M. Neumeister (comps.), *The World's Columbian Exposition : A Centennial Bibliographic Guide*, 1996.

²⁴ Annie M. Sergel, *The Midway; a Burlesque Entertainment, Based on the Famous Plaisance of the World's Columbian Exposition*. Chicago:

print for only one - very small - edition and consequently, more often than not, are lost to modern scholars.

Considering this huge corpus of narrative literature, it is more than surprising that nobody has taken a closer look at these works until a very short time ago. In 1999, Brenda Hollweg published an article in which she analyzes some of the texts as building blocks of a collective memory in the United States, using Jan Assmann's theories of collective memory and national identity as a basis.²⁵ This published article is an extract taken from a longer monography on the same subject, published in December 2001.²⁶ Hollweg's focus in both publications, however, is not restricted to fictional works. Rather, she includes travel reports, magazine articles, reviews, and similar writings. Her approach is very different from the one I intend to take in that she first establishes a theoretical framework out of the three components of culture, nation, and identity. In this context, she then analyzes a number of texts as to the space they occupy within this framework. While her theoretical chapters on the formation of cultural identity are very precise as well as highly insightful to the reader, her textual analyses remain on the surface of the material she discusses and thus, in some cases, fail to pay tribute to the role these texts fulfilled at the time they were being written and read.

For the rapidly expanding US-American reading audiences in the late nineteenth century, narrative literature was of outstanding importance. In spite of this fact, it has never been closely studied in relation to world's fairs,

Dramatic, 1894. Cf. D.J. Bertuca/D.K. Hartman/S.M. Neumeister (comps.), W45.

²⁵ Brenda Hollweg, "Recollecting the Past", 1999.

²⁶ Brenda Hollweg, *Ausgestellte Welt*, 2001.

which were among the most significant mass events of the same period. Another aspect that makes fictional literature especially interesting in this context is that, when compared with non-fiction, it allows for a greater aesthetic distance between itself and the matter it deals with through its higher degree in freedom of form.

The question remains why the study of the texts inspired by the World's Columbian Exposition, of all possible events, would be interesting to the modern scholar. The exposition was an outstanding event which attracted more than 27 million people at a time when long-distance travel was a good deal less comfortable than it is today. Through its buildings, exhibits, and the reactions of its visitors, it provides a unique snapshot of American culture, values, ideals, and consumer attitudes around 1890.

At this particular point in time, the United States had to deal with a number of serious problems. The conflicts that had found their ultimate expression in the Civil War had split the comparatively young nation in two, and the healing process was not yet complete. The Reconstruction period was made even more troublesome by a series of severe depressions and waves of immigrants, both resulting in acute social conflicts. In this situation, it was especially difficult for the country to present a rounded and consistent self-image to its own citizens and, perhaps even more importantly, to other nations. Mass events such as a world's fair fulfilled a special function in this context: They offered opportunities for the self-presentation of the host country as well as for the expression of the concerns of various interest groups. At the same time, they served as a display not only of technological, but also of cultural innovations.

For this reason, the United States world's fairs, especially the World's Columbian Exposition, were demonstrations of unity that were put on with full use of the "new media" of their time: "World's fairs are the very soul of propaganda in its most constructive form."²⁷ This statement is especially true for the American fairs in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In their book *Fair America*, authors Rydell, Findling and Pelle put forward the following hypothesis: "America's world's fairs extended and carried forward into the cultural realm the political efforts to reconstruct the United States after the Civil War."²⁸ If this thesis holds true, one would expect the fruits of these political efforts to become tangible in cultural products of any kind, including the works of authors who visited the World's Columbian Exposition or were in other ways influenced by it.

"Nationalism is, at the outset, a creation of writers," Gerald Newman notes.²⁹ Taking this and Rydell, Findling, and Pelle's suggestion as points of departure, I will analyze in what way and by which means the United States, as the youngest host nation of world's fairs in the nineteenth century, were represented in a number of exemplary novels that were written in the aftermath of the Chicago Columbian Exposition. I will try to determine if and how these texts participated in constructing a (new) national self-image and how they made literary use of the event. I will also look into the impact of the world's fair on the literary life of the host city, region, and nation.

²⁷ Mitchell Wolfson, Jr., *The Great World's Fairs and Expositions*, cited after D.J. Bertuca/D.K. Hartman/S.M. Neumeister (comps.), x.

²⁸ R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, 7.

²⁹ G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 87.

In her book *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins has called for a new approach to literature. What makes a literary masterpiece, she argues, is not the intrinsic value of the text itself; rather, it is the circumstances under which the text was written and, consequently, the cultural work the text fulfilled at the time of its publication. Tompkins proposes a redefinition of literature and literary studies, moving away from the fixed canon which has been established by literary critics and scholars and which consists of the so-called masterpieces standing out among their contemporaries. In Tompkins's model,

literary texts [are seen] not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order. In this view, novels and stories should be studied not because they manage to escape the limitations of their particular time and place, but because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.³⁰

Although her analysis focuses on the years between 1790 and 1860, her findings can undoubtedly be adapted to the period that is central to this dissertation. Tompkins picks a number of literary works which were highly successful after their initial publication, but are eyed with suspicion - if they are eyed at all - by modern critics and scholars. Her case studies cover, for example, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* - novels that do not belong to the standard literary canon or have only very recently come to the attention of literary students.

I believe that the works of fiction that this book examines were written not so that they could be

³⁰ J. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, xi.

enshrined in any literary hall of fame, but in order to win the belief and influence the behavior of the widest possible audience. [...] Consequently, this book focuses primarily [...] on works whose obvious impact on their readers has made them suspect from a modernist point of view, which tends to classify work that affects people's lives, or tries to, as merely sensational or propagandistic.³¹

In the final chapter of her book, aptly entitled, "'But Is It Any Good?' : The Institutionalization of Literary Value," Tompkins dismisses the frequently stated objection that novels of this kind more often than not lack literary value and are thus not worthy of being studied. She points out that literary value itself is not an objective criterion; rather, it has changed again and again over the last decades, as the author demonstrates by looking at various anthologies of American literature published between 1919 and 1962.³² She concludes that "*literary* judgments of value do not depend on literary considerations alone, since the notion of what is literary is defined by and nested within changing historical conditions."³³ Therefore, the question to keep in mind when dealing with a literary text must not be whether it is any good or, rather, whether it is of "literary value." Instead, following Tompkins's approach, one must look for the cultural work a particular novel has done in its own time.

The novels I have chosen are, in more than one sense, of the same kind as those Tompkins analyzes. Thus, this dissertation is a cultural study rather than a strictly literary one. Two of the authors I will examine - Clara Louise Burnham and Emma Murdoch Van Deventer - have entirely dropped from cultural memory although they were,

³¹ Ibid.

³² J. Tompkins, 187ff.

in one way or another, successful authors in their own time. Another one, Frances Hodgson Burnett, remains well known as an author of children's books but not as the author of "valuable" literature. The fourth author, William Dean Howells, continues to be critically acclaimed until today; most studies of his work, however, all but omit the particular text I will focus on. However, I suggest that each of these novels, at the time of publication, filled a cultural role in the sense of Tompkins's concept of cultural work.

The starting point for my choice of texts was Bertuca's bibliography. I ruled out a number of texts because of the temporal distance of their publication relative to the event they deal with. There are, for instance, some fictional treatments of the history of Chicago which also make mention of the World's Columbian Exposition as a significant episode, for instance in a family history. Also, some novels are concerned with visitors to subsequent world's fairs who compare the event with and share their memories of the 1893 exposition. Of the forty-six novels Bertuca mentions, fourteen were written after 1910, including some that were published as late as 1992. However, the later these works were written, the less likely it is that the author visited the exposition personally or had first-hand reports of someone who did, so that the authenticity of the fair's depiction is likely to diminish over the course of time.

Another decisive factor for the selection of texts that must not be underestimated is their availability. Successful though some authors may have been, critically or commercially, during their time, their works have not been reprinted once this initial success was over. Since a large percentage of those texts have never become part

³³ J. Tompkins, 194f.; emphasis by Tompkins.

of the standard canon of American literature, they are rarely stored in scholarly libraries. A thorough search of second-hand bookstores, even using the seemingly unlimited resources on the internet, yielded only limited results. Of the texts that have remained after this selection process I have chosen four very different ones that may be considered exemplary of one certain type of literature respectively. After subtracting from Bertuca's list those novels that feature the World's Columbian Exposition merely as a small motif or only briefly mention it in one chapter, the remaining novels and short stories seem to fall into one of four categories: children's literature, Utopian literature, romance, or detective story, with the latter two groups clearly in the majority. The final decision certainly being a matter of taste, I have selected the four texts I will now introduce.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress : A Story of the City Beautiful* is a children's novel about two orphans who travel to the world's fair and ultimately manage to find happiness and a new family. The book was originally commissioned as a story for a commemorative children's book about the World's Columbian Exposition; the publication of this book, however, never came about, and Burnett extended her story to novel length and published it as a work of its own. While Burnett was born in Manchester, England, she moved to the United States at the age of sixteen, and all her books were simultaneously published in her old as well as in her new home country. Nowadays mainly remembered as an author of children's books, she also wrote many novels for adults which were highly acclaimed during her time. Since most of her fiction takes place in the United States, there can be no objection against studying *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*

as an American work of fiction, although Burnett is frequently classified as a British author. Children's books, in the late nineteenth century, had a wide audience that did not only consist of its primary target group but also of the children's nurses, mothers, and occasionally even their fathers, thus forming "a dual audience which the mid-Victorians [...] liked to call 'the young of all ages.'"³⁴ This range of addressees allowed for a high circulation of the novel and thus validates its inclusion in my study.

A very meticulous imaginative treatment of the World's Columbian Exposition can be found in Clara Louise Burnham's *Sweet Clover : A Romance of the White City*. Published in 1895 by the renowned Boston publishing house of Houghton Mifflin, the book concentrates on the troubled courtships of two young couples and closely interweaves them with accounts of the history, design, construction, and events surrounding the Chicago fair. The novel follows the extremely popular and highly successful tradition of the romance; it is written with a fine sense of humor and features a detailed character development.

William Dean Howells's *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* belongs to an entirely different genre. In his Altrurian trilogy, Howells, then well known as the "Dean of American Literature," took up the utopian mode that was so fashionable in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century; he invented Altruria, a country in which the ideals of Christian socialism favored by the author are the basis of society. Mr. Homos, one of Altruria's citizens, visits the United States as the guest of one Mr. Twelvemough, a romance writer. In a direct response to contemporary events, the two men

³⁴ U.C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, xiii.

together form the two sides of the author's *alter ego* and discuss political and social problems of the United States as well as possible solutions. *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, as the name suggests, consists of the correspondence Homos directs to his home country, describing places he visits and events he witnesses, among them the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago, which rouses very intense emotions in the traveler.

Emma Murdoch Van Deventer's *Against Odds : A Detective Story* represents the type of the pulp detective story, a very popular genre at the time; as a matter of fact, it is not just a detective story but rather a detective story *cum* romance. The plot, focusing on two secret service agents who have to solve a series of crimes and mysteries related to the Chicago exposition, is highly predictable and the style simple; the two-dimensional characters are mostly based on clichés and serve to satisfy the expectations of dime novel customers. *Against Odds* was reprinted together with another Columbian exposition dime novel in a volume entitled *Fairground Fiction*, edited by Donald K. Hartman who also co-compiled Bertuca's bibliography I have mentioned earlier.

I will study each of these four texts separately with the following questions in mind: In what way does the respective author make use of the World's Columbian Exposition as a social and cultural mass event? Can the texts be regarded as a conscious participation in or literary treatment of the cultural or political debates of their time? How is the United States as the host nation represented in the respective novel? Is this role of any consequence at all? If so, is it treated with any degree of critical distance? How did the fair affect the literary life of Chicago, its host city?

The following chapter will provide a sketch of the history of Chicago. This information is important for understanding the debate that focused on the choice of this particular city for hosting the Columbian exposition, so named because it was intended as a celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's landfall. Next, I will give an account of the World's Columbian Exposition itself, its history, design, and some of the major controversies surrounding it. This account can by no means be comprehensive and I will have to focus on a number of points that are reflected in the novels I intend to discuss. Chapters three through six of this dissertation will each deal with one of the novels mentioned above. A conclusive chapter will then sum up my findings.

2 Chicago and its fair

The period between the Civil War and World War I has been described by many historians and scholars of cultural studies as an age of transition or, more precisely, of transformation for the United States of America.³⁵ It was an era marked by many political, economic, and cultural events that directly or indirectly influenced and often changed the life of every American citizen. Three US presidents were assassinated, one was impeached. A series of busts and booms shook the stock market, making a few industrial magnates very rich and, on the other hand, devastating many enterprises. Twelve new states were admitted to the union, thus doubling its territory. Also, "[the] country's population, number of foreign born, suicides, industrial laborers, divorces, gross national product, and white-collar workers all doubled."³⁶ The contrasts and hence the conflicts between labor and capital sharpened dramatically, resulting in upheaval and agitation. The growing middle-class churned out more and more consumers for an increasing number of goods. All of these developments changed the face of the United States' society and economy considerably during a comparatively short span of time.

Another change that affected American life was the emergence of new centers of culture and commerce. The westward movement of the frontier came to a close in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and the cultural monopoly of the cities on the eastern seaboard slowly decreased in importance. One new metropolis after

³⁵ T.J. Schlereth, in *Victorian America*, lists a number of books which analyze American political, economic, and cultural history of the aforementioned period, using transformation as an interpretative key concept. Cf. T.J. Schlereth, *Victorian America*, xii, note 3.

the other sprang up in the Midwestern regions of the country and later on the west coast. This development brought about a reorientation of the American citizens, away from European influences, and towards a genuinely American culture. One of these new cities, and arguably the most important among those confronting the east coast bulwarks of tradition, was Chicago.

The World's Columbian Exposition, doubtlessly one of the most outstanding events of this period, cannot be studied in a vacuum. In order to fully grasp its significance for the age in question, as well as its later influence on culture and especially literature, it is important to take a close look at both the historical and the cultural advancements which led up to it.

2.1 Chicago - from mud to metropolis

The city of Chicago was by no means the obvious choice as the host city for the World's Columbian Exposition. On the contrary, among the group of cities which applied for this role, Chicago seemed by far the least likely candidate.

The area that is now Chicago was ceded by Indian tribes to the Americans in 1795, and eight years later military troops were moved into Fort Dearborn which was erected on the swampy ground.³⁷ Located in a favorable spot where traffic passed from the western shore of Lake Michigan via the Des Plaines and Illinois Rivers on to the Mississippi, the fort attracted a number of traders and

³⁶ T.J. Schlereth, xi.

³⁷ For my sources on the history of Chicago, cf. the bibliography section at the end of this dissertation.

settlers and prospered reasonably. During the War of 1812, however, all of its approximately one hundred inhabitants were killed and the fort was burned to the ground during a Potawatomi Indian attack, not to be rebuilt until 1816 or 1817. "Fort Dearborn and the massacre would be memorialized on Chicago's flag with a red, six-pointed star, one of four on the white-and-blue flag. (The other stars commemorate the 1871 fire and the world's fairs of 1893 and 1933-34)."³⁸ The military eventually left the settlement in 1823, and ten years later Chicago was incorporated as a town into the Illinois State legislature. Its name was derived from an Indian word the meaning of which is, "according to various sources, either 'strong,' 'wild onion,' or 'polecat'."³⁹ The uncertain origin of its name notwithstanding, the community was now well on its way to become the region's commercial nexus, especially after the canal connecting the lake directly to the Des Plaines River was built in 1837, facilitating commerce considerably as it made the portage of goods from the lake to the river unnecessary. Expecting the canal to cause an economic boom, a large number of people moved to the area. By that year, Chicago had become the biggest city in Illinois with a population of almost 5,000, having increased from about one hundred around 1830. Perhaps figures like these best illustrate the growth of what was to become the second-largest city in the United States within a few decades: In 1850, Chicago's population amounted to nearly 30,000; within a decade, this number more than tripled to 109,000, mostly through

³⁸ S. Swanson, *Chicago Days*, 3. It is interesting to note in this context that two of the four most important events in the city's history, according to its own priorities, burned the community to the ground and killed many of its inhabitants, while the other two were world's fairs. On the fire of 1871, see below.

³⁹ R. Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World*, 17.

the arrival of immigrant industry workers, and it tripled again to more than 330,000 in 1870. In 1900, the population had reached 1.7 million.⁴⁰ But at the same time, these figures suggest an attractiveness the city simply did not possess. Rather, it was "a city mired in commerce and mud".⁴¹ The buildings had a tendency to settle in the swampy ground, and the often extreme weather was hard to bear for the inhabitants. In addition, "[t]he quagmire made Chicago a breeding ground for deadly cholera, which swept the city periodically and in 1854 killed more than 5 percent of the population."⁴² Because the city was located only a few feet above the water level of Lake Michigan, the swamp practically devoured the buildings. Finally, in 1855, a young man named George Pullman, who had only recently moved to the city, invented a method of raising the city out of the mud: It involved "hundreds of men turning thousands of large jackscrews at the same time. Many smaller structures, especially houses, were simply moved to new locations."⁴³ Pullman made a fortune with this method and grew even richer later when he went into the business of building his famous railroad sleeping cars. The effort Chicago put into this undertaking beautifully demonstrated its spirit of enterprise and made it the talk of the nation. Yet, opinions about the city remained divided. One description of the city from the year 1858 went as follows:

To describe Chicago, one would need all the superlatives set in a row. Grandest, flattest, - muddiest, dustiest, - hottest, coldest, - wettest, driest, - farthest north, south, east, and west from other places, consequently most central, - best

⁴⁰ Cf. I. Cutler, *Chicago*, 177.

⁴¹ R. Muccigrosso, 18.

⁴² D. Young, "Raising the Streets", in: S. Swanson, 20.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

harbor on Lake Michigan, worst harbor and smallest river any great commercial city ever lived on, - most elegant in architecture, meanest in hovel-propping, - wildest in speculation, solidest in value, - proudest in self-esteem, loudest in self-disparagement, - most lavish, most grasping, - most public-spirited in some things, blindest and darkest on some points of highest interest.

And some poor souls would doubtless add, - most fascinating, or most desolate [...].⁴⁴

The author of this article skillfully illustrates the controversy which was beginning to form around the city of Chicago. Industry successively settled in the city in the wake of the arrival of the railroad; the McCormick reaper works and later, in 1865, the Union Stockyards opened, bringing more money into the town, but along with the money came also rather unpleasant side effects. The area around the stockyards very soon became "a nineteenth-century version of an environmental hazard."⁴⁵ Apart from processing every part of the pig except for the squeal, as a contemporary bon mot would have it, the slaughterhouses also emanated an odor which, when the wind blew from the appropriate direction, made life and work in the city a very unattractive undertaking. Moreover, the stockyards made the Chicago River change its face: It was soon to become "notorious as Bubbly Creek when its waters thickened with pungent slaughterhouse offal."⁴⁶

However, Chicago's unprecedented growth came to a sudden halt when on October 8, 1871, a fire broke out close to its center, destroying 17,000 of the buildings which had mostly been hastily erected in the balloon-frame method,

⁴⁴ C. Kirkland, "Illinois in Spring-Time", 487.

⁴⁵ R. Muccigrosso, 19.

⁴⁶ J. Anderson, "The Stockyards Open", in: S. Swanson, 29. For an impressive description of the meat processing system, see M.

catering to the urgent need for housing, and thus consisting largely of wood. 300 people were killed, and about 100,000 more were rendered homeless. But financial aid soon poured in from several sides, including the Federal Government, and made it possible for the city to start anew. "[The fire] changed the city's character forever, infusing its inhabitants with a zealous, can-do spirit."⁴⁷ In the aftermath of the disaster, a large number of young architects from the East Coast were lured to Chicago by the opportunity to build up the city once again and, in the process, practically reinvent it; this development was to prove very fortunate for the metropolis, turning it "into the center of architectural and engineering innovation for the next generation."⁴⁸ Among those fresh minds were Louis Henry Sullivan, later to become famous as the architect of the Transportation Building at the World's Columbian Exposition as well as the "father of the skyscraper," and John W. Root from New York, who teamed up with Daniel H. Burnham to found one of the leading architectural practices behind the White City.

The new building regulations passed by the city administration in order to avoid such a catastrophe to happen again in the future, along with the new building techniques and inventions, such as the elevator, indoor plumbing facilities, and steel frame construction, turned Chicago into the United States' principal focus of innovation in the fields of architecture and urban planning. It were particularly the improvements in iron processing and the consequential advent of high-quality, yet affordable steel that solved several problems at

D'Eramo, "Die Anwendung der Mathematik auf das Schwein", in: *Das Schwein und der Wolkenkratzer*, 31-49.

⁴⁷ T. Wiltz, "The Chicago Fire", in: S. Swanson, 36.

⁴⁸ J.E. Findling, *Chicago's Great World's Fairs*, 3.

once. Building with bricks had put a vertical limit to the structures because the walls had to be built with a minimum thickness in order to support the structure's weight. Steel constructions eliminated this difficulty and made it possible for engineers and architects to react to the ever-increasing cost of land which came with the city's economic success: "During the 1880s alone the cost of a quarter of an acre of land in the business district of Chicago skyrocketed from \$130,000 to \$900,000."⁴⁹ Chicago thus became the home of the skyscraper. Structures with all-steel skeletons were erected in greater numbers during the eighties and early nineties, turning these buildings into a trademark of the city, "at a time when vertical space was desperately needed to accommodate the expanding services required by the fifty thousand persons being added to the city each year."⁵⁰

Along with the economic boom came the cultural progress. Shortly after the fire, in 1873, Chicago had the opportunity to take its first steps as a host city of major exhibitions. The Chicago Interstate Industrial Exposition had already been planned before the disaster by the Northwestern Mechanical and Agricultural Association and then had to be postponed. When it finally took place between September 25 and November 12, its almost 600 exhibitors managed to attract approximately 60,000 visitors. As an adjunct to the technological and agricultural departments, there was a fine arts exhibition. After this first event in 1873, expositions of this type were held annually until 1891, when the

⁴⁹ R. Muccigrosso, 30.

⁵⁰ J.L. Abu-Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles*, 103.

exposition building was torn down for the benefit of the new Art Institute building.

Despite this and many other developments, Chicago's reputation was not exactly that of a cultural metropolis. Taunted and ridiculed by the east coast cities for its higher aspirations, Chicago made a major effort to prove them wrong. By the time of the World's Columbian Exposition, the city was not only home to a number of concert halls and an opera, but also to the Art Institute. There were also the Historical Society, some libraries, and, perhaps above all, the new university. The latter was erected in 1892 north of what were later to become the exposition grounds, supported by considerable sums of money donated by John D. Rockefeller, and designed by the prestigious architect Henry Ives Cobb. Another field where Chicago caught up with other regions was that of literature. Significant journals such as the *Dial* (1880) and the *Chap-Book* (1894) were founded; publishing houses sprang up and, what is even more important from the point of view of the literary scholar, a number of writers propagated the development of the Chicago novel, among them Robert Herrick, Frank Norris, and, perhaps most influential, Hamlin Garland. "During the 1890s and into the first years of the twentieth century [...], the booster realism of [these] early writers promoted the conclusion that Chicago could become a cultural center of extraordinary potential."⁵¹

The derisive opinions of other cities notwithstanding, Chicago was no longer a fledgling town but had matured into a city which was influential in several regards. "Viewed from any one of several perspectives - physical

⁵¹ J. Gilbert, *Perfect Cities*, 35. For a detailed evaluation of Chicago as a literary center, see C.S. Smith, *Chicago and the American Literary Imagination*, and K.J. Williams, *Prairie Voices*.

size, population, cultural and educational aspirations, business fortunes, palatial residences, temples of commerce - Chicago was big."⁵² But it was not only a city of big achievements but also of big difficulties.

By the time of the World's Columbian Exposition, the city's population had grown to a startling 1.2 million; Chicago was now, only fifty-seven years after it had been incorporated as a town, the second-largest city of the United States. More than ten percent of its population lived in slum areas under extremely poor conditions. With about a third of the residents being foreign-born - mostly German, Scandinavian, and Irish -, the recent arrival of Italians and Jews from Eastern Europe repeatedly led to ethnic conflicts. Findling quotes a traveler from Italy who observed that "during my stay of one week, I did not see in Chicago anything but darkness: smoke, clouds dirt [sic], and an extraordinary number of sad and grieved persons."⁵³ As a consequence of the unfortunate combination of rapid growth and increasing poverty, the crime rate skyrocketed, and many industrial workers became part of the labor unions which strongly tended towards radicalism, trying to alleviate their situation. Although some attempts were made to improve the lot of the immigrant poor,⁵⁴ outbreaks of violence were frequent and fierce, and an increasing number of anarchists put their stamp on this movement. At the same time, the whole country was moving fast towards the worst economic depression in twenty years, and the signs were clear to read for everybody. The general public was

⁵² R. Muccigrosso, 35.

⁵³ Cited after J.E. Findling, 5.

⁵⁴ One of these attempts was the so-called Hull House where Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr carried out their very influential if small-scale social reform plans by providing education to the poor.

nervous about unemployment, increasing poverty, and workers' strikes; for this reason, labor uprisings were beaten down brutally and often punished aggressively.

Probably the most violent and consequential outbreak occurred in May 1886 when a bomb exploded on Haymarket Square during a labor rally. Eight policemen were killed, many other people were injured. It was never determined who exactly threw the bomb, but the Chicago police arrested eight prominent anarchists and tried them for murder. Although most of them had demonstrably not even been present at the Haymarket riot, they were convicted three months later "in proceedings later acknowledged to have been a mockery of the American legal system."⁵⁵ Four of them were hanged, one committed suicide, and three served life sentences until the governor of Illinois pardoned them during the Columbian Exposition. Both the trial and the verdict were regarded as highly controversial. It was the general policy to beat down and punish such riots as they upset the general public considerably: "The violence near the Haymarket sparked the nation's first Red Scare."⁵⁶ But many who sympathized with the laborers' plight - among them author William Dean Howells⁵⁷ - felt that the "Chicago anarchists," as a matter of fact, were tried not for murder but for their political convictions. Be that as it may, the confrontation had lasting effects in various aspects:

The incident was a major blow both to the labor movement and to Chicago's reputation, but on the other hand, it may have brought to Chicago's wealthy a heightened sense of social and civic

For a closer discussion of Hull House, see R. Muccigrosso, 36ff, and L. Kiernan, "Hull House Opens", in: S. Swanson, 56-57.

⁵⁵ P.T. Reardon, "The Haymarket Incident", in: S. Swanson, 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ On William Dean Howells's reaction to the Haymarket Square incident, see below.

responsibility, evidenced by a rise in philanthropic and reform-minded activities.⁵⁸

This raised awareness may thus, at least in part, be held responsible for the accelerated construction of libraries, schools, and art galleries, a development which ultimately found its climax in the World's Columbian Exposition.

2.2 Chicago meets the challenge

The idea to hold an international exposition in order to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landfall in 1492 already sprang up as early as 1876, during the Centennial celebrations. In the early 1880s, the issue became a matter of public debate. While the original suggestion had been to stage the event in the nation's capital, more and more cities showed interest in the role of the host. New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., were, according to various sources, the most serious contenders. Chicago's efforts were backed from the beginning by a large number of influential social and political clubs, while the city's civic leaders, on the other hand, became interested in the race at a comparatively late time. They did not start their campaign until 1888, but when they started, they did so with a vengeance and on a nation-wide basis. While the arguments for New York held that the city was the nation's largest economic nexus, the St. Louis supporters put forward the central location and excellent infrastructure of their city. Chicagoans, on the other

hand, pointed out possible ethnic conflicts arising from the fact that St. Louis was placed in the immediate neighborhood of the Old South. Since the question finally proved to be one of money, St. Louis had to drop out of the race; by 1889, the field had to all intents and purposes narrowed down to a neck and neck between New York and Chicago. The competition between the two cities grew even fiercer, and it seemed to polarize the entire nation. The opponents were not above recurring to the basest insults when it came to defacing each other in the eyes of the public. Paul Greenhalgh quotes from two *Chicago Tribune* articles which were published during this stage, supporting the city's claim: "New York is not an American city - in its history, in its relations to the nation, in its attitudes toward the government during the War of the Revolution and Rebellion, or in its social characteristics." In another article, it was pointed out that "Chicago slaughters and packs its hogs, New York puts them on committees."⁵⁹ While the author of the first commentary at least tries to put forth some historical arguments against New York as the proper place for a major scale national event, the second article is a direct and defiant attack on the opponent. New York, on the other hand, was not squeamish to assault its foe, either. Chicago's reputation as a "windy city" - and this referred not only to the unpleasant climate but also to the persistent allegations of crime and corruption - was a ready and welcome foundation for many a defamatory commentary. It did not help much in this regard that "[t]he forty aldermen of Chicago were known [...] as 'the forty thieves.'"⁶⁰ In August 1889, an executive committee led by Chicago's mayor DeWitt Cregier "obtained a

⁵⁸ J.E. Findling, 5.

⁵⁹ Both articles are cited after P. Greenhalgh, 40.

⁶⁰ R. Muccigrosso, 39.

corporation charter from the state in order to allow it to raise money through the sale of stock."⁶¹ Apart from the prestige the fair was going to bring for its host city, an enormous inflow of cash was expected as well. The US Centennial Commission, after the United States' first world's fair in 1876, had calculated in their final report that each of the almost ten million people who came to Philadelphia in order to see the fair had "contributed \$4.50 to Philadelphia's economy."⁶² It thus came as not much of a surprise that businessmen, industrial leaders and financial magnates backed the application of their respective hometown: The list of New York's staunchest supporters featured, among others, William Waldorf Astor, William Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, while Chicago was led into the field by Cyrus McCormick, George Pullman, and other well-known names connected with the power of money. Although New York finally managed to raise more money for the prospective project - approximately \$15 million as opposed to Chicago's \$5.5 million -, the "windy city's" campaign proved very effective. It became more and more obvious that the matter could not easily be decided for either metropolis, and so Congress voted on the issue. "On the first ballot, Chicago polled 115, New York 70, St. Louis 61 [...]. After a second round of tactical voting, Chicago triumphed with three votes more than it needed for an overall majority."⁶³ The first ballot had proved Chicago to be far ahead of its competitors and New York to be rather in the same league with St. Louis, the latter being at that time already considered an outsider. The second ballot on 24 February, 1890, eventually decided the issue. President Benjamin Harrison signed the

⁶¹ J.E. Findling, 6.

⁶² R.W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 42.

⁶³ P. Greenhalgh, 40.

official authorization act on 28 April. Since there were only two more years to go until the prospective date - the summer of 1892 - it was decided that the event should be postponed for one year in order to supply the planners with enough time to meet the expectations.

And the pressure of expectation was high indeed. There was a generally accepted if unspoken understanding that each world's fair had to outshine its predecessor both in largeness and in grandeur. The Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, the largest event of its kind to date, had provided a model which Chicago would be very hard-pressed to beat. The executive committee had sent a group of delegates to Paris to collect impressions and ideas for the next world's fair; their results were "very influential in determining the nature of the World's Columbian Exposition."⁶⁴ The report, footed by E.T. Jeffrey, praised the effort the French had put into the entertainment aspect of the fair. Especially the decidedly "foreign" exhibits, often involving native villages, struck Jeffrey as significant. Also, the congresses which ran parallel to the exposition received his praise. As far as design and organization were concerned, Jeffrey was impressed with the use of electricity and strategically placed fountains as well as the means of public transportation. The overall bottom line of the report was that trying to outdo the Paris Exposition would indeed be a tall order. As Winfried Kretschmer concludes, "Den nachfolgenden Weltausstellungen hinterließ die Jahrtausendtausstellung 1889 ein schweres Erbe. Unweigerlich stellte sich die Frage, ob diese großartige Inszenierung von Modernität überhaupt noch zu übertreffen sei."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ J.E. Findling, 6.

⁶⁵ W. Kretschmer, *Geschichte der Weltausstellungen*, 132. If by mere size alone, the Chicago fair easily outdid the one in Paris: The

As an additional problem, the decision for Chicago as the fair's host city was still a matter of controversy, both in the United States and elsewhere. James Gilbert sums up the objections as follows:

The choice of Chicago to represent the ideal American city was viewed by New Yorker and European skeptics as preposterous. How could a city with so little history, with no firm foundation of time nor mortar of tradition beneath the structures of its toplofty skyscrapers and commercial establishments, claim to speak for civilization? And how could a city that boasted having the most cosmopolitan population in America pretend to be American at all?⁶⁶

Chicago, however, was determined to meet the challenge. "In several respects the most dynamic major American city of the late nineteenth century, it was the City of Big Problems as well as Big Ideas. Thanks to Congress and President Harrison, it was also to be the home of the Big Opportunity."⁶⁷

The organizers had been looking for an appropriate spot for the fairgrounds since well before the decision for Chicago was made. The area had to fulfill several prerequisites: Apart from the obvious problem of adequate size, it had to be conveniently located for visitors and as close to the business center as possible to make public transportation a feasible task. The city leaders favored a spot on the shores of Lake Michigan which, unfortunately, was not large enough; a landfill was called for, and Frederick Law Olmsted was asked for advice. Olmsted had come to fame as the designer of New York City's Central Park as well as of the popular

World's Columbian Exposition grounds covered 686 acres, the Paris fair had only covered 72.

⁶⁶ J. Gilbert, 2.

Riverside community, America's first planned suburb, just outside of Chicago.⁶⁸ Olmsted came to the city, examined the various possible sites, then set up a plan for the potential use of Jackson Park, an undeveloped park about eight miles south of downtown. The city's park board was immensely pleased since it had opposed to ceding one of the improved park areas to the fair organizers. Pleased were also the fair's sponsors, Chicago's wealthy citizens whose residences were mostly located south of downtown.

Cleaning and beautifying the shoreline for the fair would enhance land values nearby and would provide the wealthy residents with a playground that, although neither as large nor as centrally located as Manhattan's Central Park, would be a worthy venue for the city's first citizens.⁶⁹

In August 1890, Olmsted was pronounced consulting landscape architect, joined by his assistant Henry S. Codman, and one month later, Daniel Hudson Burnham and John Wellborn Root were selected as consulting architects. Both had been partners in their architectural practice, probably the most famous in the city, for fifteen years.⁷⁰ On December 1, the 686 acres of Jackson Park were finally decided upon as the future location of the fairgrounds; despite its promising name, Jackson Park was not so much a park as rather "a sad wasteland of sand, sparse vegetation, and marshes."⁷¹

The four masterminds set to work and proposed the concept of a central core of buildings, which later became known

⁶⁷ R. Muccigrosso, 47.

⁶⁸ For further details on Olmsted's career and merits, see A. Little, "The Village of Riverside", in: S. Swanson, 32f.; and R. Muccigrosso, 49f.

⁶⁹ J.L. Abu-Lughod, 109.

⁷⁰ For a short history of Burnham and Root's partnership and their achievements, see R. Muccigrosso, 51ff.

⁷¹ R. Muccigrosso, 51.

as the Court of Honor, located around an axial basin. The planners opted for a large number of buildings and pavilions as opposed to one central "palace" as had been the fashion at previous world's fairs. Given the tremendous amount of exhibits that would later be on display, this was a wise decision, as Winfried Kretschmer amply illustrates:

Hätten die Organisatoren die [...] Hauptgebäude nicht malerisch um die verschiedenen Wasserflächen verteilt, sondern - wozu ihre Kollegen in Paris stets tendierten - zu einem Gebäudekomplex zusammengefügt, so hätte dieser ein Rechteck mit einer Kantenlänge von rund 1,3 mal 2,3 Kilometern und einem Flächeninhalt von zweieinhalb Millionen Quadratmetern ergeben. Das waren wohlgerne nur die wichtigsten und größten Gebäude.⁷²

As of that time, the question of the buildings' style was not yet settled, but Root envisioned "a fair that would feature a variety of designs and colors."⁷³ The site of Jackson Park, directly on the shore of Lake Michigan, would make it possible to model picturesque canals and lagoons directly out of the landscape which, at that time, was still partially concealed by the lake's water. Other buildings would be, according to the plan, grouped around this core in a more informal style, always leaving a generous distance between the various structures: "Die Gebäude sollten weit auseinander liegen, damit Platz für den Verkehr und einen günstigen optischen Eindruck blieb: das Publikum sollte die Bauwerke in großen Gruppen aus gebührender Entfernung bewundern können."⁷⁴

Fortunately, Burnham possessed a rare talent for organizing large-scale projects. In the case of the World's Columbian Exposition, too, he remained true to

⁷² W. Kretschmer, 134.

⁷³ R. Muccigrosso, 54.

⁷⁴ E. Mattie, *Weltausstellungen*, 88.

his frequently quoted motto: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood."⁷⁵ His aversion to "little plans" notwithstanding, Burnham realized that the sheer number of buildings would be too much for his firm to handle, but since time was a strictly limited resource, a competition was out of the question. Burnham and Root thus resolved to arbitrarily select a team of renowned architects and ask them for contributions. The result of their selection was rather controversial since they chose not to include any other Chicago firm into their plans. Given the tight schedule, it would have been the obvious choice to select architects who were not only close at hand and familiar with the sites, but also among the most prestigious of their trade in the entire country. It has generally been assumed, though, that this decision was consciously made as a gesture to reach out to other cities in order to include them in the preparations of the fair, to take the edge out of the nation's downright hostile attitude towards Chicago, and thus to make the event a national rather than a regional enterprise.

Burnham and Root's list of architects featured three names from New York (George B. Post, Richard Morris Hunt, and McKim, Mead & White) as well as Van Brunt & Howe of Kansas City and Peabody & Stearns of Boston. Of all these, only the Kansas City-based firm accepted the challenge immediately. But Burnham proved to be persistent: He arranged a meeting with the members of the eastern practices and treated them to a display of his enthusiasm. "Over dinner he apparently persuaded the architects, delivering a rhapsodic speech that hailed the Columbian Exposition as the third greatest event,

⁷⁵ Cited after R. Muccigrosso, 52.

following the Revolution and the Civil War, in the nation's history."⁷⁶

Having won the architects over to his cause, Burnham had to face new problems. The fair's executive committee, which was by now known as the Chicago Corporation, was not pleased with his selection of architects and urged Root and Burnham to add some local experts to the ranks; this led to the invitation of Henry Ives Cobb, Solon S. Beman, William L. Jenney, Burling & Whitehouse, and Adler & Sullivan.

The question of the fair's design was difficult to settle, and its outcome would later and well into the next century be heavily discussed both by the general public and in the architectural world. The eastern architects had all studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, at that time the world's principal and most prestigious school of architecture. Its chief teachings reflected the neo-classical style that was strongly influenced by ancient Greek and Roman architecture. Apparently, it was comparatively easy for the eastern firms to convince their Chicago colleagues of the appropriateness of this style. In spite of the vigorous criticism Louis Henry Sullivan was to express years later, at this time he did not oppose to the plans of adopting neo-classicism for the fair's principal buildings.⁷⁷ To many contemporaries, among them the

⁷⁶ R. Muccigrosso, 56.

⁷⁷ Later, Sullivan was furious about the neo-classical design of the fair. In his autobiography, which was published in 1924 - incidentally also the year he died - he called the World's Columbian Exposition "[a] naked exhibitionism of charlatanry" (cited after G.A.Larson/J. Pridmore, *Chicago Architecture and Design*, 49.) and "a lewd exhibit of drooling imbecility and political debauchery. [...] Thus, architecture died in the land of the free and the home of the brave [...]. Thus did the virus of a culture, snobbish and alien to the land, perform its work of disintegration. [...] The damage wrought by the World's Fair will last for half a century from its date, if not longer. It has penetrated deep into the constitution of the

renowned architectural writer Montgomery Schuyler, the "formal, distinguished styling of the buildings indicated good taste and signified that there was indeed an American civilization that could function on the same esthetic plane as European civilization."⁷⁸ Also, "[c]lassicism was the accepted style for denoting grandeur."⁷⁹ Other observers, however, complained that the plans were a mere reflection, aping European design and denying Chicago's progressive and modernist achievements in the field of architecture, thus nipping in the bud any American effort to strive for a national identity in this discipline.

Root's original design of a colorful fair featuring many designs might have prevailed, had he not died of pneumonia in January 1891. Shortly before his death, *Inland Architect* magazine had written about Root's plans for the fair, reporting that "he preferred a Romanesque scheme for the main pavilions, along with touches of colonial and other elements that could contribute to 'a beginning, at least, of an American style.'"⁸⁰ Root favored an eclecticism that was modeled on the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia where various buildings of the most diverse styles had been placed next to each other. His conviction that the 1893 fair should be an "expression of the heartland"⁸¹ was conclusively replaced by the decision, chiefly carried through by Charles

American mind, effecting there lesions significant of dementia." (cited after J.L. Abu-Lughod, 110, and R. Muccigrosso, 61.) While Sullivan was right in that the construction of public buildings such as post offices, libraries, etc., in the following decades was heavily influenced by the beaux-arts style, one may wonder if the real reason for his fury was that, shortly before his death, he "had become impoverished, irascible, and generally forgotten [...]." (R. Muccigrosso, 61.) It is also worth pondering why he did not express his criticism at the appropriate time.

⁷⁸ J.E. Findling, 14.

⁷⁹ R. Muccigrosso, 63.

⁸⁰ Larson/Pridmore, 49.

⁸¹ Cited after J.E. Findling, 15.

McKim, to use a uniform white color and a uniform neo-classicist style for the principal buildings grouped around the Court of Honor, the centerpiece of the fairgrounds. This decision ultimately facilitated and sped up construction as the adoption of a single familiar style made it easier for the non-resident architects to materialize their ideas. Root's role as supervising architect was taken over by Charles Bowler Atwood, who eventually was responsible for the design of about sixty of the fair's structures, including the Palace of Fine Arts and the popular Peristyle.

Although the Court of Honor buildings were to be designed in the neo-classicist style, other structures were at variance with this concept. The Mines and Mining building by Beman, for instance, displayed a colonial facade, as did more than half of the 39 state buildings. Cobb's Fisheries Building was decked out in playful Romanesque ornamentations; Sullivan's Transportation Building not only deviated from the white color, it also employed decidedly un-classicist forms and featured the visually striking and much-photographed "Golden Door". The following list shows the initially designed buildings along with their architects: Administration Building (Hunt); Agricultural Building (McKim, Mead & White); Electricity Building (Van Brunt & Howe); Fisheries Building (Cobb); Horticultural Building (Jenney); Machinery Building (Peabody & Stearns); Manufactures/Liberal Arts Building (Post); Mines and Mining Building (Beman); Transportation Building (Adler & Sullivan).

The architects convened again in Chicago in February 1891 in order to present their designs and review Olmsted and Codman's first plans for the landscape design. In the same months, the staggering task of remodeling the

grounds began. "Over one million square yards of earth were moved to create the Basin, the Lagoon, and the connecting canals, to improve the lakefront beach area, and to build a 1,500-foot pier out into the lake to receive visitors arriving by boat."⁸² Already at this point, the World's Columbian Exposition was a joint venture of many bright minds and skillful hands. Architects, landscape designers, engineers, workers, painters, and sculptors all did their share, but their efforts had to be coordinated. "A greater number of American artists and architects were drawn into the creation of the World's Columbian Exposition than had ever been brought together to work on a single project before, and perhaps since."⁸³ There was no better man to synchronize their exertions than Daniel Burnham. His famed talent for organization was put to the ultimate test during the fair's construction, and he "spent most of his days and nights in a shanty on the fairgrounds, with a telephone connecting his office there with his office downtown [...]."⁸⁴ In order to enhance the overall visual effect, the five buildings of the Court of Honor (Administration, Manufactures/Liberal Arts, Machinery, Electricity, and Agricultural Buildings) were to have the same cornice height, and Burnham had to urge the respective architects to modify their plans accordingly. The teamwork between Burnham and Olmsted proceeded smoothly and aimed to fulfill a great scheme: "The Columbian Exposition represented the first attempt since Pierre L'Enfant's much earlier plan for the nation's

⁸² J.E. Findling, 16.

⁸³ R. Reid Badger, "Chicago 1893", in: J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle (eds.), 126.

⁸⁴ R. Muccigrosso, 67.

capital to integrate architecture and landscape planning on a grand scale."⁸⁵

The actual construction of the buildings commenced in July 1891. It was accelerated considerably by the planners' agreement to employ a combination of steel frame construction and staff, "a substance made of plaster, cement, and fiber that was malleable, paintable, and relatively cheap and easy to work with."⁸⁶ While the staff surface, at least when seen from a distance, gave the impression of marble, it was by far lighter and cheaper and thus saved enormous amounts of time and money.

Since construction proceeded as smoothly as could reasonably be expected from a project of this scale, Burnham simultaneously applied himself to the task of promoting the fair. Moses P. Handy was hired as official public relations agent; he was "a highly successful eastern newspaperman who had a modern appreciation of the importance of the press in molding public opinion."⁸⁷ It was his job to inform the world about what was afoot in Chicago, and it was not an easy job: "Nachdem Chicago den Zuschlag erhalten hatte, stellten die Organisatoren erschrocken fest, dass die Stadt den meisten Amerikanern an der bevölkerungsreichen Ostküste nur vage und im Ausland kaum bekannt war."⁸⁸ Handy immediately set up a Department of Publicity and Promotion which prepared the publication of a weekly newsletter as well as numerous other print articles, thus starting a tremendous and unprecedented campaign. At the time, it was "estimated that one-third of all that was printed about the fair by the newspapers, at home and abroad, was written by the

⁸⁵ R. Muccigrosso, 72.

⁸⁶ J.E. Findling, 16.

⁸⁷ R. Reid Badger, 127.

⁸⁸ W. Kretschmer, 139.

department itself."⁸⁹ Another fruit of this highly efficient operation was a guidebook for visitors who were admitted to the construction site for a fee of 25 cents. The book offered some insight into the fair's layout and the function of the various buildings. During the summer of 1892, several thousand visitors a day arrived to gain a first impression of what was to come.

Although both the buildings and the grounds were only half finished, fair officials invited the public for a dedication day ceremony on October 21, 1892.⁹⁰ Whereas about 70,000 people were expected to turn out for the event, the estimated actual attendance was almost twice that number. The ceremony took place in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts building designed by George B. Post, at that time the largest building in the world. No other location could have been more awe-inspiring to the public. "It was reported that [the building] could readily contain the United States Capitol, The Great Pyramid, Winchester Cathedral, Madison Square Garden, and St Paul's Cathedral."⁹¹ Muccigrosso lists a few facts and numbers that can only begin to give an impression of the structure's vastness:

Some seven million feet of lumber were required for the flooring of this gargantuan structure, which also demanded five carloads of nails, eleven acres of skylights, and more than three dozen carloads of glass for its roof. Its frames consumed more than twice the amount of iron and steel used to construct the Brooklyn Bridge a decade earlier. Measured from ground to apex, it rose the equivalent of nineteen stories.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The ceremony would have been more suitably scheduled for October 12, the actual anniversary of Columbus's landfall. Muccigrosso suggests that the later date was picked in order to allow travelers to reach Chicago after the five-day celebrations of Columbus's "discovery" in New York City were over. (Cf. R. Muccigrosso, 75.)

⁹¹ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 141.

⁹² R. Muccigrosso, 75.

A symphony orchestra of 500 musicians, together with a choir of 5,500 voices were conducted by Theodore Thomas, organizer of the Chicago orchestra. The "Hallelujah Chorus" from G.F. Händel's "Messiah" had by that time become a stock feature of all world's fairs' opening ceremonies. In addition, parts of Harriet Monroe's "Columbian Ode" were performed by an actress, some stanzas having been set to music by George W. Chadwick, a then well-known composer who is now largely forgotten. In the months prior to the ceremony, Harriet Monroe, later to become famous as the editor of the influential *Poetry* magazine, had convinced exposition officials that the "Dedication would be incomplete without a poem [...]."⁹³ Indeed, all prior world's fairs had featured a celebratory ode or hymn at their opening ceremony. In her autobiography, Monroe remembers, "I wanted to write it - indeed, I seemed to be the only available person [...]."⁹⁴ In contrast to Carl Smith's account, Monroe did not "[win] the competition for the official poem of the Fair;"⁹⁵ there was no such competition since Monroe was the only contender - it had been her idea, after all. With an amazing boldness, she persuaded the Committee on Ceremonies not only that she was the one and only person to write such a dedicatory ode, but also that she was to receive the unprecedented sum of one thousand dollars for it.⁹⁶ After many conflicts and intense discussions with

⁹³ H. Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, 116.f.

⁹⁴ H. Monroe, 117.

⁹⁵ C.S. Smith, 142.

⁹⁶ For detailed, if sometimes contradictory accounts of Monroe's commission, cf. H. Monroe, 116ff., and A. Massa, "'The Columbian Ode' and *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*", 55ff. Compare also Hollweg's contrary description of the events: "Zu diesen Feierlichkeiten [i.e. the dedication ceremony] dichtete Harriet Monroe auf Bitte des Joint Committee on Ceremonies of the World's Columbian Exposition ihre 'Commemoration Ode' auf die Chicagoer Weltausstellung. Das Gedicht wurde am 21. Oktober 1892 im Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building

the committee, leading to much indignation on both parts, Monroe received her payment. A business woman through and through, however, she authorized only twenty-eight of the total of 2,200 lines for performance at the ceremony, "lines emphasizing the role of America as the custodian of 'the Spirit of Freedom' and 'the purpose of God.'"⁹⁷ The entire text was published in the official proceedings of the Dedication Day. It describes the procession of nations to Chicago to celebrate a festival of peace and harmony; at the same time, it emphasizes the outstanding American position by depicting the westward movement of culture and civilization, the *translatio imperii et studii*, with America as its climax.

Ann Massa concludes that

[a]fter such a palaver the poem would have had to be extraordinarily good not to be anti-climatic [sic]; it was not good at all. If Harriet had not consistently anthologized the poem it is doubtful if even the historical interest of association with the World's Fair and with her own role in shaping American poetry would have been sufficient to preserve the Ode's accessibility.⁹⁸

In spite of the author's own insistence that she "was determined to use no classic images"⁹⁹ in order to strive for a uniquely American character of the poem, the work "consistently used traditional styles and images."¹⁰⁰ However, as Massa concedes, the significance of the "Columbian Ode" was more of a long-term nature, since "if the winning of support for her poem is seen as a dry run

vor einer kleinen elitären und geladenen Zuschauergruppe vorgetragen." Hollweg, *Ausgestellte Welt*, 21 n. 8.

⁹⁷ A. Massa, 58.

⁹⁸ A. Massa, 59.

⁹⁹ H. Monroe, 121.

¹⁰⁰ A. Massa, 59.

for *Poetry*, the Ode was, in fact, the most significant literary event of the Fair."¹⁰¹

A more immediate influence was exerted by *The Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag*, which had been written earlier in the same year by Francis J. Bellamy. At the Dedication Day ceremonies, it was for the first time introduced to the public. "Intended to promote the fair and underscore its significance as a nationalizing event, the Pledge of Allegiance would become one of the fair's most important legacies."¹⁰² Various dignitaries, including Vice President Levi P. Morton, recited many formal speeches but entertainment was also on the schedule as a variety of bands played popular tunes. The crowds were as pleased as Burnham and his fellow planners when the day was over - the dedication ceremony had clearly been a success.

The six months between dedication day and the scheduled opening on May 1, 1893 were a frantic attempt to finish construction in time. The landscape modeling process was still in progress, and many of the buildings stood incomplete. The Illinois winter, cruel enough in regular years, was especially harsh for the second time in a row and thus further impeded assembly as snowdrifts destroyed some of the roofs shortly after they had been completed. Also, Olmsted's assistant Codman died quite unexpectedly which dispirited the planners and left the landscape architect without an assistant. All effort to brave both the elements and fate was in vain: The fair remained unfinished on opening day, and for several more weeks, work continued. The date for the opening, however, was

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, 37.

not postponed, and on May 1, 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago officially opened.

2.3 *The White City and the Midway Plaisance*

Although John E. Findling describes the fairgrounds as being composed of three distinct parts, namely the Court of Honor, the buildings surrounding it, and the Midway Plaisance,¹⁰³ most visitors and scholars have always conceived of them as having two parts, grouping the first two parts Findling mentions under the header "White City."

While not all buildings in this area were actually white - the Transportation Building has already been mentioned; the various state buildings and the few foreign structures located on the premises used their own color schemes - the nickname proved to be persistent and had, after all, a very good reason. Since the majority of visitors arrived by train or by boat, they entered the White City either from the east or the west end of the Court of Honor. In either case, the Court was the first sight they beheld, and it left a lasting impression on them. The formal basin at its center was framed by a statue at either end: The west end featured Frederick W. MacMonnies's *Columbian Fountain*, displaying an allegorical rendering of Columbus's voyage, and the east end was adorned by Daniel Chester French's representation of *Columbia*, gilded and a staggering sixty-five foot tall.

This first glimpse was even more overwhelming for visitors arriving at night. The cornices and all the main

¹⁰³ Cf. J.E. Findling, 15.

features of the buildings were outlined with light bulbs, "the most powerful display of electricity yet devised."¹⁰⁴ Day and night, the basin reflected the surrounding buildings, thus adding to the splendor. At the east end of the Court, the majestic Peristyle separated the grounds from the pier and the lakeshore, "five hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty feet high, supported by forty-eight Corinthian columns."¹⁰⁵ To the north, the basin changed gradually into another body of water, the more informal lagoon with the so-called Wooded Island at its center. The island was intended as a recreational area and featured both a Japanese and a rose garden. Grouped around the lagoon as well as further to the north were other principal buildings, such as the Horticultural, Fisheries, and Women's Buildings, thirty-nine US state buildings, and eighteen foreign pavilions. The lagoon and the different ponds as well as the canals connecting them were populated by little boats and gondolas, thus inviting many a comparison to Venice. The neo-classicist facades of the central buildings added to the European flair. "Die weiße Retortenstadt wirkte wie ein Traumbild des alten Europa, wiederauferstanden in der Neuen Welt [...]."¹⁰⁶

However, the White City was not only beautiful and inspiring to behold. Many contemporaries praised the outstanding effort that had been made in planning the City as just that: a self-contained city with all its necessary services and amenities. Extraordinary attention had been paid to the sanitation and overall cleanliness of the place by implementing, among other features, a convenient system of public restrooms and drinking fountains. Law and order were maintained by a private

¹⁰⁴ R. Muccigrosso, 90.

¹⁰⁵ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 141.

¹⁰⁶ W. Kretschmer, 134.

security staff known under the name of Columbian Guard. They were clad in a blue uniform, ever present and highly visible, providing the visitors with a feeling of safety, and at the same time occasionally serving as guides. In addition, plainclothesmen patrolled the grounds. Nevertheless, petty theft and purse robbery were a problem, but not due to faulty security systems but only because the crowds were dense and extremely large.

This self-containedness of the White City did not fail to leave a lasting impression on the future of city planning in general; "in Chicago, Burnham began working in that area after the fair and in 1909 published his *Plan of Chicago*, which served as the basis for the city's development until the 1950s."¹⁰⁷ The impact of the World's Columbian Exposition also spurred the so-called City Beautiful Movement: "As the first 'City Beautiful,' it influenced the next two decades of American urban design."¹⁰⁸

With all the beauty and impressiveness of the White City, the attention of many contemporary visitors and modern scholars alike is and was often steered away from the actual exhibits. Reid Badger describes the City itself as "undoubtedly the greatest exhibit of the Chicago world's fair,"¹⁰⁹ and Findling emphasizes that "the physical appearance of the World's Columbian Exposition was its most remarkable attribute."¹¹⁰ However, the exhibits included many amazing items that were to change every-day life substantially for every American and, for that matter, many other people worldwide in the years to come. Alexander Graham Bell's telephone had been introduced at

¹⁰⁷ R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, 37f. For a closer analysis and discussion of the *Plan of Chicago*, see J.L. Abu-Lughod, 111-115.

¹⁰⁸ T.J. Schlereth, 169.

¹⁰⁹ R. Reid Badger, 126.

the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876; now, seventeen years later, long distance calls were possible for the first time, and visitors to the World's Columbian Exposition's Electricity Building witnessed phone calls from Chicago to New York City. Revolutionary office devices such as the typewriter or the latest innovations in the field of adding machines were presented to the general public. George Pullman, who had made his name in literally lifting the city of Chicago out of the mud, displayed his giant locomotives, and the newly invented dynamos with their ability of generating electricity mesmerized their observers. Nikola Tesla expounded the significance of alternating current, and Thomas Alva Edison's kinoscope provided a foretaste of the motion picture. But these innovations were only the tip of the proverbial iceberg:

For perplexed visitors, one guidebook cited the names, location, and relative interest of more than five thousand displays. Thirty-six nations, forty-six states and territories of the United States, and miscellaneous private organizations swamped the exposition with displays intended to demonstrate their achievements in industry, agriculture, and the arts.¹¹¹

Unfortunately, Muccigrosso does not specify the guidebook in question.¹¹² The actual number of exhibits was much higher; Reid Badger states that it amounted to "65,000 exhibits [...] displayed in the major exhibition halls."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ J.E. Findling, 12.

¹¹¹ R. Muccigrosso, 93.

¹¹² Muccigrosso probably refers to *The Time-Saver : A Book Which Names and Locates 5,000 Things at the World's Fair that Visitors Should Not Fail to See*, which is also mentioned by J.E. Findling (29) and which sorted said 5,000 exhibits on a scale from "1" (Interesting) to "3" (Remarkably Interesting). Given that most visitors only had limited time to spend at the fair, such a pre-selection could indeed save quite some time. It would be very interesting to take a closer look at the items selected and the respective grades they received; however, this will have to be left to future research.

¹¹³ R. Reid Badger, 127.

Many of these were intended as an impetus for commerce, especially in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, which was, as Schlereth notes, "the largest department store the world had ever seen. Many of the wares that were exhibited were for sale and carried price tags so visitors could do comparison shopping."¹¹⁴

Thus, the various exhibits provided education, information about new products, but also entertainment; curiosities such as a knight on horseback, entirely composed of Californian prunes, a copy of the Venus de Milo carved out of chocolate, or a 22,000-pound chunk of Canadian cheese were some cases in point. In a sense, the sum of exhibits displayed at the White City formed a snapshot of material culture, a snapshot simultaneously of descriptive and prescriptive nature. "The enormous range of goods at the Chicago fair provided a cornucopia of material culture that not only catered to middle-class taste but helped to form that taste."¹¹⁵

But the White City was only one of the two pillars supporting the World's Columbian Exposition. The second became known as the Midway Plaisance and was, in many ways, the exact opposite of the serene and beautiful, yet educative city. A one mile long and two hundred yards wide corridor jutting out from the western border of the fairgrounds, the Midway was the fair's entertainment sector. Officially it was classified under the exposition's Department of Ethnology, but it represented none of the scholarly connotations this name might evoke. Originally devised as an exposition area for exhibits brought together from all over the world, financial considerations soon moved the planners to include some

¹¹⁴ T.J. Schlereth, 171.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

amusement. A young entrepreneur by the name of Sol Bloom who had visited the Paris exposition four years earlier was determined to take the French model of entertainment as a starting point, only to surpass it considerably. His creation "became one of the most successful and famous amusement areas of any of the world's fairs, and it established a pattern for mass entertainment that soon found application in such independent parks as Coney Island."¹¹⁶ The Midway became a profitable enterprise; unlike in the White City, where payment of the fifty cents admission fee granted access to all locations, the Midway amusements each had to be paid for separately.

Literally the most outstanding and perhaps also the best remembered among them was undoubtedly the Ferris Wheel, named after its designer, Pennsylvania civil engineer George Washington Gale Ferris. The first structure of its kind, it has until today also remained the largest. It was 264 feet high and supported by underground foundations that reached forty feet deep into the ground. Each of the thirty-six cars was ten feet high, twenty-seven feet long, and thirteen feet wide, and could transport thirty-eight passengers in revolving seats plus an additional twenty-two standing customers. Also, each of the cabins featured a dining counter where passengers could eat their lunch brought on board. When fully loaded, the Wheel transported 2,160 people at the same time, who each paid fifty cents for two rounds, i.e. approximately twenty minutes. It provided a unique aerial view over the entire grounds and was itself eminently visible from afar. With more than 1.5 million visitors during the course of the fair, the cash inflow exceeded the construction cost of \$250,000 considerably. More

¹¹⁶ R. Reid Badger, 127.

importantly, the Wheel served as an emblem of the World's Columbian Exposition. John A. Kouwenhoven puts it into one league with the Paris Eiffel Tower, legacy of the 1889 exposition, and better remembered only because it is still standing.

Because the Ferris Wheel had no official status among the structures at Chicago and did not remain in place as the Eiffel Tower did after the fair was over, it has never been considered by historians or critics concerned with the comparative significance of the structures erected at these two great expositions summing up European and American achievements in art and industry near the close of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁷

After the Columbian Exposition was over, the Ferris Wheel was disassembled and sold off, only to make another appearance at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis before it was ultimately scrapped. A half scale version was erected at the Coney Island amusement park shortly after the debut at Chicago, and this Coney Island Ferris wheel has remained the world's largest specimen to date.

The Ferris Wheel, however, was not the only attraction that drew visitors to the Midway Plaisance. If they were so inclined, they had the opportunity to visit performances at Hagenbeck's animal show or the Chinese theater; they could witness the eruption of a panorama model of the Hawaiian volcano Kilauea or have a look at costumes from all over the world at the International Dress and Costume Company. There was a host of restaurants and cafés offering everything from snacks and refreshments to multi-course luxury dinners, in a wide variety of cultural shades from the Japanese Tea House to the very popular Old Vienna Café.

¹¹⁷ J.A. Kouwenhoven, *Half a Truth Is Better Than None*, 109.

Perhaps the Midway's greatest amount of magnetism was exerted by its so-called native villages. People from all over the world were brought to Chicago and settled in replicas of their home villages, wearing their native costumes and performing tasks of their everyday life, during the entire span of the exposition. Paul Greenhalgh describes these "human showcases" as follows:

The normal method of display was to create a backdrop in a more or less authentic tableau-vivant fashion and situate the people in it, going about what was thought to be their daily business. An audience would pay to come and stare. [...]they would be expected to perform religious rituals at set times each day for the visitors and to give demonstrations of their various arts and crafts.¹¹⁸

Such human displays had first become popular at the Paris exposition in 1889, where France literally made an exhibition of its various colonies, and subsequently formed some of the principal attractions at all world's fairs through 1914. Generally speaking, these exhibits made use of the obvious cultural inferiority of the natives in order to emphasize and highlight the progress and enlightenment of the respective host country or Western civilization in general, thereby justifying imperial claims and underlining the superiority of the "white race". Winfried Kretschmer concisely sums up this concept:

In offizieller Lesart dienten diese ethnologischen Elemente der Belehrung über die Lebensweise fremder Völker - Wissensvermittlung, verpackt in jene beschwingte Form, die für die Weltausstellungen charakteristisch geworden war. Unter der Oberfläche hatte die Zurschaustellung von Menschen fremder Völker freilich auch mit Macht zu tun. Sie war ein symbolischer Akt der Unterwerfung, eine

¹¹⁸ P. Greenhalgh, 82f.

Widerspiegelung von Kolonialismus, Rassismus und Imperialismus im Kleinen, in der kleinen Welt der Weltausstellungen.¹¹⁹

In this sense, the Midway Plaisance was a "Black City," forming a distinct counterpoint to the White City. It featured Indian, Native American, Dahomeyan, Austrian, Chinese, Turkish, German, Irish, Javanese, Samoan, and Lapland villages; Japanese, Turkish, and Indian bazaars, and the highly popular "Street in Cairo," replete with palaces, merchants, and a notorious because sparsely clad belly dancer called "Little Egypt."

However, the case of the arrangement of the Midway's attractions must not be overstated, as has frequently been done by a number of scholars. Both R.W. Rydell, in *All the World's a Fair*, and T.J. Schlereth uncritically quote a contemporary observer by the name of Denton J. Snider who described the amusement mile as a "sliding scale of humanity."¹²⁰ In keeping with Snider's idea, Rydell suggests that

[n]earest to the White City were the Teutonic and Celtic races as represented by the two German and two Irish villages. The center of the Midway contained the Mohammedan world, West Asia, and East Asia. Then, "we descend to the savage races, the African of Dahomey and the North American Indian, each of which has its place" at the opposite end of the Plaisance.¹²¹

However, a mere glance at the Midway's layout reveals this to be nonsense. The Austrian village was located directly next to the Dahomeyan, if closer to the White City, and separated from the latter by the Turkish

¹¹⁹ W. Kretschmer, 137. The use of native villages as imperial displays has been thoroughly analyzed by P. Greenhalgh in *Ephemeral Vistas* and by R.W. Rydell in *All the World's a Fair* and cannot be discussed here in greater detail.

¹²⁰ Cf. R.W. Rydell, 65, and T.J. Schlereth, 173.

village and the Moorish Palace. Thus, at least the Austrians would beg to differ from Snider and Rydell's opinion. But the same holds true for other "races": As far as the Teutonic ones, as represented by the German village, were concerned, they were located farther from the White City than the Javanese and Samoan settlements. It is certainly true that from today's point of view, the Midway and most of its attractions must seem blatantly racist and commercial. However, as Muccigrosso suggests, "to interpret the Midway, as a number of critics have done, almost exclusively in those terms misses the point that it provided genuine entertainment and no little educational instruction."¹²²

Nevertheless, the Midway Plaisance and the White City seemed to form two antagonistic concepts, or rather two sides of the same coin. While there were a few exhibits on Midway that might be termed "educative," they were always amusing at the same time and, moreover, geographically separated from the "antiseptic world of the White City."¹²³ Thus, the White City represented education, the Midway Plaisance entertainment. Beauty stood opposed to sensuality, intellectual goals to money-making, fruits of the brain to food for the body, mind to matter. Numerous travel reports, letters, and other materials prove that this is not a construct which has been interpreted into the event by later generations. Indeed, the literature that was influenced by the World's Columbian Exposition clearly reflects this dichotomy, as will be demonstrated later on.

¹²¹ R.W. Rydell, 65, quoting from D.J. Snider, *World's Fair Studies*. Chicago: Sigma Publishing, 1895, 237, 255ff.

¹²² R. Muccigrosso, 165.

¹²³ W. Kretschmer, 137 (my translation).

Certainly the most important intellectual event which took place at the Chicago world's fair was organized by the so-called World's Congress Auxiliary. This association was formed in 1890 with the aim to enrich the forthcoming event through a series of congresses that were to discuss various problems of humankind as well as their possible solutions. "'[Not Men, But Ideas.] Not Matter, But Mind' became the official motto of the leaders of the World's Congress Auxiliary, with the furtherance of peace and prosperity a stated objective."¹²⁴ Speakers from all over the world were invited to participate in and contribute to 139 different conferences. However, heated debates and animated discussions were not what the organizers had in mind. In keeping with their desire for peace and "[i]n an effort to insure harmony, they organized the various programs around the formal presentation of papers but ruled out subsequent comments, controversy among speakers, and motions from participants or from the audience."¹²⁵

Between May 15 and October 28, conferences on a variety of topics "from medicine and surgery to Africa, from temperance to literature"¹²⁶ were held. Since not all of these congresses published their proceedings and records hence are incomplete, the total number of attendants can only be estimated as amounting to about 700,000. Four thousand American and one hundred foreign speakers delivered over six thousand papers.¹²⁷ The conference that drew the most attention was the World's Parliament of Religions which took place in September and lasted for seventeen days. Participants represented not only various Christian denominations, but also Buddhist, Shintoist,

¹²⁴ R. Muccigrosso, 116, 131.

¹²⁵ R. Muccigrosso, 116.

¹²⁶ J.E. Findling, 30.

¹²⁷ Cf. R. Muccigrosso, 116ff., and T.J. Schlereth, 171f.

Moslem, and other faiths. In an apparently peaceful and harmonious fashion, the contributors discussed a host of topics including tolerance, the social responsibility of religion, and Darwinism.

Among the smaller events was the convention of the American Historical Association, but it had far-reaching consequences. This was due to a young historian by the name of Frederick Jackson Turner, whose address "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" was to become a most influential thesis and would change the direction of American historiography forever by introducing the frontier concept. This notion was perhaps the greatest contribution of the World's Columbian Exposition towards the creation of a national self-image. As Alan Trachtenberg notes, "Turner [...] arrived at his conception of the American character as an emblem of national coherence. The nation incorporated itself, he insisted, through that figure and its traits of inventive individualism."¹²⁸

The one week long Literary Congress, on the other hand, held in July, came and went largely unnoticed. Only few names on the attendance list drew the public's attention, among them Hamlin Garland who caused a small stir when he, as a substitute speaker, read a paper on "Local Color in Fiction" which was later modified into one chapter of his *Crumbling Idols*.¹²⁹ His thesis that "every novelist should draw his inspiration from the soil, should write of nothing but the country he was bred in and the people most familiar to him" did not meet with unanimous applause.¹³⁰ An argument ensued between Garland and Mary Hartwell Catherwood, a popular author of historical

¹²⁸ A. Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 16.

¹²⁹ Cf. H. Garland, *Crumbling Idols*, 59-65.

romances, who was also present at the conference. Catherwood interrupted the speaker following Garland in order to vent her disagreement and defend her mode of writing which had been discredited by Garland's thesis.

This announcement proved to be the note of preparation for a joust, in which Mrs. Catherwood and Hamlin Garland figured as principals. Mrs. Catherwood bravely championed the cause of the dead past, Mr. Garland nobly threw himself into the breach in defense of the living present. Then Chairman Cable expressed devout thankfulness that the earth was so big that there might be room enough on it for Mrs. Catherwood's school and Mr. Garland's ideas at one and the same time. The audience applauded vigorously, everybody shook hands with everybody else and the Authors' Congress [sic] was a thing of the past.¹³¹

Actually, it was not quite a thing of the past since Garland and Catherwood continued their "joust" for several weeks by writing open letters to various magazines, attacking and defending their respective positions.¹³² The fact remains, however, that Garland's battle for a regional literary realism - or veritism, as he preferred to call it - was not fought in the forum of the World's Columbian Exposition, largely due to the organizers' anxiety to avoid confrontations.

The Chicago world's fair closed on a subdued note. On October 28, only three days before the scheduled date for the fanciful closing ceremonies, the city's mayor Carter Harrison was assassinated in his home; therefore, the ceremonies were cancelled.

¹³⁰ The quote is taken from a magazine article reporting on the Literary Congress (*Critic*, XXIII [July 22, 1893], 60) and cited after D. Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career*, 116.

¹³¹ *Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 1893, 8. Cited after D. Pizer, 116.

¹³² For more detail on Garland and Catherwood's campaign, see D. Pizer, 155-122, and J. Holloway, *Hamlin Garland*, 83-89.

In spite of this tragedy, the event had been a success. With 21,477,212 paying visitors, attendance was twice as high as it had been at the Philadelphia fair seventeen years before. The total of all admissions amounted to a little more than 27.5 millions. "With a profit of \$1.4 million, it was a commercial success as well"¹³³ - in a time of severe national depression, this came as good news. Although both attendance and surplus had been larger at the Paris Exposition of 1889,¹³⁴ the Chicago figures have to be considered in a different light; Paris was more centrally located for a larger number of potential visitors. Also, compared with the figures the Philadelphia Centennial had totaled,¹³⁵ the World's Columbian Exposition aptly demonstrated that the United States as a host nation had done their homework.

There were no definite plans for the further use of the fairground and its buildings after the Exposition was over. With the exception of the Palace of Fine Arts, which was constructed from bricks and would later become the Museum of Science and Industry, all buildings technically were makeshift constructions made of steel and staff. Therefore, the White City, formerly the epitome of beauty, fell into decay. Vandalism was the biggest problem. On the one hand, there were the souvenir hunters who, after the fair was over, wanted to take home bits and pieces of the buildings as memorabilia. On the other hand, drifters made their homes in the now empty palaces.

Thousands of workers attached to the fair or drawn to Chicago in hope of employment had joined with the local jobless to create an alarming level of

¹³³ R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, 41.

¹³⁴ Attendance: 32,250,297; surplus: \$1.6 million. Source: W. Kretschmer, 293.

¹³⁵ Attendance: approx. 10 millions; loss: \$4 millions. Source: W. Kretschmer, 291.

unemployment. [...] The rapidly increasing numbers of homeless [...] congregated in parks and in the fair's deserted buildings, which the city had not decided whether to preserve or to raze. Normal wear and tear, petty acts of vandalism, and fires lit by the homeless to warm themselves had caused some damage [...].¹³⁶

A series of fires of unclear origins in January and July 1894 ultimately destroyed most of the principal buildings; the remaining structures were then torn down. "Except for the museum [i.e. the Fine Arts building], virtually all of the fair's structures were gone from Jackson Park by the spring of 1896."¹³⁷ With no physical reminders left, the fair passed into the realm of memory and "acquired a unique mystique that would perpetuate its memory."¹³⁸

The real success of the Exposition, however, lay in the influence that became noticeable in its aftermath. Its significance for the next decades of city planning has already been mentioned. Louis H. Sullivan's devastating assessment notwithstanding, many architects felt the design especially of the White City and its landscape to be a masterpiece. The "Pledge of Allegiance," originally devised in the context of the Chicago fair, became a "nationalizing ritual"¹³⁹ and has been in use at United States public schools ever since. Many contemporaries felt overwhelmed by a national spirit when visiting the fair, among them writer and historian Henry Adams. In his autobiography, he describes his stay at the White City and concludes: "Chicago was the first expression of American thought as a unity; one must start there."¹⁴⁰ In

¹³⁶ R. Muccigrosso, 182f.

¹³⁷ J.E. Findling, 31.

¹³⁸ R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, 41.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ H. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 343.

a magazine article, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie spoke of "a national reunion."¹⁴¹ An atmosphere of awakening and of appreciating the positive consequences of progress pervaded most of the commentaries. Rydell quotes a journalist by the name of Frederick F. Cook who, in December 1893, wrote:

Man's temples typify his concepts [...]. I cherish the thought that America stands on the threshold of a great awakening. The impulse which this Phantom City will give to American culture cannot be overestimated. The fact that such a wonder could rise in our midst is proof that the spirit is with us.¹⁴²

This highly emotional atmosphere bred a number of other forms of cultural expression; the literary mode was one of them. In the following chapters, I will analyze the influence of the World's Columbian Exposition on four exemplary and very different literary texts.

¹⁴¹ *The Engineering Magazine* 6, no. 4 (January 1894), 421f., cited after R.W. Rydell/J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle, 41.

¹⁴² *Halligan's Weekly World's Fair* 3 (December 1893), 713, cited after R.W. Rydell, 71.

3 Frances Hodgson Burnett: *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*

Frances Hodgson Burnett is nowadays mainly remembered for her children's fiction. Novels like *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *The Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* have been read by generations of children and have been adapted for both the stage and the screen. A fact which is largely unknown is that Burnett had already established a reputation as one of the most promising authors of adult fiction well before the success of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* made her popular in 1886. Especially her novel *Through One Administration*, published in 1885 and dealing with the social and political life in Washington, D.C., during that time, was much acclaimed by contemporary critics and, as Phyllis Bixler notes, "invites comparison to novels William Dean Howells and Henry James were producing during the same period."¹⁴³ The success of her juvenile books, however, all but obliterated these achievements. Of the fifty-two novels she wrote, most of today's scholars would be hard-pressed to list more than the three mentioned above. Among those largely forgotten novels is one which was published in 1895. It is entitled *Two Little Pilgrim's Progress : A Story of the City Beautiful* and is the result of a commission to write a children's story about the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

The novel tells the story of the twelve-year-old orphaned twins Robin and Meg Macleod who live in their aunt's household. Aunt Matilda, a renowned Illinois farmer, is a self-made and successful business woman. Her industrious

life does not leave her any time to provide the children with anything more than the bare necessities of food and clothing. After her brother's death and out of respect to public opinion, she has taken the children in. Having lived in a poor yet loving and intellectually inspiring household before their parents died, they now feel utterly alone and worthless. On the busy farm they seem to be in everybody's way and have only one comfort in life: retreating to their so-called "Straw Parlour," a secret spot in the barn, and reading their most beloved book, John Bunyan's 17th century Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Meg, who has a gift for inventing and telling stories, likes to spin new tales along the lines of "What would happen if we could go to the City on the Hill with Christian, the protagonist of *The Pilgrim's Progress*?" She furnishes the city, which she calls the City Beautiful, with various buildings, and the buildings with the things she and her brother love most. Their parents are alive in that imaginary city, and it holds lots of machines, chemicals and motors for Robin to explore and books for herself to read.

One day, the orphans overhear a conversation between Jerry and Jones, two farm hands, about the world's fair which is being set up in Chicago, only two hundred miles away from their farm. Being particularly serious and determined children, they make up their minds to visit the Fair because it seems to them that their dream city will become reality there. Says Robin: "All the trades will be there, and all the machines, and inventions, and books, and scientific things, and wonderful things, and everything anyone wants to learn about in all the world!" (27)¹⁴⁴ They save all their money and start collecting

¹⁴³ P. Bixler, "Frances Hodgson Burnett", 102.

¹⁴⁴ In this and the following chapters, quotes from the primary sources will be followed by the page number in parentheses.

newspaper clippings about the great event, they dream and scheme, and finally they buy their train tickets, pack some hard-boiled eggs, leave a note to their aunt saying not to worry, and go. "[The Fair] shows how wonderful men and women are," says Meg. "I believe they can do anything, if they set their minds to it." (57) And so, it appears, can these children.

They arrive safely in Chicago and spend their nights in a sparsely furnished bedroom rented out by the poor Nowell family, and they spend their days walking across the fairgrounds and taking in the sights. Since they cannot afford to buy one of the many catalogues or guidebooks, they have to rely on the stories Meg invents about the different buildings. The children pretend that the buildings are palaces built by various genies.

While they walk around the fair, explaining the sights to themselves in keeping with their genie stories, they are overheard by an embittered man by the name of John Holt. Holt has recently lost his young wife and child with whom he had planned to visit the Fair. He is enchanted by the children's stories and secretly follows them around. Meg reminds him of his wife who also had a talent for story telling, and after a while, he makes up his mind to ask for the twins' company. Together they explore the White City and the Midway Plaisance for many days. Holt turns out to be a wealthy farmer himself, as well as an acquaintance of Aunt Matilda's. He takes the children to proper restaurants and has them sleep in his hotel. When they accidentally meet Matilda in the Agricultural Building, Holt has a long talk with her and asks her permission to take the children into his care and provide for their education. Matilda seems to be glad to rid herself of the two little burdens, and so the newly-formed family goes back home to live happily ever after.

3.1 *The two parts of the novel*

One of the most striking features of the novel is that it is organized into two parts which are very different from each other. The first part, i.e. the first ten of a total of twenty chapters, describes the children's pilgrimage to the White City.¹⁴⁵ During these chapters, frequent references are made to the novel's namesake, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Also, Meg and Robin's plan to travel to Chicago may be seen as a plot to escape from a captivity situation, as shall be demonstrated below.

The novel's second part, on the other hand, plays with the structure and motifs of a traditional fairy story. The meaning of the White City as a symbol appears to shift during the course of the novel.

3.1.1 *Pilgrims to the City Beautiful*

The book *The Pilgrim's Progress* plays an important role for Meg and Robin Macleod, as has been mentioned earlier. It is one of the very few books they managed to save from their parents' home, and among those books, it is their favorite. "[Meg] was particularly fond of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and she had made Rob fond of it" by "invent[ing] new adventures for Christian as he toiled up the Hill of Difficulty. Robin thought her incidents more exciting than John Bunyan's." (17f.)

¹⁴⁵ When the White City is talked about in the course of this chapter, this technically refers to the World's Columbian Exposition as a whole. However, as I shall demonstrate later on, the Midway Plaisance seems to play only a minor role in this novel, whereas the White City is invested with a special symbolic significance.

Bunyan's allegory was originally published in 1678. It describes the travels of a man by the name of Christian who leaves his wife and children behind in the City of Destruction in order to get rid of the burden he perceives to be bearing on his back and to reach the Celestial City. On his way he encounters many characters that either try to make him go astray or are helpful on his journey, until he finally reaches his goal.

Early on, Bunyan's work - not limited to, but including *The Pilgrim's Progress* - started exercising a strong influence on American literature. In 1715, Joseph Morgan published *The Kingdom of Basaruah* in which he employs Bunyan's allegorical methods, but in addition Americanizing the imagery to the effect of "regard[ing] the American wilderness imaginatively as the New Jerusalem."¹⁴⁶ The pilgrims' venturing into the chaos of wilderness and taming it, thus turning it into a garden, is a concept that remained pervasive in the Puritan heritage. Many influential writers, notably Nathaniel Hawthorne, frequently recurred to Bunyan's imagery. Smith states that "the period of Bunyan's most direct and traceable influence would seem to have been the years between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War."¹⁴⁷ After this period, the emphasis seems to shift: "After the war there was a marked decline in the number of annual editions. Furthermore, [...] at this period [Bunyan] seems to have become, for the first time, fit subject for parody and travesty."¹⁴⁸ What Smith means by "parody and travesty" is not exactly clear; however, it appears that he refers to the use *The Pilgrim's Progress* is made of

¹⁴⁶ D.E. Smith, *John Bunyan in America*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ D.E. Smith, 3.

¹⁴⁸ D.E. Smith, 16.

especially in juvenile literature in the post-Civil War decades.

Although Bunyan's allegory was originally not intended for children, it was widely popular particularly among younger readers throughout the nineteenth century. "[It] was among the most commonly read books in American families and was profoundly present to the American religious imagination."¹⁴⁹ It comes as little surprise, then, that Meg and Robin actively and consciously take the allegory of Christian's travels to the Celestial City as a model for their own travel. It is also noteworthy that they are not the first protagonists of a children's novel to adapt this role model: The March sisters in Louisa May Alcott's juvenile classic *Little Women*, first published in 1868, also love playing at being pilgrims. They reenact Christian's adventures by carrying their backpacks as their burdens from the basement of the house all the way up to the attic. Later, when they are teenagers, their mother encourages them to bear their burdens, i.e. their respective character flaws, and patiently strive to lose them.¹⁵⁰

It can thus be safely assumed that the readers of Burnett's novel would recognize the many intersections between the Macleod twins' road and Christian's. The chapter headings, such as "There is a City Beautiful" (ch. 1), "The bottom of the Hill of Difficulty" (ch. 2), or "'Burdens don't fall off by themselves'" (ch. 6), all hint at the various episodes of Christian's travels. In addition, the narrator explicitly draws some parallels: "But they had reached the Wicket Gate, and from the hour

¹⁴⁹ K. Walters, "Seeking Home", 153.

¹⁵⁰ For an in-depth discussion of Bunyan's influence on Louisa May Alcott, cf. D.E. Smith, ch. 4.

they passed it there was no looking back." (66) Even more explicitly, the children themselves plot their strategy on the basis of Bunyan's allegory:

In [*Pilgrim's Progress*] they seemed to find parallels for everything. "Aunt Matilda's world is the City of Destruction," Meg would say; "and our loneliness and poorness are like Christian's 'burden'. We have to carry it like a heavy weight, and it holds us back." [...] "Robin," said Meg suddenly [...], "[...] We are like Christian. We are pilgrims, and our way to that place is our *Pilgrim's Progress*." (70f.)

Their pilgrimage, it has to be conceded, is not the sort Bunyan had in mind. The full title of his allegory is *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* and thus bears reference to the concept that man's whole life on earth is a pilgrimage, the goal ultimately being death and the life after. Meg and Robin's pilgrimage, on the other hand, stands in the religious tradition of going to see places connected with saints or sacred events.

The aforementioned paragraph is also noteworthy as an example of the narrator's attitude towards the children's thoughts and opinions. Formulas of circumscription such as "they seemed to find parallels ..." (see above) or "they felt themselves treading upon holy ground" (113) as opposed to a much more direct and biased "they were treading on holy ground" may be found throughout the novel and establish a sort of bemused distance, the reason for which is not quite clear.

The White City, in the first part of this novel, forms the ultimate goal of Meg and Robin's multi-level escape strategy which is plotted out in the very first chapter and illustrated in fig. 1.

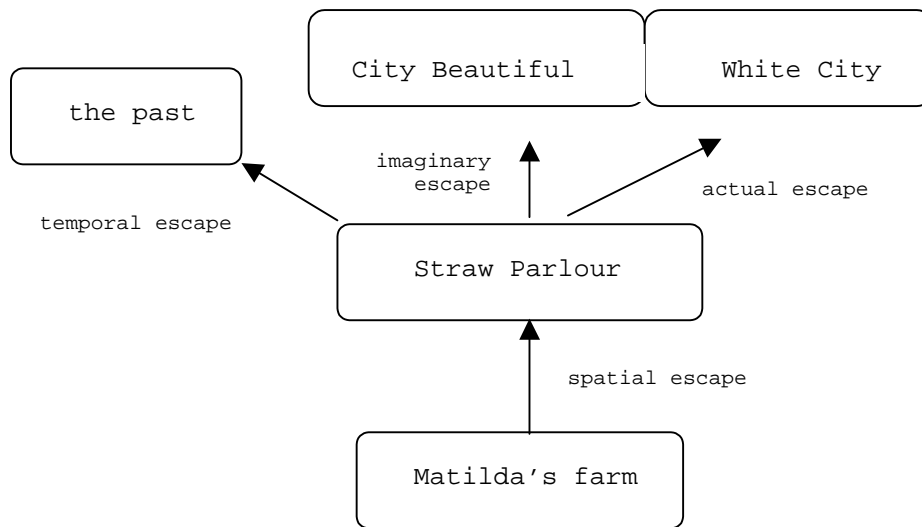


fig. 1

Meg and Robin perceive themselves to be in a captivity situation and try to find a means of escape. Frequent reference is made to their being imprisoned or even kept like animals:

[Aunt Matilda] gave them food to eat and beds to sleep in, but she scarcely ever had time to notice them. (11)

The strangeness of their lives lay in the fact that absolutely no one knew anything about them at all - or asked anything, thinking it quite enough that their friendlessness was supplied with enough animal heat and nourishment to keep their bodies alive. (36)

[Meg said,] "I was looking at the pigs in their sty. Some of them were eating, and one was full and was lying down going to sleep. And I said to myself, 'Robin and I are just like you. We live just like you. We eat our food and go to bed, and get up again and eat some more food. We don't learn anything more than you do, and we are not worth so much to anybody - we are not even worth killing at Christmas.'" (38)

[Robin said,] "[N]o one ever thinks we could care about [the World's Fair] any more than if we were cats and dogs. It was not like that at home, even if we were poor." (60)

These few examples also demonstrate what it is that the children are missing most in their present lives. In their parents' home, they were encouraged to read books,

listen to stories and ask questions. Within the range of their modest means, Mr. and Mrs. Macleod provided their children with as much of an education as they could afford. Now, on their aunt's farm, the twins are being starved to death both emotionally and intellectually.

In Aunt Matilda's bare, cold house there was not a book to be seen. (12)

Until the day [Meg and Robin] found the Straw Parlour, it had seemed as if no corner on the earth belonged to them. (13)

Of that other part of them - their restless, growing young brains, and naturally craving hearts, which in their own poor enough but still human little home had at least been recognised and cared for - Aunt Matilda knew nothing, and indeed had never given a thought to. She had not undertaken the care of intelligences and affections; her own were not of an order to require supervision. (36)

But they had been made of the material of which the world's workers are built, and their young hearts were full of a restlessness and longing whose full significance they themselves did not comprehend. (38)

[Robin said,] "Whose business are we but our own! Who thinks of us or asks if we are happy or unhappy?" (59)

The children now set out to conquer this emotional and intellectual wilderness in search of their very own Celestial City. The first stage in their escape from the farm is reached by spatially elevating themselves above this world which is imprisoning them by retreating to the "Straw Parlour" and making it their own. They refer to this secret place as "another world [...] miles and miles away from Aunt Matilda." (14) When Robin joins his sister in the Straw Parlour after he has overheard Jones' and Jerry's first talk about the World's Columbian Exposition, it seems to Meg "that he had come from another world." (20) Robin tries to make his sister listen to the two men, but Meg does not "want to hear any of the people down there." (20) Robin has to urge her to

"get near the edge and listen." (21) The ladder leading up to the secret retreat can be likened to Jacob's ladder described in the Old Testament:¹⁵¹ "Without the aid of the ladder their Straw Parlour was an unattainable paradise [...]." (33) The Straw Parlour - distinctly described as another world - thus serves as a place the children flee to, but at the same time it serves as a starting point for three different strategies of escape:

1) The first goal is represented by the past with memories of Robin and Meg's parents and their small but cozy house. Rather than a spatial escape, this is a temporal one. The children share fond recollections of a loving and harmonious atmosphere at home. The only physical reminder of this past world is a number of "their old favourite books," (15) of which *Pilgrim's Progress* is the most important to them (cf. 17).

2) This volume also serves as a basis for another line of escape which is neither spatial nor temporal but of an imaginary nature, leading into a fantasy world. This world is, in a sense, an enhanced version of Bunyan's Celestial City on Mount Sion. Meg merges Bunyan's Palace Beautiful and the Celestial City into the City Beautiful. She then not only invents "new adventures for Christian as he toiled up the Hill of Difficulty" (17); which is perhaps more important, she also adds to the celestial city by including in her stories "all the things she and Robin wanted and all the joys they yearned for." (18) In her mind, she designs a "fairy palace" (18) for them to live in. Walking through the streets of this imaginary city is related as a synaesthetic experience: One notices

the sweetness [...] in all the air the people breathed,
[...] a strange golden light [...] - and the houses were

¹⁵¹ Cf. Gen. 28:12.

as white as snow, and had slender pillars and archways, and courts with flowers and fountains. And you could see lovely people [...] and everybody had a little smile, and a look as if their eyes were stars. (19)

The "lovely people" in Meg's fantasy form a counterpoint to the people in the "wilderness" of the farm who are indifferent if not downright hostile and largely ignore the children or treat them as a nuisance. By describing the buildings, Meg of course unwittingly anticipates the architecture and design of the White City.

The intensity with which the children immerse themselves into this imaginary world becomes clear in the way Meg is described reading: "This afternoon [...], she and Christian were very near the gates," (19) when suddenly Robin intrudes from the world below with his news about the White City.

3) The third line of escape, and the one which actually leads the children out of their captivity, leads to the White City itself. Meg and Robin's first encounter with this event occurs through the conversation between the two farm hands Jones and Jerry. The children crawl "as near to the edge [of their world] as they could" (22) to listen to the news. Jones is described as "an authority on many things," (22) whereby his credibility is established. His account of the city-to-be is as follows:

It will be a City [...] and all the world is going to be in it. They are going to build it fronting on the water, and bank the water up into lakes and canals, and build places like white palaces beside them and decorate the grounds with statues and palms and flowers and fountains, and there's not a country on earth that won't send things to fill the buildings, and there won't be anything a man can't see by going through 'em. (22f.)

It is fairly obvious that Jones' description of the future event is remarkably close to the ideas Meg has

about her City Beautiful, and whereas not all of Jones' predictions are implemented in the actual World's Columbian Exposition, his account forms a distinct intersection between Chicago's White City and Meg's City Beautiful. At any rate, it is incentive enough for the children to focus their thoughts on one goal, which is going to see the Exposition.

At first, they content themselves with collecting newspaper clippings and stories about the event. They hoard these bits of information together with their "Treasure," a strong box hidden in the Straw Parlour which holds the few pennies they have managed to save over the years: "Before very long there was buried near the Treasure a treasure even more valuable of newspaper cuttings, and on the wonderful Saturday nights they gave themselves up to revelling in them." (56) The contemplation that a place so very much like their dream city is being built by human hands leads Meg to the following conclusion: "That shows how wonderful men and women are. [...] I believe they can do *anything*, if they set their minds to it." (57) Robin retorts, "Perhaps we could do anything we set our minds to." (57) Thus their plan is put into words for the first time: They set their minds to reaching the White City as the goal of their ultimate escape from captivity.

During the following weeks, they work hard on the dreaded farm in order to collect the money they will need for the trip. But their scheme nourishes them: "Yes, they believed they were going, and lived on the belief. [...] It was like them both that they should dwell upon the dream [...]." (68) In this dream, they even anticipate that their escape will be final: "'[...] I suppose we shall have to come back,' [Robin said] with a long breath. [...] 'Perhaps

we are going to seek our fortunes, and perhaps we shall find them,' said Meg." (64) After their day's chores are done, they congregate in the Straw Parlour for an almost religious preparational ceremony: They peruse their collection of clippings over and over again "until they knew them almost by heart" (35f.); they listen in disbelief to the "people in the world below talk about [the World's Fair] in their ordinary everyday way, without excitement or awe," (35) thus in fact profaning the sacred event. And like a minister would interpret Scripture in a Sunday sermon, Meg interprets the information they have gathered:

And then Meg would begin to talk about the City Beautiful - a City Beautiful which was a wonderful and curious mixture of the enchanted one the whole world was pouring its treasures into two hundred miles away, and that City Beautiful of her own, which she has founded upon the one towards which Christian had toiled through the Slough of Despond and up the Hill of Difficulty and past Doubting Castle. Somehow one could scarcely tell where one ended and the others began, they were so much alike, these three cities - Christian's, Meg's, and the fair ephemeral one the ending of the nineteenth century had built upon the blue lake's side. (69)

Meg's tale of three cities embodies the paradise the twins attempt to gain, and in order to gain this paradise they, in a sense, have to travel through the wilderness by working hard in the "world below" on the farm, a world they both despise - here, Burnett re-interprets the Protestant work ethic: Aunt Matilda, successful, busy, and content in her own world, has no hope of deliverance, but she does not even know that she is missing anything. The two serious and determined children, on the other hand, employ their bodies and souls to attain a world beyond the one they are presently confined to. This world beyond is symbolized by the pillars and palaces, archways

and artifacts of the White City which embodies everything the children are missing in their lives: education, knowledge, beauty, and love.

When the twins finally manage to steal away from the farm and are on their way to Chicago, the captivity motif changes to that of the quest. "And so, hand in hand, they went out on the road together." (81) The pilgrimage they have made so far was one in time; now they set out for a spatial progress. They are on the verge of encountering all the things they have so far only dreamt about. The three "travel chapters" (chapters eight through ten) formally belong to the first part of the novel, since the ultimate goal of their pilgrims' progress, the White City, has not yet been reached. At the same time, the fairy story elements so copiously employed in the second part of the novel are already anticipated. The twins have to brave various adversities such as the crowded train, the even more crowded depot in Chicago, and the streets of the immense, strange, and unknown city before they finally arrive at their City Beautiful. A character of major importance is introduced during this trip, namely John Holt, "the beloved giant who was to carry them to fairyland." (89) Thus, the pilgrims' quest motif and the fairy tale elements are strangely mixed up in these three chapters.

Chapter ten, entitled "More pilgrims are come to town," contains the last overt references to the children's status as pilgrims. After they have eaten their breakfast in a bakery belonging to a German immigrant woman, they go "forth on their pilgrimage [...] into the fairyland that only themselves and those like them could see." (109) The end of this chapter marks the final transition. When they see the White City from afar, it grows "from a fair,

white spirit [...] to a real thing [...]. For their dream had come true, though it had been a child dream of an enchanted thing!" (112) The feat that has been at the center of all the children's longings and plans has now been accomplished; they have managed to escape from their captivity and reached their Celestial City which materializes before their eyes.

For all practical purposes the story might just as well end at this point, and it may well be argued that it originally did. As has been mentioned before, Burnett had been commissioned to write a children's story for a *World's Fair Book* which never came into being. "Burnett kept her side of the agreement; and in 1895 her contribution, by then grown to novel length, was published by Scribner's."¹⁵² Of course this is mere conjecture, but if there is any point in the novel that could mark the ending of a shorter version of the narrative, it is the point where the two little pilgrims have reached the goal of their progress.

3.1.2 Meg and Robin in Wonderland

From the minute Rob and Meg enter the fairgrounds through "the snow-white stateliness of the great arch," (113) there is hardly a page of the novel that does not bombard the reader with allusions to the White City as a fairyland. The toils and hardships the children have had to endure in order to reach this place are all but forgotten; it seems as if they had been magically transported to an enchanted world, such as Alice in Lewis

¹⁵² F.J. Molson, "*Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*", 55.

Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or little Dorothy in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. "'It is a fairy story - but it is real [...],'" (117) Meg suggests, and, "'Let us be part of the fairy story when we go anywhere.'" (120)

It seems to be worthwhile at this point to consider what kind of audience Frances Hodgson Burnett might have had in mind when she wrote her story. The fact that the author regarded her novel as a kind of fairy tale is clarified by the epilogue she makes her narrator add to the story proper; it starts with the words, "Dear little children and big ones, this is a Fairy Story." (214) This assertion offers two clues, the one being that the author consciously and with a purpose wrote the novel - or at least large parts of it - with a fairy tale style in mind. But also, the statement is directly addressed to the prospective audience of the book, which encompassed not only children but also adults.¹⁵³ The term "fairy tale" here is not to be understood in the strict sense of the word, referring to traditional folk tales. Rather, as Knoepflmacher notes, it "can at best capture the eclecticism that marks a literature for children that is every bit as experimental as Victorian writings for adults."¹⁵⁴ Still, Burnett employs motifs that are at work in classical fairy stories.

In her book *American Young Adult Novels and Their European Fairy-Tale Motifs*, Lucia Huang analyzes a number of novels written for adolescent readers and traces motifs and motif clusters back to traditional fairy tales. For defining the motifs, Huang falls back on Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, and she uses

¹⁵³ Cf. note 34.

¹⁵⁴ U.C. Knoepflmacher, 425.

the Grimms' fairy tale collection to represent the European tradition. Although her study deals with novels published in the 1980s, Huang's findings can in some regards be applied to earlier juvenile fiction. Quoting Willa Cather who once remarked that "the books we read when we are children [shape] our lives,"¹⁵⁵ the author concludes that "children feel satisfied when they discover the plots of the fairy tales are in accordance with their imagery world."¹⁵⁶

In her analysis, Huang isolates five recurring motifs, four of which are more or less prevalent in *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*: the "wise helper," the "unpromising hero," the "abandoned children," and the motif of "magic." The latter does not figure too prominently and not in the strict sense of the word; however, it shines through whenever the children talk about the White City as an "enchanted place" or the creation of genies.

Clearly, the motifs of the "unpromising hero(es)" and the "abandoned children" are closely entwined in Burnett's novel. While Meg and Robin are not willfully abandoned or sent away by their parents, such as for example the protagonists of *Hansel and Gretel*, they are emotionally and spiritually neglected and confined to an animal-like life by their ward, Aunt Matilda. This of course puts them in an ideal position to be "unpromising heroes." Rapunzel, confined to her tower; Sleeping Beauty, trapped in her castle and awaiting the prince to awaken her from her sleep, and Cinderella, enslaved by her wicked stepmother and stepsisters, all come to mind. However, while these characters have to rely upon an exterior agent, the respective prince, to change their fate, Meg

¹⁵⁵ Cited after L. Huang, *American Young Adult Novels*, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

and Robin actively set about to change their lives and make their dreams come true.

This is where the "helper" figure steps in. It is true that the twins manage to escape their confinement and reach the Celestial City, or rather the magic castle, on their own; however, without the help of John Holt they would have to return to their prison so that the fairy story would have an unhappy ending. "The wise helper has always been a common motif in fairy tales. [...] Without the helpers' advice or gifts, the protagonists will never accomplish the tasks."¹⁵⁷ Traditional examples of the wise helper are the fairy godmother in "Cinderella" or the seven dwarves in "Snow White." In *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*, this role is attributed to John Holt, who himself starts out as an "unpromising hero." He is a loner, embittered and depressed, but the Macleod twins show him the promise of a better life, and so he, in turn, provides one for them; the "beloved giant" (89) transports them to a world which, like the White City, is grand and wonderful for the children, with the added benefit of being permanent. "When [the holiday at the Exposition] was at an end they went home with John Holt." (209) It seems quite a natural process, as if the children had never belonged anywhere else. Holt is so rich as to seem omnipotent to Meg and Robin. However, he is not one to squander his fortune:

[Holt's] house was a wonderful house. It was one of the remarkable places that some self-made Western men have built and furnished with the aid of [the] good sense [...] that it is more practical to buy taste and experience, than to spend money without it. John Holt had also had the aid and taste of a wonderful little woman, whose [...] world had been broader than his own.

¹⁵⁷ L. Huang, 104.

[The house] contained things from many countries, and its charm and luxury might well have been the result of a far older civilisation. (209f.)

This, in sum, seems to be a palace built by a worldly genie or a "prince" (cf. 176) who had both the sense and the means to carry together all the things Robin and Meg need and have longed for.

The two children had to work very hard and display a serious amount of determination in order to escape from the world they had been confined to and to reach the city of their dreams, the destination of their pilgrimage in the first half of the novel. Now, as a gift from their "wise helper," they have received a new home and a family into the bargain - albeit an incomplete family, since Holt's deceased wife cannot function as a mother, but nevertheless she seems to permeate the whole house (cf. 210).¹⁵⁸ The function of the White City has now shifted once more. Shortly before their departure from Chicago, Meg watches the white palaces fade away against the horizon. This reminds her of the fact that the city will actually be torn down after the exposition is over. She cries, "it is going, and we shall never see it again! For it will vanish away - it will vanish away!" (214) But John Holt holds a little speech to pacify and comfort her:

No, [...] it won't vanish away. It's not one of the things that vanish. Things don't vanish away that a million or so of people have seen as they've seen this. They stay - where they're not forgotten and time doesn't change them. They're put where they can

¹⁵⁸ Note the conspicuous absence of a maternal figure throughout the novel. When the children's parents are referred to, it is mostly their father who is remembered. There are only two brief appearances by *ersatz* mothers who nurture the children: the German baker woman and the farmer's wife who shares her and her husband's picnic with Robin and Meg. Usually, as Knoepfmacher notes (cf. ch. 1), most Victorian fairy tales feature exceptionally strong mother figures.

be passed on - and passed on again. And thoughts that grew out of them bring other ones. And what things may grow out of it that never would have been - and where the end is the Lord only knows, for no human being can tell. It won't vanish away. (214)

This monologue also forms the end of the story proper. The narrator adds the aforementioned short epilogue on the story's moral, but Meg, Robin, and Holt are left on this note.

Holt's explanation describes several different qualities of the role that the White City occupies at this point of the story. First of all, in his eyes, the city cannot vanish away, simply due to the fact that so many people have seen it - in fact many more than the "million or so" Holt talks about. It will merely shift from the physical world into the realm of memories where, so Holt claims, it will not be altered during the course of time. Also, the memories of the big event are worthy of being passed on to people who have not had the fortune of being present, and, as a next step, also to future generations. What is even more important, the digestion of these memories will inspire new thoughts and ideas that would not have been possible without the White City.

At the same time, Meg's City Beautiful and everything it stands for is being made permanent in a different sense. When Holt announces that he is going to adopt the twins, Meg exclaims: "Oh, dear John Holt. We have got *into* the City Beautiful, and you are going to let us live there always." (205) Meg realizes that she and her brother will from now on live permanently with what are the White City's key features to her: education and beauty.

Before I discuss the implications the White City holds as a symbol, I would like to turn to the religious aspects

of the novel and further investigate the Christian imagery it employs.

3.2 *The absence of God*

As has been discussed before,¹⁵⁹ *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress* may, at least in part, be regarded as a secularized version of John Bunyan's classic. However, it is so thoroughly secularized that God seems to be all but absent.

When the children plan their pilgrimage, they are completely self-dependant. They feverishly collect information, thereby composing their own Scripture that Meg interprets in their leisure hours. They peruse Bunyan's book again and again to seek inspiration in Christian as a role model. Surprisingly enough, however, they never pray for assistance or discuss the meaning of Christian's adventures on a level other than the most superficial one. While this perhaps cannot be expected from twelve-year-old children - although the narrator again and again emphasizes that they are very mature and clever for their age -, it seems striking nevertheless that they choose to completely ignore the religious implications of the text.

Instead of God, they, in a sense, worship the city which is being built in Chicago and which simultaneously is being constructed in their minds. As has been demonstrated above, they regard every snippet of information as an almost holy text to be exegeted over

¹⁵⁹ Cf. ch. 3.1.1, and Molson, "*Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*", passim.

and over again, and the exposition itself is, in their eyes, a quasi-sacred event.

To the two lonely children in their high nest in the straw stack it seemed a curious thing to hear these people in the world below talk about [the exposition] in their ordinary everyday way, without excitement or awe - as if it was a new kind of big ploughing or winnowing machine. To them it was a thing so beautiful that they could scarcely find the words to express their thoughts and dreams about it, and yet they were never alone together without trying to do so. (34f.)

The key phrases here are "awe" and "they could scarcely find the words to express their thoughts." Meg and Robin are adherents of an occult faith, a secret religion, worshipping not an invisible God but the materialization of their dream city, their very own New Jerusalem.¹⁶⁰ The question of who is actually the agent behind this materialization will have to be considered later on.

The motif of the White City as a holy place is further elaborated on in chapter eleven, at the point where the twins eventually enter the Exposition grounds.

They walked softly, almost as if they felt themselves treading upon holy ground. To their young and unsworn souls it was like holy ground. They had so dreamed of it, they had so longed for it, it had been so mingled in their minds with the story of a city not of this world. [...] It [...] was so radiant and unearthly in its beauty! [...] "Rob," [Meg] said, "perhaps we are *dead*, and have just wakened up." [...] They were breathless and uplifted by an ecstasy [...]. (113f.)

Here and in the following chapters, the aspects of the enchanted fairy city and the sacred place are frequently

¹⁶⁰ There are indeed striking parallels between Meg and Robin's descriptions of their Dream City and the description of the biblical

intermingled; the term "City Beautiful" which was habitually used in the first half of the story now is generally replaced by "Enchanted City."

When the children discuss their notion of life after death with John Holt, Robin remarks: "Perhaps we say things that would seem very funny to religious people. I don't think we're religious - but - but we do *like* it." (189) This illustrates that the children are not religious in any orthodox or conventional sense of the word. The entity they worship is a different one; the Christian God - Christian's God - remains absent.

A reason for this absence may perhaps be detected by putting the novel into the context of Frances Hodgson Burnett's other works as well as her life. According to a biography written by her son Vivian, Burnett "always had a strong religious sense and read the Bible regularly, though she was neither orthodox nor a regular churchgoer."¹⁶¹ Especially during the last phase of her career, she was strongly influenced by the new movements of Theosophy and Christian Science which became very prominent during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although she never formally enrolled as a member of the Christian Science movement, which was founded in 1879 by Mary Baker-Eddy, Burnett adopted some of the tenets of this group, including "the general belief in the power of goodness and the possibility of happiness for everyone,"¹⁶² this happiness stemming from sources found inside of this world as opposed to transcendental powers. "The sacred does not have to be found outside

New Jerusalem as it can be found in Rev. 21, especially Rev. 21:23-27.

¹⁶¹ P. Bixler, "Frances Hodgson Burnett", 114.

¹⁶² Ibid.

this world, and by seeking it there we miss seeing it all around us and within us."¹⁶³

In order to find out what is truly sacred to the two little pilgrims, it may prove useful to take a look at who is made responsible for the materialization of Meg's and Robin's dream city.

3.3 "I've made up how it came to be like this."

In her biography of Frances Hodgson Burnett, Phyllis Bixler argues that

[*Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*] pays homage to American ingenuity and technological achievement by celebrating the American work ethic and defining heaven as the technological and material fruits of American ingenuity and energy, symbolized by the exposition.¹⁶⁴

However, if the reader of the novel started looking for references to the World's Columbian Exposition as "the technological and material fruits of American ingenuity and energy," he would be hard-pressed to find them. There is merely one single instance in the story where a character describes the Fair as an American achievement, and this thread is very soon dropped again. When farm hands Jerry and Jones discuss the upcoming event, Meg and Robin overhear the following conversation:

"That's Chicago out and out," said Jerry. "Buildin's twenty stories high, an' the thermometer twenty-five degrees below zero - an' a World's Fair - Christopher Columbus! I'd like to see it!"

¹⁶³ Hansen, Linda, "Experiencing the World as Home : Reflections on Dorothy's Quest in *The Wizard of Oz*", in: *Soundings* 67, 91-102; cited after Walters, "Seeking Home", 167.

¹⁶⁴ P. Bixler, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 58.

"I bet Christopher Columbus would like to see it!" said Jones. "It's out of compliment to him they're getting it up - for discovering Chicago."

"Well, I didn't know he made his name that way partic'lar," said Jerry. "Thought what he prided hisself on was discoverin' America."

"Same thing," said Jones, "same thing! Wouldn't have had much to blow about [...] if it had only been America he'd discovered. Chicago does him full justice, an' she's goin' to give him a send-off that'll be a credit to her." (23f.)

Jerry admires the citizens of Chicago for the industriousness, wealth, and sense of enterprise they display, in spite of the hostile climate, in setting up an event of this scale. Jones' remarks to the effect of "Columbus discovered *not only* America, but *also* Chicago" show a similar kind of pride in the nearby metropolis. Moreover, in this statement, Chicago becomes the epitome of America and everything it stands for. However, these two uneducated farm workers are the only characters who talk about the Exposition as an American - or rather Chicago - achievement, and after their function as dispensers of initial information is fulfilled, they and their opinions instantly become irrelevant. The story's protagonists, Meg and Robin, clearly have a different view on this matter.

Early on in the novel, Meg and Robin reflect on the exposition as a "huge and beautiful marvel, planned by the human brain and carried out by mere human hands, this great thing with which all the world seemed to them to be throbbing, and which seemed to set no limit to itself and prove that there was no limit to the power of human wills and minds [...]." (39) For the two children, the world is pervaded by a life essence "throbbing" in its veins, and this essence consists of the "power of human wills and minds." This human genius, as I would like to term it for

now, is, in the twins' point of view, the sole creator of the White City - as opposed to the 'American genius'¹⁶⁵ which does not figure here at all. Later on, on their way to Chicago, they anticipate their first view of the fairgrounds, seeing "only the fair and splendid thought which had created it" (96); here, the White City is pictured as a place conceived of by mere thought. Just as Meg has thought her City Beautiful into (imaginary) being, the White City has been thought into being, albeit in a very material and tangible sense, by the sheer will power of human genius. Robin considers

"[...] all the people who have made the things to go in it [i.e. the White City], and how they have worked and invented. There have been some people, perhaps, who have worked months and months making one single thing - just as we have worked to go to see it. And, perhaps, at first they were afraid they couldn't do it; and they set their minds to it as we did, and tried and tried, and then did it at last. [...]"
 [...] "It makes you think that perhaps men and women can do anything, if they set their minds to it," said Meg quite solemnly. (84f.)

"Human beings can do anything they set their minds to" - this is not only the heading of chapter five of Burnett's novel, but also one of the two morals with which the narrator imbues the story. And it is made very clear that this refers not only to American human beings:

Meg said - "[...] People in France and in England and in Italy are doing work to send to [the Exposition]. Artists are painting pictures and machinery is whirring and making things - and everything is pouring in to that one wonderful place. And men and women planned it, you know - just men and women. [...]" (56f.)

¹⁶⁵ This term was frequently used in the late 1700s to propagate the nationalist movement. In the context of Burnett's book, America as a nation seems to play no role at all.

People from all over the world, artists and engineers, men and women - all are involved in carrying out this project, all are part of the human genius. The city "the ending of the nineteenth century [has] built upon the blue lake's side" (69) apparently could not have come into being at any other point in history; rather, it is the materialization of *zeitgeist* and at the same time the climax of human civilization as a whole. The *translatio studii et imperii*, the concept of the westward movement of civilization throughout history which was very popular in the nineteenth century, is here rendered irrelevant; the fact that the White City materialized in the United States of all places is seen as a mere accident.

This ultimate triumph of civilization is symbolized by the archway through which the Macleod twins enter the White City. The arch stands for "the triumph of the man, in whom the god was so strong that his dreams, the working of his mind, his strength, his courage, his suffering wrested from the silence of the Unknown a new and splendid world." (111) Not God, but "the god" in man is the strongest power so that man, without further assistance from God, can create "a new and splendid world" all by himself.

The machines displayed at the Exposition seem especially remarkable to Robin's stereotypically boy-like mind. He observes, "[As] soon as a man gets any sense he begins to make machines. He bangs at things with his brain, instead of with his arms and legs." (195) Meg, in her decidedly more feminine manner, continues her habit of inventing stories while she and her brother explore the White City. Since their meager funds do not allow them to buy an exposition catalogue, let alone hire a guide, the imaginative girl makes up stories to explain the various places and buildings. "I've made up how it came to be like this," (117) she announces to Robin.

"There was a great Genie who was the ruler of all the other Genii in all the world. They were all powerful and rich and wonderful magicians, but he could make them all obey him, and give him what they stored away. And he said, 'I will build a splendid city that all the world shall flock to, and wonder at, and remember for ever. And in it some of all the things in the world shall be seen, so that the people who see it shall learn what the world is like - how huge it is, and what wisdom it has in it, and what wonders. And it will make them know what they are like themselves, because the wonders will be made by hands and feet and brains just like their own. And so they will understand how strong they are, if only they knew it, and it will give them courage and fill them with thoughts.'" (117)

"[It] sounds quite true," her brother acknowledges. Meg continues to tell how the Great Genie called together all other genies in the world, such as the genie who inspired all works of art:

"[...] There was a Genie who was the king of all the pictures and statues, and the people who worked at making them. They did not know they had a Genie, but they had, and he put visions into their heads and made them feel restless until they had worked them out into statues and paintings. [...]" (118)

According to Meg, the Great Genie then urged all the other genies to build palaces for displaying all the works and products inspired by them. "[All] who see will know what wonders can be done, and feel that there is no wonder that isn't done that is too great for human beings to plan." (118) Robin wants to know who this Great Genie was, and his sister explains, "[he is the] thing that *thinks* - and makes us want to do things and be things. [...] Everyone has some of it - and there are such millions of people, and so there is enough to make the Great Genie. [...]" (119)

The Great Genie, then, is the life essence throbbing in the world's veins and pervading it. Everyone has got some of this essence inside of them, and in turn everybody partakes of its fruits, of which the White City is the grandest.

The novel thus pays homage to human rather than American ingenuity, as Phyllis Bixler would have it. Instead of crediting the American people or, more specifically, the people of Chicago with staging the Columbian Exposition and erecting the White City, the author depicts the Fair as the ultimate fruit of human willpower and human civilization.

3.4 The role of the White City

As has been shown, the White City shifts its symbolic meaning twice during the course of the novel.

In the first part, it stands for the ultimate goal of Meg and Robin's escape scheme; it is a City on a Hill which they strive to reach through hard work and the use of determination and willpower. The same determination and willpower, which may be summed up as "human genius," are described as being innate to all human beings, and the sum of it manifests itself in the construction of the Columbian Exposition. This human genius as well as its manifestation assume a quasi-godlike position for Meg and Robin. The White City is frequently likened to the Celestial City in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Like Bunyan's protagonist Christian, the twins have to toil up the Hill of Difficulty; that is, they have to cross a wilderness and overcome various obstacles before they reach the destination of their pilgrimage.

As soon as they have achieved their goal, the White City takes the shape of an enchanted place, a fairy land, in which the two little waifs turn into princes, aided by a friendly giant in the disguise of John Holt. The Columbian Exposition is here depicted as a mixture of a wonderland and a quasi-sacred place.

The exposition's other half, the Midway Plaisance, is given less significance. While the White City is repeatedly described in great detail, using glorifying adjectives and thus giving it a quasi-sacred touch, the description of the Midway Plaisance focuses on the children's actions and reactions rather than on the place itself.

They rode on camels down a street in Cairo, they talked to chiefs of the desert, they listened to strange music, they heard strange tongues, and tasted strange confections. Robin and Ben went about like creatures in a delightful dream. Every few minutes during the first hour Robin would sidle close to Meg and clutch her hand with a grasp of rapture. (176)

While it is true that the children enjoy themselves immensely on Midway, the narrator rather clips the description of said enjoyment. It may be speculated that the spectacle of the Midway, the "honky-tonk sector of the fair,"¹⁶⁶ did not fit into the picture of the exposition as a place of beauty and education that Burnett wanted to create. It does not seem to matter that most of the people who made up Burnett's audience, both children and adults, would probably have derived more fun and enjoyment - or what today is frequently termed "family entertainment" - from a visit to the Midway than from a day spent at the Court of Honor.

Special attention should be paid to the healing power the White City seems to exercise on its visitors. John Holt came to the Fair "because he wondered if it would distract him at all" (138) from his sorrows. He encounters the two children who then give back some meaning to his life. Meg and Robin work hard to achieve their goal and are used to thinking only of themselves since there is nobody else to take care of them. But after only one day spent on the fairgrounds, they feel moved to commit an act of kindness toward poor and hunchbacked Ben Nowell by buying him an admission ticket to the White City. On Ben, this visit has a double effect. For the first time in his life, he is confronted with something that goes well beyond his experience and the present boundaries of his mind.

"Oh!" he said. and then - "Oh!" again. And then "I-I don't know - what it's - like!" And he cleared his throat and stared, and Meg saw his narrow chest heave up and down.

"It isn't *like* anything, but - something we've dreamed of, perhaps," said Meg [...].

"No - no!" answered Ben. "But I've never dreamed like it." [...]

"But you will now," she said. "You will now." (158)

The mere sight of the Court of Honor at the core of the White City not only renders Ben speechless but also provides him with food for thought that will probably last for the rest of his life, if he is able to digest it at all. In addition, Ben instantly passes the gift on to his mother who joins the party in the White City on the next day. "How Ben led her from triumph to triumph with the exultant air of one to whom the City Beautiful almost belonged, and who, consequently, had it to bestow as a rich gift on those who did not know it as he did." (185)

¹⁶⁶ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 40.

But the Enchanted City is physically as well as spiritually uplifting. "What wondering glances his mother kept casting on his face, which had grown younger with each hour! She had never seen him look like this before." (185) Under the influence of this magic place, Ben even forgets about his father, who is a violent and unemployed drunkard, for a little while. The dialectic of good and evil, so pervasive in other fairy tales, becomes meaningless in the face of this supreme fruit of human genius.¹⁶⁷ The Enchanted City has the power and effect of a rejuvenating fountain on its visitors: "They were to drink deep draughts of delight as long as they were thirsty for more." (185)

The only person who remains remarkably untouched by the magical workings of the Enchanted City is Aunt Matilda. Her visit to the Columbian City is strictly on business - Robin finds her "in the Agricultural Building, standing before a new steam plough and [...] chewing a sample of wheat." (193) "There's been a lot of money wasted in decorations," (197) she observes when asked about her impressions of the event. But practical considerations lead her to the decision that she "may as well get [her] ticket's worth" (201) since she paid the admission fee

¹⁶⁷ Shortly after Ben's mother arrives at the Fair, the two of them are dismissed from the party because "Ben's mother would be more at ease in the society she was used to," (190) and after that, they are mentioned only in passing. They clearly belong to another world and ultimately do not partake of the White City's healing power in the same way the other characters do. Before the newly founded family leaves Chicago, Holt searches out Ben's father to give him a "straight talk," (209) urging him to find a job and promising to make his life "uncomfortable" (209) if he continues treating his family in the same way as before. "And [Holt] kept his word," (209) the narrator concludes this thread. While the reader cannot be sure to what degree Holt keeps his word and what this actually implies for Ben's future - i.e. if they boy will receive proper medical treatment and an education -, it comes as a surprise that this story thread is dropped so suddenly after having played such a large role before; one may wonder whether Meg and Robin really did Ben a favor by introducing him to a world he is ultimately left out of: While the twins carry their own City Beautiful with them to their new life with John Holt, Ben is dismissed to his former life.

for the whole fairground and not only the Agricultural Building. She visits the Midway Plaisance with Holt and the children, taking in the sights like a "matter of business," "with a grim air of determination" and "cool interest." (202) She inspects the foreign people "with a sharp, unenthusiastic eye [...] plainly thinking them rather mad." (202) After the day is over, she "marche[s] away briskly" (203) to return to her farm. Unlike Meg and Robin, John Holt and Ben, Matilda does not believe in the power of the White City in the first place and hence does not profit from it: She came on business, and she leaves on business. In her life, there is no room for change or inspiration. She possesses the same willpower and determination her niece and nephew can call their own, but she lacks the vision to implement the possible fruits of these feats into her life. On the whole, she strikes the reader as a female caricature of the concept of Protestant work ethic.

Finally and in the last very short part of the novel, the White City fades into the realm of memory in order to inspire coming generations; at the same time its main aspects and features are carried by Meg and Robin Macleod into their new lives as John Holt's wards to stay with them in their future. The White City symbolism has come full circle: The twins have escaped their captivity and, through the power of their City Beautiful, have reached all they ever dreamed of.

4 Clara Louise Burnham: *Sweet Clover*

Clara Louise Burnham was born in Massachusetts in 1854 and later in her life was a long-term Chicago resident. She is the author of numerous works of fiction, beginning with *No Gentlemen*, published in 1881. Many of her about two dozen works of popular fiction are set in her native state and often deal with the teachings of Christian Science of which she, like Frances Hodgson Burnett, was an adherent. The most successful among her novels are *The Wise Woman* (1895), *The Right Princess* (1902), *Jewel* (1903), and *The Opened Shutters* (1906). In her time, she appears to have been very popular and, to a certain degree, critically acclaimed. In an 1893 article on "Literary Chicago", William Morton Payne notes: "As for the novels of Mrs. Clara Louise Burnham ('A Sane Lunatic,' 'No Gentlemen,' etc.) [...], they are numerous and well known."¹⁶⁸ Her works were distributed by the prestigious publishing house of Houghton, Mifflin and Company that emphatically advertised her works in magazines such as *Scribner's* and *Atlantic Monthly*. In the back pages of the December 1896 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, for instance, Houghton Mifflin placed a one-page ad solely dedicated to Burnham's works. The publisher cites a review which had previously appeared in *The Critic*, stating that

Mrs. Burnham's books always fulfill what is supposed to be the true function of the novel. [...] One feels after reading one of these romances as he does after a good dinner, that he has done something not only agreeable but useful, and that things are decidedly the better for it.

With regard to *Sweet Clover*, the ad quotes another review, this one from the *Literary World*, which concludes: "It is delightful to have [the glories of the White City] re-animated in such a vivid manner."¹⁶⁹ In the December 1899 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Houghton Mifflin published a "Literary Bulletin of New Books and New Editions", praising Burnham in a review of her short story collection *A West Point Wooing and Other Stories* as follows: "Mrs. Clara Louise Burnham does not disappoint her large audience, which calls for good, animated, healthy love-stories."¹⁷⁰ While it certainly must be kept in mind that these ads were written to promote Burnham's novels and thus ultimately to make money for the publisher, there is the good and valid name of Houghton Mifflin and also their mentioning of a "large audience" that both speak for a certain degree of popularity of the now largely-forgotten author.

Clara Louise Burnham's novel *Sweet Clover : A Romance of the White City*, published in 1894, may rightfully be called one of the most detailed as well as one of the most favorable fictional depictions of the World's Columbian Exposition.

Title character Clover Bryant, a young Chicago woman, is the eldest of four children and feels responsible for her siblings and widowed mother. For this reason, she feels compelled to accept a marriage proposal made by the elderly and kindly gentleman Richard Van Tassel, the father of Clover's childhood friend Jack and a close friend of the family's, who by this marriage wants to

¹⁶⁸ W.M. Payne, "Literary Chicago", in: *The New England Magazine*, vol. 13, iss. 6, 697.

¹⁶⁹ Both reviews cited after "Mrs. Burnham's Novels", in: *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 78, iss. 470, c086.

help the Bryants out of their financial troubles. Jack, mistaking this liaison for an intricate scheme devised by Clover in order to secure his father's fortune for herself, is bitterly disappointed and leaves for Europe together with his cousin Gorham Page. During their absence, a series of tragedies strike the family: The two youngest Bryant siblings die of the scarlet fever, leaving only Clover and her sister Mildred behind; their mother passes away as well, and Mr. Van Tassel suffers a stroke and dies a few months later. Upon Jack's return, he finally is reconciled with the Bryant sisters, with no little help and diplomacy from his cousin Gorham and their spinster Aunt Lovina Berry.

They all spend the summer of 1893 at the Van Tassels' Chicago mansion which is conveniently located just a few blocks away from Lake Michigan and the fairgrounds. They visit the fair repeatedly and thoroughly experience both the White City and the Midway Plaisance. During the course of the big event, Jack falls in love with Mildred, while at the same time Gorham and Clover grow ever closer. In the end the lovers pair off happily, and Aunt Lovina returns to her native town of Pearfield, Massachusetts. The novel ends with the description of the big fire which destroyed the Peristyle and many others of the remaining White City buildings in January 1894.

The first approximately 120 pages of the novel are dedicated to a description of the fateful events which take place in the four years prior to the World's Columbian Exposition. After that prologue, as it were, the main characters visit both the dedication day and opening day ceremonies which are described in great

¹⁷⁰ "Houghton, Mifflin & Company's Literary Bulletin of New Books and New Editions", in: *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 84, iss. 506, December 1899, b025.

detail. The remainder of the story, i.e. roughly 250 pages, illustrate the summer of 1893, the protagonists' repeated visits to the fair and their strongly emotional reactions to it. Unlike in Burnett's novel, the city of Chicago plays a noteworthy role in Burnham's narrative – so much so that it might with good reason be put on the list of leading characters.

4.1 *Chicago: A young lady with a mission*

Chicago is hometown to three of the five central characters: The Bryant sisters and Jack grew up together on the shores of Lake Michigan, while Jack's cousin Gorham hails from Boston and Aunt Lovina lives in Pearfield, a small rural town in Massachusetts. Right from the beginning of the story, Clara Louise Burnham devotes a relatively large amount of space to describing the city of Chicago, its history and development; even the future of the city is briefly anticipated. The narrator, who throughout the story wavers between an authorial and an omniscient point of view, describes in great detail the Chicagoan landscape and depicts what Chicago as a hometown means to Clover, Mildred, and Jack.

When the Bryant family history is related, old Mrs. Bryant is referred to as being part of the "pioneer set," a group of families "who had danced together 'long before the fire,'" (18) meaning the great fire which destroyed large parts of the city in 1871. But time moves fast in Chicago, as the narrator points out:

In a city like Chicago, where events occur with phenomenal rapidity, two or three years make great changes in a neighborhood. Hyde Park, [the suburb in

which the Bryants live,] which long hung back like a rebellious child loath to yield its independence, had at last placed its reluctant hand in that of the mother city [...], (18)

thus being incorporated into Chicago. This, of course, was fortunate for Hyde Park, considering that it was to become the scene of the World's Columbian Exposition. Apparently, one part of Jackson Park, the later fairgrounds, was already known as the Midway Plaisance long before it became known to the whole world as the entertainment center of the World's Fair. When old Mr. Van Tassel takes Clover out for a joyride to propose to her, they visit this place together.

What that name [Midway Plaisance] suggested to Chicagoans up to a short time ago was the loneliest, most rural drive of their park system. [...] It was the Midway Plaisance; but with no dull rhythmic beat of drum to be the first greeting of each new arrival, no shadowing forth of the scenes in the near future, when this unknown plot of ground should become the rendezvous and rallying place of the civilized, half-civilized, and savage nations of the earth. (26)

Jackson Park proper, at that time, was a rural landscape with fields "studded with haystacks." (28f.) The narrator anticipates the future construction of the White City on this site:

[S]wans sailed majestically on the lakelets where soon the Eskimo canoes would be equally at home. Adjoining the field of new-mown hay, ducks paddled along [...] as contentedly as later in the same spot their brothers would swim in the shadow of the white columns of a treasure-house of painting and sculpture. (28f.)

The conversations and thoughts of the various characters are frequently interspersed with reminiscences of their childhood and youth and of how they spent their time sailing on the lake.

It is particularly striking that, during the course of the narrative, Chicago is time and again portrayed as a person, more precisely a young woman coming of age. This image is for the first time introduced when Gorham Page describes to his Aunt Lovina a caricature he has seen in a New York newspaper. The sketch showed

our principal cities represented as pretty women standing in a semicircle around Uncle Sam waiting to see which shall receive a bouquet which he holds in his hands labeled 'World's Fair,' - that is, they are all pretty women except Chicago, who is a half-grown, scrawny girl, arrayed in an evening gown with a pattern of little pigs. She has huge diamonds blasting in her breast and ears, her thin arms are bare, and the hands she wildly stretches out to Uncle Sam wear white kid gloves with one button at the wrist. Her mouth is wide open, and she is evidently vociferously demanding the prize, while New York, a beautiful society girl, gazes at her with well-bred scorn. (57)

This caricature very well illustrates the veritable war fought between the various cities, notably New York and Chicago, about which of them was to host this outstanding event. Chicago is represented as the youngest of these cities, an upstart girl not fully grown up yet, tastelessly dressed and vulgarly bejeweled. The pig pattern on her dress stands for Chicago's reputation as a city whose sole expertise is on meatpacking. She inappropriately and flashily displays her wealth in the form of huge diamonds, and while the other city girls, one imagines, stand about in a reticent and polite, ladylike fashion, patiently awaiting Uncle Sam's decision, Chicago stretches out her arms, screaming from an ungainly open mouth and all but jumping up and down in excitement. New York, Chicago's major opponent, on the other hand, is described as a beautiful and, more importantly, well-bred young lady who knows how to

behave. While this image does not accurately represent reality (in fact, all the "ladies'" arms were stretched out, and they were not above boasting with their respective advantages, as I have demonstrated above), it exemplifies public opinion around this time, which ranged from ridicule to indignation. Nobody, except the Chicagoans themselves of course, believed that this city was up to meeting the public's expectations.

Gorham Page, for one, is undecided. When asked by Aunt Lovina which city he favors, the Bostonian answers:

I feel as though New York were the proper place. I think it is the general feeling that it would be a risk to trust a matter like that to Chicago. [...] For my own part, I think New York may overdo the nonchalant business, and if she does, the energetic maiden stands a good chance to gain her end. (56f.)

Later on, after the decision for Chicago has been made, the author takes up the "young girl" image again. Gorham, on a train to a New England seaside resort, overhears a conversation between two fellow travelers about the fair.

They were discussing the incongruous situation of the World's Fair; for in the previous April Uncle Sam had yielded, and thrown his bouquet to that one of his daughters which [...] had clamored and importuned the loudest. The crude, unformed, ill-bred creature now had this treasure in her keeping, and the righteous indignation and despair of those two New Hampshire men filled the car. What could be expected but a national disgrace? What was the matter with the powers in Washington that they had not in some way averted such a disaster? A good many people thought it a joke; these gentlemen could see nothing amusing in having our country held up to ridicule. (67f.)

Thus, the American public is divided: On the one hand are the Chicagoans who intend to rise up to the occasion, while the rest of the nation, on the other hand, either laugh spitefully about the anticipated major-scale

failure or are outraged, expecting nothing less than a "national disgrace." How can such an internationally prestigious project as the World's Columbian Exposition be entrusted to an inexperienced upstart? The "crude, unformed, ill-bred creature," a city not even worth to be called that name and which made its fortune with crime and the dirty business of slaughtering pigs certainly cannot be trusted to represent the United States of America to its foreign visitors - this, at least, was the general feeling among a good many of the American citizens.

Chicago's citizens, however, see the "scrawny girl" in a different light. One of her major champions is young Mildred Bryant. Together with Gorham, she overhears the aforementioned conversation on the train and is hardly able to control her emotions. "Dear, generous Chicago!" she exclaims in "youthful wrath," (69) and adds:

It is the best thing that ever happened to the country that we are to have the Fair. [...] I suppose the Eastern people think we enjoy the prospect of being jostled, and crowded, and having our streets torn up and our city extended, and all our comfort taken away for two years while we live in a perfect Pandemonium. No. We do not enjoy it, but we do it as our duty because we know that we can and shall do it well. It is not best to trust such an enterprise to an old, slow town. (69)

Mildred, having spent all her young life in Chicago, feels deeply hurt and insulted. She is very proud of her hometown and feels that it deserves better treatment. In her eyes, the young lady by the name of Chicago is a lady indeed, generously sacrificing herself for the sake of the nation and doing nothing but her duty. Mildred in her speech implies that an "old, slow town" is not flexible and alert enough to cope with the 'busy-ness' that will

come to town as a consequence of the Fair. In keeping with the previous imagery, one imagines the other cities as old women, barely able to hold themselves upright with the help of a crutch, while the young, fast and agile Chicago busily moves about to prepare herself for her rightful role as hostess. Seen from this perspective, Chicago would indeed be the only possible and reasonable choice to outshine all previous World's Fairs and lead both the international world's fair enthusiasm and the United States' mode of self-representation to a new era.

Mildred's speech in favor of Chicago arouses new feelings in Gorham. "It occurred to [him] that with her superb vitality and unconscious audacity [Mildred] might be a truer type of the triumphant young city than that shown in the cleverly insulting picture which had so tickled his imagination." (70) Indeed, when he first meets her, he mentally likens her to Juno, the highest of Roman goddesses, regarding "her flat back and fine shoulders, her clear healthy skin and the Cupid's bow of her upper lip. [...] She was what is called in the parlance of the day a tailor-made girl, and her physique suggested rowing and tennis." (67) This girl, who in fact practically grew up on a sail boat on Lake Michigan, embodies everything Chicago stands for in the eyes of its own people: She is young, athletic, beautiful, and ambitious, if a little overly self-possessed, at least in the case of Mildred, as we are to learn later on in the story.

The decision for Chicago as the setting of the fair having been made, the public's eyes remain on the city in order to watch its every move and to detect the slightest mistake. The narrator describes how lengthy squabbles among the Fair officials about where exactly the event is to take place lead to a considerable loss of time.

Finally, Jackson Park is decided upon. "Sand-dunes and marshes, woodland and slough, had all to be effaced, for a new earth must be offered in time to be the foundation for those castles in the air, which were already creating in men's brains." (122) This description of Frederick Olmsted's landscape design procedure amounts to a veritable creation process in the mythological sense of the word, to building a new world out of nothing. It reminds the reader of the bible verse, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."¹⁷¹ This notion is reflected in numerous allusions various characters later make about the White City as a mysterious and holy place, a concept that shall receive further attention later on.

After the grounds have been cleared and prepared, further work has to be done, and time is running out fast - all under the watchful eye of Chicago's critics, the number of which has not diminished. "Of public opinion in the East, the kindest expression continued patronizing, amused, and skeptical; the average, contemptuous and hostile." (123) In short, nobody believes that this project will be seen through to the end, much less that it will be a success. Here, again, the "young girl" image is taken up:

But Chicago, which had formed a habit of making stepping-stones of obstacles, now said "I will" with greater doggedness of purpose than ever before [...]. [...] The Eastern papers [...] still exercised the virtue of frankness to the fullest extent; but Chicago, with all her reputation for talking, now had not time for such indulgence; but emulated Uncle Remus's famous tar-baby, who, it will be remembered, when Brer Rabbit jeered at her once and again, still 'ain't sayin' nothin'.' She only grubbed away [...]. (123)

¹⁷¹ Cf. Rev 21:1.9.

Here, the "young lady" stubbornly rolls up her sleeves and rises to meet the challenge and fulfill her mission. She does not even take the time to defend herself against the attacks and accusations coming from the east but instead devotes all her time and power to the task at hand. She is not the vociferous and clamoring teenager anymore, but has matured into an ambitious, dutiful, and responsible adult.

Perhaps it is interesting at this point to observe how Clara Louise Burnham represents the United States in her novel. Instead of being a Union wishing to present itself to the world, the United States here are not so united at all; rather, they are pictured like the "house divided" they were some decades ago, in a conflict culminating in the Civil War. However, this time the dividing line runs no longer between north and south but between the long-standing bulwarks of culture and civilization, i.e. the old cities of the east coast, and the young newcomer city with its sleeves rolled up, ready to look eye to eye with its critics and to meet the challenge.

In the novel, this antagonism manifests itself in the constant if playful quarrel between the cousins Jack and Gorham. When Jack, after learning that his father is going to marry his childhood friend Clover, announces his unexpected decision to join his cousin and friend on a long trip to Europe, Gorham quips, "'[...] Did Chicago grate upon your æsthetic sense in her scramble for the Fair?'" Jack coolly replies,

"She isn't scrambling, that I know of. She doesn't need to. She'll get the Fair all right. Any one can see with half an eye that Chicago is the only place for it, - the foreordained place."

Page laughed quietly and skeptically, and there followed one of the arguments of which every American citizen knows the pros and cons. (59)

This quote allows three conclusions; a) that the debate about which city was to host the Fair was so ubiquitous in American every day life that the author does not even have to list the arguments for each point of view; b) that the decision is not really a decision to be made by a committee since it is a question of fate - here again we find an allusion to the fair as a mythical or holy event; and c) that Jack undeniably is a fervent and passionate champion for his hometown.

He spends the winter of 1891/92 in exile, as it were, staying with his family in Boston but keeping a steady interest in the developments back at home. More than once he has to defend his Chicago against the attacks of the "enemy":

So he lived through the winter, [...] gaining a reputation for touchiness regarding his native city, with whose exertions he felt a loyal and filial sympathy. It made him hot to read and hear frequent allusions to prove that the public was still holding its sides with merriment over the exquisite humor of the idea that upstart, pork-packing Chicago should undertake to conceive and carry out a true World's Fair, [...] and to be an adequate embodiment of the high ideas which gave birth to the enterprise. (124f.)

In this short paragraph, it seems that the young lady Chicago has matured to an even higher degree as she is twice represented as a mother figure. First, Jack feels "filial sympathy" to her, and then she is pictured as the "embodiment of the high ideas which [give] birth to the enterprise." This is in keeping with Chicago's generosity and sense of duty Mildred alluded to in the aforementioned train scene.

The cousinly dispute about which city is the worthier one is carried on on dedication day, October 21, when Jack and Gorham visit the exposition grounds for the first time. Although the White City is largely unfinished at this point, it does not fail to leave a lasting impression on Jack, but Gorham yet remains to be convinced.

Jack felt his breast swell with pride in the fair scene, incomplete, yet already inspiring; but he forbore from being the first to comment. Let the Boston man speak; and he finally did. [...]

"This is great - so far. [...] But Eastern men designed these palaces. Eastern art" -

"Now look here," burst forth Jack. "Don't try to apologize for Chicago's achievement. She hasn't got there yet, quite, of course, but she is arriving. She had sense enough to make this Fair a national and not a local business. [...]" (126f.)

Here, Burnham picks up an argument which, as I have shown above, was hotly discussed at the time. Many people felt that it was a wrong move to commission a great number of the buildings to east coast architects instead of entrusting them to the many local experts. But the reason Jack gives here is quite convincing; all the quarrels notwithstanding, this world's fair is to be hosted by the United States as a country and not just by a single city. Thus, the young lady Chicago has matured to yet another level: She has reached out to let her sisters of the east coast partake in her success and to make the fair, as it were, a family enterprise. To Jack, this seems a wise and sensible decision. To the reader, it indicates the final coming of age of the young lady Chicago.

October 9, 1893 marked the Chicago Day, the anniversary of the Great Fire which all but destroyed the city in 1871. The celebrations held on this day are, again, described in great detail in *Sweet Clover*: With regard to

the splendid fireworks, the narrator remarks, "Surely, Chicago had earned the right to celebrate herself by bombardments of colored fire, if it so pleased her [...]." (397) The World's Columbian Exposition, now being almost over, has been a success, and even the most skeptic or downright evil voices from the east can no longer deny this fact. The hostess may now rightfully celebrate herself.

Although the fair is generally portrayed very favorably in the novel, the various characters react to it with a mixture of different emotions and concepts which shall be explored in the following section.

4.2 *The depiction of the fair*

At different points of *Sweet Clover*, the World's Columbian Exposition is brought in connection with various images and concepts. Sometimes these concepts depend on the question from whose point of view the event is regarded at the respective time, and sometimes it is the narrator who evokes a certain picture of the fair. At other times, it might even be said that the goings-on at the fair to a certain degree mirror the emotions of the characters. On the whole, the different images seem to form a number of recurrent motifs.

First of all, and taking up the ideas put forth in the previous section, the exposition, throughout the novel, is regarded and portrayed as a success.

The narrator describes how the weather in the winter preceding the fair has been exceptionally cold and wet,

thus hindering the final preparations considerably; however, the tides turn just in time for the great event:

It was the beginning of that marvelous summer whose weather every Chicagoan will always proudly consider an exhibit worthy to be ranked with any wonder it shone upon. The natural elements, like the human ones, gradually admitted that the Columbian Exposition was not only a worthy but an overwhelming success, and in place of buffeting wind and destructive storm, sent week after week a warm blue sky and a cool east breeze to add the crowning charm to the White City's bewildering loveliness. (165f.)

Chicago shows its most charming side, the weather appears to have been made to order, turning along with the public opinion - the best requirements for a fair summer indeed, and again and again the characters playfully complain about the swelling throng of visitors. Relating to Jack how she has spent the afternoon at the exposition, Mildred remarks, "Our party was glad to retreat to a private room and have a sherry cobbler. Everything is beginning to be crowded now." (212) On the whole the reader notices that, apparently, the Chicagoans feel like an elite among the fair visitors; the event is part and parcel of their day-to-day life. Again, it is haughty Mildred who sums up what distinguishes the city's citizens from all other visitors: "We Chicagoans aren't Fair visitors. We are Fair lovers." (281) On the day of the opening, Mildred is especially proud of her heritage: "Oh, Jack, aren't you glad you are a Chicagoan? Aren't you glad that we've gathered goldenrod right in this very spot in front of the Administration Building?" (154) The young girl is part of the happy number of people who witnessed their hometown as it created the White City from scratch, and this makes her appreciate and take pride in this achievement all the more. She is not even above insulting Jack as a "poor, provincial Bostonian"

(189) when he utters a slight word of criticism, thus painfully reminding him of the long time he has spent abroad.

A second motif that may be singled out is the vastness of the fairgrounds. Gorham, making plans for his first visit and trying to convince his brother Robert to join him on the trip to Chicago, muses:

I propose to spend a good deal of time at the Fair. I want to go through it with some degree of thoroughness. Of course no one will really see half of it. I understand that, giving one minute to each exhibit, it is estimated that it would take thirty-two years for a man to get around. (172)

While this calculation certainly is a bit exaggerated, as it would allow for the visual evaluation of something close to 17 million exhibits, it still illustrates fairly well that visitors had to prepare for a major exertion if they wanted to experience the exposition with any "degree of thoroughness." The sheer size of the Liberal Arts Building alone - 787 by 1678 square feet and hence "the largest enclosed building ever constructed"¹⁷² - receives its due respect from the narrator in the description of the dedication day ceremony: "Only a Brobdignagian could have felt at ease in such surroundings [...]" (137).

Due to the vastness of the fairgrounds, the protagonists seem to be in a constant hurry in order to honor their engagements; indeed, "hurry" appears to be ever the watchword of the season. "Hurrying is the normal condition of people who try to keep appointments at the Fair," (216) Clover observes. And later, resolving to meet some friends in order to watch a military parade, she remarks, "Then comes in that awful word again. [...] We

¹⁷² R.R. Badger, "Chicago", in: J.E. Findling/K.D. Pelle (eds.), 126.

shall have to hurry a little." (356) And the narrator muses: "To 'hurry home' from this city of magnificent distances was but a form of words." (210)

Clover, by the time her house guests Robert and Hilda Page arrive in Chicago, is an experienced fairgoer. She knows her way around the fairgrounds and has learned that it is dangerous to underestimate distances. After his first visit to the White City, Robert is enthusiastically looking forward to the next days and the "unlimited feast" (231) the fair holds in store for him. Clover is serenely amused at this excitement, observing,

"You are in the first-day frame of mind, I see."

"What is that?"

"Oh, eagerness and hopefulness."

"And what is the second?"

"Despair; yes, overwhelming, stony despair."

"What is the third? Suicidal tendency?"

"No indeed. Resignation. At first one expects and determines to see everything; soon finds that to be so impossible that he yields to his bewilderment, and at last accepts the inevitable and sets himself to see what he can, and be rapturously content therewith." (231)

Interestingly enough, this comes from the lips of a person who lives but two blocks away from the White City and can explore its attractions at leisure. One cannot help but wonder what the feelings of a person must have been who had only a week or, even worse, just one or two days to spend at the exposition, as it very probably was the case for a majority of the visitors. Robert, it may be added as an afterthought, has his keenness extinguished very soon. A few days later, after a day spent on the fairgrounds with his brother, he nags: "The only interest I've had for hours in any exhibit was as to whether there was a chair in it [...]" (237) - evidently he has reached the second stage already in spite of having been forewarned by his hostess.

When Clover fails to appear on time at a certain meeting point, her sister wonders what became of her. The narrator explains: "Clover, wanting to stop a minute to look at some pieces of old china [...] had had the usual curious experience in World's Fair minutes. In a city of enchantment, how could it be expected that sixty seconds should be of the conventional length?" (214) Time is perceived differently by the visitors of the World's Columbian Exposition as if they were under the influence of a magic spell. In contemplating just a few of the items on display, it is easy to lose track of time and find that hours instead of just minutes have passed. This places the White City in the tradition of other enchanted places in which the clocks beat to a different time, a common folk-lore motif as it may be found for example in Washington Irving's story "Rip Van Winkle", where the eponymous Rip falls asleep in a cave in the woods and awakes to find that he has been away from his home village for some twenty years.

Indeed, the World's Fair City is frequently alluded to as a "magic" or "enchanted" place, turning this into yet another motif. Clover declares the Court of Honor a "wonderful place" (219) since it makes Gorham content to just gaze at it, refraining from his usual inquisitiveness and his inclination to look underneath the surface of things. Also, as a fair visitor, one tends to lose not only one's sense of time, but also one's sense of place. Jack and Clover spend an evening in the picturesque German village on the Midway and later tell their friends: "Oh, it was fine. I declare, we didn't know where we were." (249)

Generally speaking, the "magic" metaphor is more frequently used in connection with the Midway Plaisance than with the White City; Mildred, for instance, refers

to the Midway as "this wonder-world of a street." (310) "The magic carpet in the Arabian Nights which transported its owner from one country to another, remote, in the space of a few seconds, was the property of all visitors to the Midway Plaisance," (268) the narrator observes when Mildred and Jack travel from the "Swiss Alps" to the "Bedouin Encampment" in the nick of time. And one of Mildred's favorite places on the Midway is an upstairs apartment on Cairo Street with a balcony which allows a splendid bird's eye view of the spectacle; she calls it "my enchanted palace," and access to it may be gained by the "open sesame [of] fifteen cents." (276)

Mildred's usually more sober sister Clover, too, is subject to the Midway's enchantment. On a visit to the theater in the Javanese village, she whispers to Gorham, "Really, the whole thing seems strange enough to be a sight in fairy-land; and do you hear that enchanting rustle of trees above our heads?" (305)

Very much like in Burnett's *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*, the exposition, or rather certain parts of it, seem like a place taken directly out of a fairy tale, a place where magic is wrought as a matter of course. The difference seems to be that the fairy tale atmosphere evoked by Burnham reminds the reader more of the *Arabian Nights* than of traditionally European folklore, largely due to the settings she chooses which are predominantly situated in the "oriental" locations of the Midway Plaisance.

One of the few instances where the White City proper is brought in connection with the "magic" concept is when Mildred and Jack behold it from the roof top of the Brazil building, looking down "on the enchanting vision of early evening in the White City, - the sum of imaginable loveliness." (365)

This, in fact, is one of the many moments in the novel where the surroundings seem to mirror the romantic feelings experienced by the protagonists. Since the reader, along with the supporting characters, mostly has only hazy notions about who is actually in love with whom at any given time, every get-together between a male and a female character is of a potentially romantic nature, regardless of the combination of people. To make the confusion complete, Jack and Clover devise a scheme to punish Mildred for her arrogant behavior towards her many suitors by pretending to be in love with each other, thus trying to make her jealous - as may be guessed, this configuration of characters allows for a host of romantic situations.

Clover and Jack are enchanted by "the German village by moonlight," (248) perceiving themselves to be part of "some romantic old story." (250) In a replica of a Damascus palace, Jack and Mildred find themselves all alone in a secluded and curtained room with fountains and "gold-embroidered velvet divans" (269) - quite a romantic spot for young lovers, as is Mildred's "enchanted palace" on Cairo Street. Even a dinner with their friends at the famous Old Vienna Café, modeled, as the name suggests, on eighteenth century Vienna, undeniably has a strong romantic appeal to the two pairs of lovers:

Feathery bits of white cloud scudded over the blue above them. Picturesque gables and weather-beaten façades illuminated with the decorations of a bygone time closed them in from the outside world with such an atmosphere of antiquity, that even the dignified beauty of Handel's Largo [...] seemed an anachronism. (290)

And Gorham surprises Clover with a *tête-à-tête* for tea at her beloved New Jersey pavilion (355f.), a place with a charmingly old-fashioned appeal.

But the fair can also mirror negative emotions, as in the case of Mildred. Jack Van Tassel, in order to reprimand her for the arrogance she has previously displayed, refuses to spend an afternoon on the Midway with her. Piqued and spiteful, she resolves to go and ride the Ferris Wheel on her own. But instead of enjoying the spectacular and colorful scenery on Midway, as she usually does, the girl is appalled by the "seething mass of humanity" (261) around her, and the scenes that on other days seemed enchanting and picturesque, like the Javanese or the South Sea Islanders villages, are a source of dread and noise to her and hold "neither truth nor poetry." (261) "She began to feel that she was doing an absurd thing, to be forlornly and doggedly pursuing her way among the motley crowd, to the monotonous, rhythmic beat of drum, and the sing-song of strange voices." (261) In this scene, the multitude around Mildred, "seething" like so much vermin, turns into a mob, crowding in on her and actually threatening her. This sensation is even sharpened when she finally finds herself standing in front of the huge Ferris Wheel, experiencing "a painful physical sense of being overwhelmed. The monster had paused for its cars to be filled, and she shrank from the prospect before her with unprecedented sensations." (263) Suddenly the reader sympathizes with Clover, the watchful and cautious elder sister, and remembers her warning: "But I don't want you to go to the Midway alone, Milly." (259) The Midway, for an unescorted girl, can actually be a place of danger - this is a note that is very seldom struck in Burnham's novel.

But where does this danger come from? To a certain degree, it results from the technological and mechanical exhibits that never fail to baffle and bewilder the

protagonists. Mildred perceives the colossal Ferris Wheel to be a monster; later, Jack refers to the novel attraction as "his Wheelship." (287) Both feel that it is a humongous and intimidating living being. Aunt Lovina, for the first time in her life, sees a long distance telephone in the Electricity Building. She feels that it is "blasphemous," (206) and when her nephew Gorham urges her to try it out, she is shaken almost to the point of physical sickness: "I feel prickly, Gorham. I think I'm goin' to faint." (207)

However, the danger posed by technology and new inventions is only a secondary one. What really makes the characters in this novel nervous is caused by a generous amount of xenophobia. Still, one has to concede that, most of the time, the allusions to that effect are much more restrained than in Van Deventer's novel *Against Odds*. Instead of being downright disapproving of and hostile toward the foreign visitors and exhibitors, Clover and her friends make subtly condescending remarks about them, and the narrator, more often than not, supports them in their attitude.

When Mildred and Jack visit the Bedouin Encampment and find themselves in the secluded and romantic room mentioned before, an Arab enters and washes his face and hands in the little fountain. "'How nice of him,' said Mildred, acknowledging this touch added to the picture." (269) The Arab, one imagines, seeks a few minutes of refreshing refuge from his job, which is entertaining the public all day long and probably late into the night, but Mildred feels that even this is a gesture made expressly for her. A short while later, the couple visits the Nubian huts where a dancing performance is in progress. The dancers are grouped around a central figure which kindles Jack's excitement.

The object of his admiration was tall, straight as an arrow, dressed in a long robe of white, and wore large hoop earrings. [...]

"Like a splendid bronze!" said Jack [...]. "I tell you, Mildred, [...] if that woman could have been brought up in a different environment she would have been superb. Fancy having her well-trained for a servant? How would you like her to pass you your coffee at breakfast?" (272)

At first, the description portrays the type of the noble savage, proud, aloof, and immaculately groomed, with "the most perfect teeth imaginable." (272) Just as the reader, along with Jack, is beginning to be carried away by the sight of this stately figure, Jack, through his words, dresses her in a servant's garb and has her serve breakfast, only regretting that there would be a thorough training and education necessary before the "savage" was ready and sophisticated enough to assume such a position. The thought that this person could ever be anything more than a servant does not even occur to him. It is an interesting and bitter twist, though, when Mildred enlightens her companion that the object of his enthusiasm is in fact "Mohammed Ali, the chief of the Nubians," (273) a mighty warrior of androgynous beauty.

Hilda and Robert Page pay a visit to the Chinese theater on Midway and later ridicule the performance, complaining about the "squealing music and the shrieking actors." (289) They point out the especially ridiculous fact that the women's parts in the opera were all played by men, "and they jabber in a high monotonous falsetto without any change of countenance." (289)

Clover, upon visiting the Javanese village with Gorham, decides: "I want one of those brown girls to take home as bricabrac" (305); while it is clear that this is just a playful remark, it still reveals her and her friends' basic attitude towards those "uncivilized" people. On the

same evening, she describes the Javanese dancing performance to her sister: "Such dear, cunning, absurd motions as they make, their little bits of mouths looking so serious all the time." (322) For all the audience knows, the dance might have been a religious ritual or part of some other intense and meaningful ceremony, but to Clover the dancers appeared only cute and absurdly serious. Though fairly well educated, she obviously did not take the trouble to try to procure some background information on what she witnessed. Like her friends, she regards the foreign people in their make-believe native villages like specimens in a zoo or a freak show. She does not display hostility toward them, but she does not take them seriously in their capacity as members of a foreign culture, either, and it does not cross her mind that those costumes and artifacts she looks at might be the fruits of a different way of life, different from hers but still eligible to qualify as "culture."

The only person with a different if not more promising point of view is Aunt Lovina. The elderly lady from Massachusetts, being a zealous Puritan, has worries of a special kind on her mind when she visits the Midway - which she is reluctant to do, to begin with. When her nephew Gorham asks her to go with him, she ventures her opinion as follows:

Civilization's good enough for me. If I'd had a call to minister to naked savages, I s'pose I'd'a' been given grace to conquer; but to listen to 'em yell, and see 'em dance, is a mighty queer thing for Christians to seek for entertainment, it seems to *me*. If I could go into that Pleasance with plenty o' hot water and Castile soap, and some sensible clothes, and could help those poor critters to a more godly way o' livin' that would be a different thing; but when I want a good time I ain't goin' to try to get it bein' trod on by camels and yelled at by Turks, all the time smellin' smells I don't know the name of and would be afraid to. No, sir. (200)

If Aunt Lovina had her way, she would baptize the inhabitants of the native villages and put them on the right way to Paradise by washing them and dressing them "properly," thereby of course unwittingly obliterating their attraction for her nephews, their friends, and, for that matter, just about all other spectators. A Javanese dressed in Western garb, silently and decently sitting about on a chair, would be considerably less interesting to look at than a Javanese dancing to the sound of drums and exotic instruments, dressed in his native costume which, as an added benefit, displays much more skin than said Western garb.

But even Aunt Lovina is able to change her mind, if only for a very short while. Later in the exposition summer, the Parliament of Religions convenes, and naturally Lovina is both very interested and in for a surprise:

The names of those Orientals, whose words she listened to as to music, were impracticable to her; but their dark faces and graceful gestures were fixed in her mind forever. Aunt Love was one of thousands whose complacent generalization of 'the heathen' received a blow. (395)

The "blow," however, cannot have produced a very lasting impression; when Mildred frequently shows herself in the company of a "handsome coffee-colored Indian," (395) by everyone referred to as "Pink Turban" in an allusion to his remarkable headgear, Aunt Love's admiration for Oriental wisdom and tranquility comes to a sudden end. "[W]hatever you do, marry a man o' your own color, who wears a hat and coat instead of a turban and a bath wrapper." (399) Tolerance for foreign ways of life and the realization that there is no such thing as "the heathen" only carry her so far, and there are certain boundaries that simply cannot be crossed by a society

girl, or by any "civilized" member of society, for that matter. The "Pink Turban" is not even given a proper name, and being in his company for more than a few days is simply unthinkable - one has to remain separated from anything that does not fit into one's notion of society, be it foreigners or the common rabble.

This may also be the reason for another feature of the Fair, according to the Bryants, Van Tassels, and Pages: The World's Columbian Exposition is not an event to be enjoyed by everyone. One has to have had a certain amount of education and traveling in order to properly appreciate the event - this, at least, is the attitude exhibited by the protagonists of *Sweet Clover*. Interestingly enough, this prejudice, at least in some cases, seems to be held up by its own victims.

The Van Tassels have had a Scottish housemaid by the name of Jeanie for many years. At the beginning of the world's fair season, Jeanie announced the "call to visit her own kin," (155) thus setting out to spend the summer in Scotland. Clover, later relating this development to Jack and Mildred, quotes her: "'What do I want with the Fair?' [Jeanie] asked contemptuously." (155) Mildred agrees with Jeanie: "No doubt a person of her sort would be more fatigued than interested by the Fair." (156) Since the housemaid does not figure anywhere else in the novel except in passing, not much is known about her, save that she is a housemaid and hails from Scotland. Either one of these facts, or perhaps both of them combined, evidently turn her into a person who does not have the faculties to recognize the value and meaning of the exposition.

Aunt Lovina has come from her rural New England hometown to Chicago on Clover's invitation, more or less to fill the gap left by Jeanie and keep the household running smoothly. During the first few weeks of her stay, she

does not even seem interested in visiting the fair which is, after all, only two blocks away. The narrator comments:

The more cultivated and traveled one was, the more wonderful and beautiful the White City seemed to him. Upon a woman of [Aunt Lovina's] narrow worldly experience, its unique characteristics dawned but slowly. For some weeks it is quite certain that the housekeeping duties [...] were more attractive to the good woman than the marvels which lay so near her. (167)

In the eyes of the protagonists as well as the narrator, it seems to be necessary to have acquired a good amount of knowledge and taste before one is able to approve of the exposition. Hence Clover's admonition to Jack prior to his first Fair visit: "You will be grateful for whatever feeble standards of comparison you have gained by travel." (177)

This, of course, does not make too much sense. It is certainly true that a certain amount of background education helps simply by sharpening the senses for a number of things. But while it may be true that the neo-classicistic style of the buildings grouped around the Court of Honor was recognizable as such only by people with a background in architecture, all other people were still able to perceive it as outstandingly beautiful and harmonious, as numerous travel reports prove. The same holds true for the people Clover observes when she goes to a concert directed by Theodore Thomas in the Festival Hall. Having come in the anticipation to hear a band play popular tunes, these people leave after the first few minutes: "[Clover] saw pleased hopefulness give way to apathy in many faces, as strange harmonies and dissonances fell upon uncultivated ears." (232) One may be certain, though, that those "uncultivated" people Clover watches with mild disdain will find their share of

entertainment elsewhere on the fairgrounds, because surely there will be a band somewhere playing the ubiquitous "After the Ball," the popular melody so frequently referred to in *Sweet Clover*.

At this point, one cannot help but remember Meg and Robin Macleod, the *Two Little Pilgrims* of Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel; they, too, were poor and comparatively uneducated, but not only did they meet with many other people who were like themselves - a part of society that is all but left out of *Sweet Clover* -, they took pleasure in their City Beautiful with all their hearts, and where education and knowledge lacked, they made it up with imagination and curiosity.

It comes as quite a surprise, then, that it is the uneducated spinster lady Aunt Lovina who best sums up the White City motif which is perhaps the most pervading of all. It is a motif which *Sweet Clover* has in common with *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress* in that it depicts the White City as a quasi-sacred place which, in a sense, offers its visitors a religious experience of sorts. The major difference between Burnett's and Burnham's novels, however, is that in the latter the religious imagery is founded on the dichotomy between good and evil, between light and dark, between White City and Midway Plaisance.

The chapter "A Massachusetts celebration" in *Sweet Clover* is dedicated to one of Aunt Love's extensive Fair visits she takes to making after her first weeks of acclimatization. She accidentally meets Gorham and he asks her to keep him company. As I have described above, Lovina is reluctant to go to the Midway with her nephew. The place scares her; it is, in her words,

dirty and all barbaric. It deafens you with noise; the worst folks in there are avaricious and bad, and the best are just children in their ignorance, and when you're feelin' bewildered with the smells and sounds and sights, always changin' like one o' these kaleidoscopes, and when you come out o' that mile-long babel where you've been elbowed and cheated, you pass under a bridge – and all of a sudden you are in a great beautiful silence. The angels on the Woman's Buildin' smile down and bless you, and you know that in what seemed like one step, you've passed out o' darkness into light. (201)

In other words, exactly those things which make the Midway attractive to most of its visitors – a kaleidoscope of foreign and exotic sights, music, food, performances, souvenirs, the touch of the forbidden – are repellent to Aunt Love and drive her away, under the bridge to the White City, where she finds silence, smiling angels, and light. In an uncharacteristically precise thought digest that takes the reader quite aback in its philosophical implications, Lovina ventures: "That Midway is just a representation of matter, and this great White City is an emblem of mind." (201) And a few moments later, she gives this thought complex yet another dimension: "It's come to me, Mr. Gorham, that perhaps dyin' is goin' to be somethin' like crossin' the dividin' line that separates the Midway from the White City." (201f.) She also gives a reason for her opinion: "I believe it's just the fact that the makers o' the Fair believed in God and put Him and their enlightenment from Him into what they did [...]." (202) By "Fair," she here obviously refers to the White City as opposed to the helter-skelter of "heathens" on the other side of the bridge.

The White City as an emblem of the mind, as the embodiment of spiritual enlightenment and therefore a holy place, is referred to in other parts of the novel as well. When Clover visits Jackson Park with old Mr. Van

Tassel in 1889, all she sees is the familiar surroundings, of course. "No vision came to her of a white city, lovely and unsubstantial as though fashioned from the clouds of heaven, and holy because the offering of the best of men's hearts and brains." (34) Perhaps it is noteworthy that the white-city-to-be is here not capitalized - this is the time before it became an emblem, after all. Later on, the City is repeatedly termed "overwhelming," "unreal," or of "unearthly beauty;" even the Dharmapala, one of the participants of the Congress of Religions, receives mention for his declaration, "All the joys of heaven are in Chicago." (374) Yet the thought that all of this is destined to perish again is present all the time: The narrator observes that the event is "something supernatural, evoked for a moment's breathless rapture, and fated to disappear forever." (366)

Just like the other terms mentioned above, "rapture" might be associated with conventional religious terminology; but there are also more extravagant images at work. One example can be found on page 152, shortly before the Opening Day ceremonies are portrayed: "[T]he White City rose like a perfect superb lily from its defiling mud [...]." Like a sacred flower, it rushes out of the profane sludge all around to display its beauty and purity.

Aside from Aunt Lovina's philosophical realization about the emblem of the mind, there are two other key scenes that best illustrate the role the White City plays in this context.

The first scene takes place on opening day; the awe-inspiring sight of the Court of Honor touches Clover to the heart: "Clover gazed at the white magnificence of architecture, and felt a thrill at the solemn stillness

pervading all [...]." (153f.) She assumes a reverent position, like one would do in a cathedral, for instance. She and her sister rapturously clasp hands; "their breath came fast as they stood facing the majestic Peristyle, its marble columns surmounted by the solemn, glad, immortal declaration: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" (154f.) This biblical promise,¹⁷³ inscribed on many an American public building, receives additional impact by the context in which it is placed here, at the center, as it were, of a quasi-religious ceremony.¹⁷⁴ "Jack stood beside them, his head bared before this beginning of a new era [...]." (155) Jack bares his head like he would do in a church as a sign of his reverence; the new era which is about to begin promises the realization of the above Scripture quote, emphasizing that the White City indeed is an emblem of the mind.

The second, but by no means less intense, moment signifying the White City's meaning comes when Jack, for the first time, visits the Court of Honor, "that Mecca of all Exposition pilgrims." (180) He involuntarily has to remember his dead father who, before his death, participated in planning the World's Columbian Exposition. Jack is overcome by gloominess and wonders if his father now is in a place from where he can watch the successful realization of his plans. In addition, the

¹⁷³ Cf. John 8:32.

¹⁷⁴ It is interesting to note the role the Peristyle is to play later on in the novel: Mildred is so enamored with the stately structure that she confesses: "I don't love many things in this world beside Mildred Bryant, but the Peristyle is one of them." (318) She repeatedly expresses the fancy that the Peristyle has been built particularly for her. Her self-importance does not permit her to fall in love with Jack; but later, when the fire destroys large parts of the White City, she sinks into his arms: "The - the Peristyle has gone! [...] gone back - to heaven! [...] Your rivals are all gone, Jack [...]." (410) After the lofty building has gone, Mildred can safely turn away from her own lofty goals and the

young man still feels pangs of guilt since he left his father in anger and was not at hand when he needed him, coming home to Chicago only after the old man's death. The metamorphosis Jack experiences now upon visiting the Court of Honor, this ultimate place of pilgrimage, is worth another quote:

Jack's thoughts became confused. They had followed so long and yearningly out into that unknown country where his father had gone, and about which he had never before troubled himself, that he had grasped for his own consolation a belief that it was a reality; and now something in this stately and beautiful place built with men's hands made him recall vaguely the Bible declaration: -

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

It was with reverence and a species of awe that Van Tassel gazed about him. The Court of Honor had given him his first approach to a realization of the possibilities of the Celestial City. (181)

Here, the White City is "explicitly described not as the image of the promise of this world, but of the next one."¹⁷⁵ If man is able to build a place like this, Jack muses, how much more beautiful must the heavenly city built by God be, according to the biblical promise he remembers?¹⁷⁶ The White City as a shadow of the Celestial City - one cannot help but think of Meg Macleod and her City Beautiful. The place provides a spritual revelation for Jack in that he now, for the first time, becomes reconciled with his father's death and is given some peace of mind, being now able to really believe what he only tried to make himself believe all along.

freedom promised by the building's inscription and thus transform herself into a marriageable girl.

¹⁷⁵ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 145.

4.3 *The role of the fair*

As I have tried to point out, there are two principal characteristics which distinguish *Sweet Clover* from *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*.

The first is the outstanding role played by the city of Chicago. The first half of the novel is riddled with the imagery of Chicago as a person, growing from a scrawny and cheeky girl with no sense of style and propriety into a responsible young woman, a mother figure even, working ambitiously for her success, but being generous enough to share the laurels she deserved with her sisters, i.e. the rest of the United States. Even so, the World's Columbian Exposition as such is here depicted as a triumph scored by Chicago rather than by the United States as a whole. On the contrary, the United States are frequently pictured as a divided nation, the old cities of the east coast not being able to put up with the achievement attained by the new western metropolis.

The exposition itself, during the course of the novel, is imbued with a number of additional connotations. The popular success of the event, its vastness, and the enchantment it offers to its visitors are recurring motifs. Special attention must be paid to the protagonists' sense of being part of an elite, both culturally and in terms of education. Members of other cultures or classes are treated with a mild but pervasive condescension.

But perhaps the most impressive image of the fair, particularly the White City, is that of the "emblem of the mind." Aunt Love, most of the time, seems to play the role of the jester in this novel, just like the Camps do

¹⁷⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 2:9.

in *Against Odds*. Together with her dog Blitzzen, infamous for his antics, she frequently adds comic relief to the plot with her endless ramblings about the quality of her cookies. On the whole, she is the most unlikely character to coin such a phrase. Still, it precisely encapsulates the White City's quality as a spiritual place offering quasi-religious revelations to those who visit it.

Much emphasis is thus put on the spiritual character of the White City as opposed to the materialism embodied by the Midway Plaisance. The White City appears to exemplify everything that is good and pure and American, whereas the Midway in many ways represents the "other," darker side. Visiting the fair is likened to an act of worship. "Going to the Exposition is a holy experience,"¹⁷⁷ writes Carl Smith. While he may be overstating his case a little, the fact remains that the spiritual quality of the White City is one of the most lingering motifs in this novel.

¹⁷⁷ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 144.

5 William Dean Howells: *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*

William Dean Howells, along with Henry James and Mark Twain, must be numbered among the most important American writers of the late nineteenth century. His literary career spanned the time from the eve of the Civil War until after World War One. In his day, he was by many regarded as the leading American man of letters. He wrote a large number of novels and short stories and was also a significant editor and literary critic. Today, his chief importance lies in his role as one of the leading forces in the movement toward literary realism. Thus, it is not much of a surprise that a few of his works which do not fall into this category have been all but forgotten.¹⁷⁸

5.1 *The road to Altruria*

Following the success of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, published in 1888, American literature was marked by what might be termed a utopian revival. A large number of novels with a utopian character were published in the following two decades, and for various reasons, William Dean Howells felt the urge to try his hand at this genre.

His social conscience had been aroused in the late 1880s by economic events and the increasing confrontations between labor and capital. The author felt that the salvation of America lay in the relatively novel movement

of Christian Socialism, and he began giving vent to his distrust of a competitive social and economical system in several of his non-fictional texts.

As the source for Howells's convictions, Clara and Rudolf Kirk list the writings of the Unitarian minister Edward Everett Hale as well as those of William Morris and Edward Bellamy.¹⁷⁹ The chief influence, however, was Howells's passion for Tolstoy, whom he referred to as "that voice of one crying in the wilderness."¹⁸⁰ In reviewing the Russian writer's work in the 1888 Christmas edition of *Harper's Monthly*, Howells sums up Tolstoy's significance: "The whole of his testimony is against the system by which a few men win wealth and miserably waste it in idleness and luxury, and the vast mass of men are overworked and underfed."¹⁸¹

When Howells moved to Boston in late 1889, he mingled with several groups of Christian Socialists and other social protestors who numbered among their ranks various literary figures such as Edward Bellamy and Hamlin Garland.¹⁸² Although he never formally joined any of these movements, he was more than welcome since it was generally felt that he had expressed views vital to these associations in his prior novels and other writings. In the aforementioned Christmas 1888 edition of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Howells had written: "Christ and the life of Christ is at this moment inspiring the literature of the world as never before, and raising it up a witness against waste and want and war. [I]n the degree that it ignores His spirit, modern literature is artistically

¹⁷⁸ Apparently, the only in-depth study which is dedicated solely to Howells's Altrurian works is C. Kirk's *W.D. Howells, Traveler from Altruria : 1889-1894*, which was published in 1962.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. C.M. Kirk/R. Kirk, *William Dean Howells*, 128.

¹⁸⁰ W.D. Howells, "Editor's Study", in: *Harper's Monthly*, LXXVIII, Dec. 1888, 159.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

inferior."¹⁸³ Howells's contact with other thinkers who shared his views ultimately shaped in his mind the concept of a fictitious country or continent by the name of Altruria, the name being derived from the term "altruism" which was coined by French philosopher Auguste Comte in the 1850s. Howells assigned this name to an island where "altruism was translated into social manners and customs as well as into law and government. Characteristically, Howells seized upon a popular concept, attached it to a word just then entering the popular imagination, and gave it fresh meaning."¹⁸⁴

In the Christmas 1890 edition of *Harper's Monthly*, the author describes a vision of his home country in which "the old order was succeeded by the new; [...] the formerly imperfect republic of the United States of America had given place to the ideal commonwealth, the Synthetized Sympathies of Altruria." These "Sympathies," in turn, were part of the "Federation of the World, represented by a delegation eager to sacrifice their selfish interests in the Parliament of Man." The most striking aspect of this new world order, Howells observes, "was the apparent reconciliation of all principles once supposed antagonistic, the substitution of emulation for rivalry, the harmonization of personal ambitions in a sweet accord of achievement for the common good."¹⁸⁵ The key features of the model society are already plotted out in this essay, and Altruria's description was continued in the "Editor's Study" of *The Harper's Monthly* December issue of 1891. Thus, Howells by and by relocated the continent of Altruria, conceived of in his mind, into literary

¹⁸² Cf. C.M. Kirk/R. Kirk, "Introduction", in: W.D. Howells, *The Altrurian Romances*, xvii.

¹⁸³ W.D. Howells, "Editor's Study", in: *Harper's Monthly*, LXXVIII, Dec. 1888, 159.

¹⁸⁴ C.M. Kirk/R. Kirk, "Introduction", xv.

reality, ultimately making it the focus of a trilogy which was published over the long stretch of the years between 1892 and 1907.

5.2 *The Altrurian trilogy*

From November 1892 through October 1893, *Cosmopolitan Magazine* published in a series of twelve installments what were later to become the twelve chapters of *A Traveller from Altruria*.¹⁸⁶ While this work was republished in book form by Harper in 1894, its sequel was to suffer another fate. The *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, which followed between November 1893 and September 1894, were not republished between the covers of a book during Howells's lifetime. Rather, parts of them were transformed by the author into essays which he included in *Impressions and Experiences*, published in 1896.¹⁸⁷ The last six *Letters* he later turned into Part I of *Through the Eye of the Needle*, the third component of the Altrurian trilogy, published in 1907.¹⁸⁸

The trilogy's first part describes how Aristides Homos¹⁸⁹ - the eponymous traveler - comes to the United States in

¹⁸⁵ W.D. Howells, "Editor's Study", in: *Harper's Monthly*, LXXXII, Dec. 1890, 152.

¹⁸⁶ W.D. Howells used the form "traveller" instead of "traveler," and this form will be used throughout the text whenever the work's title is referred to directly.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. C.M. Kirk/R. Kirk, "Introduction", in: W.D. Howells, *The Altrurian romances*, xii.

¹⁸⁸ Since the *Letters* were not republished in book form, it is technically not correct to speak of a trilogy. However, since the three parts form a whole and are connected as far as the content is concerned, it is my opinion that it is legitimate for the purposes of this study to use the term. This view is backed by Clara and Rudolf Kirk's decision to republish all three works under the title *The Altrurian Romances*.

¹⁸⁹ Aristides was an Athenian military commander and statesman who lived approximately between 550 and 467 BC. His model behavior led his people - who incidentally later ostracized him, allegedly

order to learn about American culture and society. Altruria, an island country which has only recently been "rediscovered," had been completely cut off from civilization for centuries and during this time, isolated from any influence by outside nations, developed a model society. At some point in their history, called the "Evolution," the Altrurian citizens had simply voted the powerful capitalists out of power and had taken control of the country. They established a society based on the concept of the good for all rather than the good for the individual; it is a commonwealth where all citizens are equal, all private property is forbidden, and money does not exist. Neighborly love is the foundation of Altrurian thought, and all are cared for by all. The United States are held in high esteem by the Altrurians; this is due to the theoretical texts upon which the United States were founded - the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution - and the republican ideals these texts ostensibly embody. The citizens of Altruria feel that, of all foreign countries, the United States must be the very next nation to live through the "Evolution" to Altrurianism.

Mr. Homos has come to the country as the guest of the novel's first person narrator, a romance novelist by the name of Mr. Twelvemough, whom he visits at a New England summer hotel. Homos very soon is deeply bewildered and disappointed to find all his ideas about life in America shattered to pieces. In a country where, as he has been told, all kinds of work are honored since all men are created equal, he has to observe what in fact amounts to

because his model behavior put them under so much moral pressure - to call him "Aristides the Just." As the Greek word homos denotes "the same," Aristides Homos's name suggests the qualities of justice

a rigid class system, marked, in the small world of the summer hotel, by the social superiority the hotel guests assume over the employees and local farmers.

Upon his arrival, the visitor is introduced to a number of Twelvemough's friends and eagerly listens to their lively discussions about politics, economy, and education. He also meets some society ladies, first and foremost among them one Mrs. Makely who informs him about women's status in American society - or more precisely, about her views on it. She implores Homos to give a talk on Altruria as a fund-raiser for the local church; the traveler agrees and gives a lecture on Altrurian history and society, economy and politics. The novel ends with Homos's announcement that he would rather leave the fancy hotel and his "society" acquaintances and move in with a farmer family for a while in order to study the simple rural life and compare American agricultural methods with the ones in his home country.

The adventures of Mr. Homos are continued in parts two and three of the Altrurian trilogy. *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, as the name suggests, consists of letters Mr. Homos writes to his friend Cyril back in his home country. The *Letters* contain Homos's ruminations about Altrurian philosophy and his observations about life in the United States, particularly in New York City where he has settled. His disappointment in the American version of the concept of equality as well as his waning faith in its imminent Altrurianization are the central recurring elements in the letters.

Through the Eye of the Needle, in its first half, describes how Homos falls in love with and marries an

and equality, both considered very valuable by the Altrurians. Cf. also K.E. Eble, *William Dean Howells*, 119.

American woman by the name of Eveleth Strange, consequently taking her to his home country. The second part of the volume consists of letters Eveleth writes home to describe the life they lead together in the utopian society.

During his travels in the United States, Homos visits the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. His letter to Cyril, dated September 28, 1893, recounts this visit and Homos's strong emotional reactions to it. But first of all, in order to fully understand the Altrurian's thoughts and feelings about the World's Fair, it is necessary to take a closer look at his journey prior to this event and at the picture of the United States which this journey has formed in Homos's mind.

5.2.1 The Altrurian's first impressions

As has already been mentioned, the first-person narrator of the Altrurian trilogy's first installment is a romance novelist by the name of Twelvemough. He is in the habit of spending his summers in a rural New England hotel where many businessmen and other professionals from the east coast cities convene in order to spend a few months escaping the stifling summer heat and relaxing from their duties. Having planned to dedicate the summer months to his new story, Twelvemough is a little annoyed at first when he receives a letter from a friend introducing the Altrurian and announcing his imminent arrival. But then, curiosity prevails: Never before has he met an Altrurian; neither has any of his acquaintances, for that matter. He hopes to learn as much as possible about this interesting and unusual country which has only so recently been put

on the map, and introduces his remarkable guest to a few of his friends:

They were men whom I particularly liked, for one reason or another; they were intelligent and open-minded, and they were thoroughly American. One was a banker; another was a minister; there was a lawyer, and there was a doctor; there was a professor in one of our colleges, the political economist whom I had in view for the enlightenment of my friend; and there was a retired manufacturer [...]. (31)

These men are, with very few exceptions, never mentioned by name; rather, they can be said to serve as types embodying various parts of American society. Through the variety of their professions, they cover a wide area between clergy and business and thus provide ample material for discussions. By means of their conversations about politics, economics, education, the arts, and various other matters, Homos is presented with a kaleidoscope of American life - or at least a certain segment of American life. The traveler very soon realizes that there is neither worker nor farmer present in this illustrious circle, and when he asks questions about the conditions of these parts of society, the answers seem either vague and evasive or decidedly biased, as in the case of the manufacturer whose opinion on labor unions certainly differs from the one a steel worker or miner would venture if he were consulted on this matter.

Curious as these men are about Altruria, Homos is strangely reluctant to speak about his home country. "I am in America to learn, not to teach, and I hope you will have patience with my ignorance." (33)

And ignorance he does display - to Twelvemough and his distinguished friends, it seems their guest has taken leave of his senses. First of all, the foreigner labors under the misapprehension that, indeed, all men are created equal. Upon his arrival at the train station,

Homos insists on helping the porter with his valise; later, he cannot be talked out of helping the waitress at the hotel restaurant carry his dinner tray or shaking hands with the head waiter. Twelvemough is embarrassed beyond belief, but his guest does not in the least understand the author's reprimands. What follows is a conversation which is so exemplary of the Altrurian's perplexity and the ubiquitous misunderstandings that it deserves to be recounted in full. Describing his previous travels to his new friend, Homos remarks:

"I liked England greatly, and I liked the English, but I could not like the theory of their civilization, or the aristocratic structure of their society. It seemed to me iniquitous, for we believe that inequality and iniquity are the same in the last analysis."

At this I found myself able to say: "Yes, there is something terrible, something shocking, in the frank brutality with which Englishmen affirm the essential inequality of men. The affirmation of the essential equality of men was the first point of departure with us, when we separated from them."

"I know," said the Altrurian. "How grandly it is expressed in your glorious Declaration."

"Ah, you have read our Declaration of Independence then?"

"Every Altrurian has read that," answered my friend.

"Well," I went on smoothly, and I hoped to render what I was going to say the means of enlightening him without offence concerning the little mistake he had just made with the waitress, "of course we don't take that in its closest literality."

"I don't understand you," he said.

"Why, you know it was rather the political than the social tradition of England that we broke with, in the revolution."

"How is that?" he returned. "Didn't you break with monarchy and nobility and ranks and classes?"

"Yes, we broke with all those things."

"But I found them a part of the social as well as the political structure in England. You have no kings or nobles here. Have you any ranks or classes?"

"Well, not exactly, in the English sense. Our ranks and classes, such as we have, are what I may call voluntary."

"Oh, I understand. I suppose that from time to time certain ones among you feel the need of serving, and ask leave of the commonwealth to subordinate themselves to the rest of the state, and perform all the lowlier offices in it. Such persons must be held in peculiar honor. Is it something like that?"

"Well, no, I can't say it's quite like that. [...] I don't suppose they would serve if they could help it," I replied.

"Surely," said the Altrurian with a look of horror, "you don't mean that they are slaves!"

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" I said; "the War put an end to that. We are all free, now, black and white."

"But if they do not wish to serve, and are not held in peculiar honor for serving--" (13f.)

Twelvemough and Homos agree with regard to the "shocking" English aristocratic system. But then, the discussion seems to veer in different directions, and the two men are talking at cross purposes. Twelvemough praises the moral strength of his people who did away with the English inequality in order to replace it with the American version of equality which his visitor, on the other hand, completely fails to appreciate or even to understand. Homos detects obvious flaws in a system in which people who do not wish to serve are forced to do so out of economical reasons and are not even held in honor for their service. At the same time, without even wanting to do so, the traveler reveals some little pieces of Altrurian thought. In this instance, through the veil of his questions, we can infer that the citizens of Altruria perceive the necessity for some people to serve the rest of the community, and thus serve voluntarily as a matter of course. These little pieces of information are scattered throughout the novel in the guise of questions Homos asks and of things he does, which often are both strange and exceedingly embarrassing to his acquaintances. Finally, in the talk Homos gives during the last two chapters telling about the history and

culture of his country, all these pieces are put together to form a picture of the model society of Altruria.

It is conversations like the one quoted above which take place all the way through the novel, with varying characters participating in them, and which slowly but surely seem to drive the narrator insane. He is very proud of his country and perceives it to be run under the best of all possible political and social systems. But whenever he points out one of the United States' key features, such as the individualism he and his friends hold in very high esteem, his guest is aghast. He cannot believe that all the high ideals laid down in the theoretical foundations of this great country are, in reality, perverted into their exact opposite, and that its citizens do not even seem to perceive that something has gone wrong. The traveler keeps talking about how things are bound to change so that ultimately, the United States will adopt a system similar to the Altrurian one. But there is no thought that could be more horrible and repulsive to the upper class Americans he meets. When Homos during one conversation remarks on the obvious inconsistencies in American society, the banker retorts:

We have everything on a large scale here [...], and we rather pride ourselves on the size of our inconsistencies even. I know something of the state of things in Altruria, and, to be frank with you, I will say that it seems to me preposterous. I should say it was impossible, if it were not an accomplished fact [...]. You have hitched your wagon to a star and you have made the star go; there is never any trouble with wagons, but stars are not easily broken to harness [...]. (33f.)

Using Ralph Waldo Emerson's image of the wagon and the star, the banker illustrates that he not only thinks it to be impossible for the United States to be

Altrurianized; to him and the like of him, it is not even remotely desirable. He and his friends are perfectly happy with the way their country is run - which is only natural since it is, to all intents and purposes, they themselves or rather their financial means who are running it - and their pride and smugness will not be shattered by a dreamer come from a country full of dreamers. At some points, the banker and his friends even believe their visitor to be a fraud, an impostor trying to fool them, possibly even sent by the labor unions to undermine them.

Homos, on the other hand, has no intention of preaching. He keeps quiet about his home because he believes with perfectly frank innocence that the "Evolution," the development which has changed Altruria from a competitive into an emulative society, must come to the United States as a matter of course.

What finally urges him out of his solemn silence is a trip to the country with Mrs. Makely and Twelvemough, where they pay a visit to the Camp family's farm. Old Mr. Camp was killed in the Civil War, his widow is bedridden, their son struggles to keep the farm running, and his sister earns a little something extra by working as a seamstress for the rich vacationers up at the hotel. They barely manage to make ends meet because the soil grows poorer every year and the prices for produce are pushed down by the enormous new farms in the western part of the country.

Mrs. Makely, ever certain that those who suffer are to blame for their own fate, is sure that the New England farmers fare so badly because they are too lazy to work as hard as they used to do, and also because "the farmers' daughters want pianos, and the farmers' sons want buggies." (81) During their stay at the Camp house,

Mrs. Makely never refrains from frankly venturing her opinions; the reader gains the impression that she does not even mean to be unfriendly, but she is utterly convinced that she is right and that the suffering farmers could be as well-to-do as she is if only they would invest their capital more wisely. It becomes fairly obvious that she has not conceived of these opinions herself, but is just repeating parrot-fashion what her husband and society friends tell her over and over again. Her companions react in quite different ways to her ramblings.

Young Mr. Camp is infuriated at her attitude. He does not even have any capital to invest, since the income yielded by the farm is hardly large enough to feed his family, and to make things worse, the home is mortgaged, so the family has to live in constant dread that the bank will foreclose it. Conceivably, the thought of wanting either pianos or buggies enters neither his nor his sister's mind.

While Twelvemough agrees with his lady friend in his heart of hearts, he is embarrassed at her outspokenness; what both he and she perceive to be nothing but the truth, as soon as it is voiced by her, seems to shed an unfavorable light on his home country and the way it is run. Also, he would like for her to keep her silence in order to give the Altrurian an opportunity to talk about how these matters are handled in his own country: "This perverse woman [...] would rather hear the sound of her own voice than any other, even if she were dying, as she would call it, to hear the other." (108)

And Homos comes to realize during this visit what he has suspected all along: Poor people in America have had to live like Altrurians for generations. They have to help each other, look out for each other, thus forming a microcosm of a commonwealth within the framework of

American society. It is here, in poor people's homes, where Homos finds that the seeds of Altrurian thought are germinating. And it is the poor people who later respond most favorably to his talk about Altruria, while Homos's society acquaintances feel outraged and threatened by his account of the "Evolution."

His well-to-do listeners, on the other hand, cannot quite believe what they hear. They all share the belief that it is their Christian duty to love their neighbor, but they would not go so far as to actually share their riches with said neighbor. Altrurian conditions, they unanimously declare, would be altogether impossible to realize in America, and anyway, they are much too engrossed in their own problems to waste much thought on improving American society, which, in their eyes, does not need much improvement at all. Mrs. Makely best sums up their way of thinking when she reacts to the Altrurian notion of equality by exclaiming, "I think that is simply impossible. There *must* be rich and there *must* be poor. There always have been, and there always will be. [...] Didn't Christ himself say, 'The poor ye have always with you?'" (87f.)

Howells's tongue-in-cheek description of the elite's "problems" gives a special edge to the contrast between Altruria and America. The Altrurian traveler is desperate to get his message across: He feels that it is only a matter of time before America will be Altrurianized, since it is simply human nature to live the Altrurian way of life. His American acquaintances beg to differ. Their opinion of human nature has much more to do with capital and competition than with neighborly love and mutual kindness.

5.2.2 Mr. Homos at the fair

Letters of an Altrurian Traveller consists of five letters Aristides Homos writes home to a friend by the name of Cyril. As has been mentioned above, *Cosmopolitan Magazine* originally published eleven letters, the last six of which were later reworked into the first part of *Through the Eye of the Needle*. The major share of the letters is postmarked from New York City, where Homos apparently has settled in a hotel close to Central Park in order to explore the city. In great detail he describes to his friend the streets and avenues of the city, the stately brownstone mansions in the center of Manhattan and the shabby tenement buildings close to the East and Hudson Rivers, the ever-present contrast between rich and poor he observes even in Central Park, where he studies the poorer people watch their rich fellow citizens swoop by in their expensive carriages. He bewails the ugliness, the bad smells, and the dirt he encounters everywhere, and he contemplates how easy it would be to improve the deplorable state of affairs by applying the Altrurian system.

Letter number two, however, differs in its tone from the traveler's other epistles. It seems that Aristides Homos has seen the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel when paying a visit to the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago.

Chicago itself does not impress him at all, he calls it "only a Newer York, an ultimated Manhattan, the realized ideal of that largeness, loudness and fastness, which New York has persuaded the Americans is metropolitan." (198) But the Fair City, as he calls it, offers more than a sparkle of hope for the future:

I feel as if I had caught a glimpse of the glorious capitals which will whiten the hills and shores of the east and the borderless plains of the west, when the New York and the Newer York of today shall seem to all the future Americans as impossible as they would seem to any Altrurian now. (198)

To him, the White City looks as if an Altrurian city had been miraculously relocated to the shores of Lake Michigan, and therefore he perceives the White City to be the bud of the Altrurian miracle.

Following the Americans' quasi-Altrurian effort to abolish slavery which culminated in the Civil War, Homos writes to his friend Cyril, the construction of the Fair was "the first great triumph of Altrurian principles among this people in a work of peace," (199) doubly so because no financial profit was expected from the enterprise. On the contrary: The capitalists who provided the money, Homos is pleased to report, put the whole affair into the hands of artists and architects who were free to create beauty for beauty's sake. In a spirit of cooperation, all artists worked together to create the Fair City, which thus became a truly Altrurian endeavor. However, the Exposition can hardly be termed an American enterprise, since Homos notes: "As yet the governmental function is so weak here that the national part in the work was chiefly obstructive, and finally null; and when it came to this there remained an opportunity for the arts, unlimited as to means and unhampered by conditions." The artists made full use of this opportunity for a fraction of the money they might have gained in realizing other projects, working "for the pleasure of it, the pride of it, the pure good of it." (201)

In his letter, Homos very clearly recalls his first impression upon entering the White City: "I was at home once more, and my heart overflowed with patriotic rapture in this strange land [...]." (201) He goes on to describe the beauty of the Court of Honor by night, the enchanting atmosphere created by the electric illumination. The splendor and harmony of the architecture evoke strong emotions in the traveler, and the gorgeousness of the majestic Peristyle adds "a divine heartache to [his] ecstasy [sic]." (202)

Like the two little pilgrims as well as Clover Bryant and her friends, Homos feels spiritually uplifted: "I call the effect creation because it is divinely beautiful," (202) he writes, and contemplates that the City is "a foretaste of heaven." (199) He describes how the ground was literally re-formed to shape the exposition grounds, thereby again alluding to a creational process. For the first time since he arrived in America, he feels happy. He praises the beauty and perfection, the safety and the exemplary sanitary conditions, the general comfort and cleanliness and discipline of the place, everything so very much like in Altruria.

At the same time he is deeply disappointed because his American acquaintances do not see his point that the underlying principle of the White City could very well and easily be transferred to any other city. They believe that a regular business city, a place "where there was something going on besides the pleasure of the eyes and the edification of the mind," (204) could never be operated under such conditions - despite Homos's reassurance that that is "all that our Altrurian cities are for." (204) However, his message is lost upon them, as he intimates; the Americans repeatedly question where the money comes from which is needed to build such

centers of beauty and pleasure, and "we are alike driven to despair when I try to explain that we have no money, and should think it futile and impious to have any." (204)

As for the Midway Plaisance, Homos approves of it as well, but for a comparatively unusual reason: It is a giant "money-making contrivance" (206) and therefore, by its mere existence, sharpens the contrast between itself and the pure beauty of the White City. The Midway, he feels, represents "the competitive life of the present epoch," (205) while the White City embodies the promise of the future, a future when the United States will finally have adopted the Altrurian principles and ideals.

After having thus portrayed his own first impression of the exposition, Homos, in his letter, recalls an evening spent with one of his American friends, the banker he first met at the summer hotel during his stay with Twelvemough. They discuss the respective merits of capitalism and Altrurianism, and again, the banker is bewildered at the notion of a country without money. He does not understand how public buildings in Altruria are funded or "how [the Altrurians] paid the piper." (206) Homos tries his best to explain, but again, it seems the discussion runs into a dead end. "When I answered that as each one of us was secured by all against want, every one could freely give his labor, without money and without price, and the piper could play for the pure pleasure of playing, he looked stupefied and said incredulously, 'Oh, come, now!'" (206) As on previous occasions, this concept is simply beyond grasp for the average American mind, or so it must seem to the Altrurian exile.

The men then turn their conversation towards the second half of the "twin fetishes of our barbarous worship," (207) as the banker refers to the notions of competition

and individuality. He insists that the exposition is the ultimate fruit of individuality, from that of the capitalists down to that of the various artists.

Homos, on the other hand, when confronted with this argument, deplores the "heartbreaking obliteration of individuality" (207) that manifests itself in the World's Columbian Exposition. He complains that the names of the individual workers who constructed the buildings and fairgrounds are nowhere to be found, as they certainly would be in Altruria. The banker retorts that one can "find *their* names on the pay-rolls, where, I've no doubt, they preferred to have them," (208) but the foreigner is not satisfied. It is virtually the only flaw he finds about the exposition that it is thus "dehumanized." The Boston-born banker, quite outmaneuvered by the Altrurian's logic, is overjoyed to hear this complaint as it gives him the opportunity to steer the debate away from this unpleasant topic:

Why, I have gone about the last three days inwardly bowed down before Chicago in the most humiliating fashion. I've said to myself that our eastern fellows did half the thing, perhaps the best half; but then I had to own it was Chicago that imagined letting them do it, that imagined the thing as a whole, and I had to give Chicago the glory. When I looked at it I had to forgive Chicago Chicago, but now that you've set me right about the matter, and I see that the whole thing is dehumanized, I shall feel quite easy, and I shall not give Chicago any more credit than is due.
(209)

Here, the bitter conflict between Chicago and the old east coast centers of culture, which has played such an eminent role in *Sweet Clover*, crops up again. Homos, the foreigner and outsider, sees the matter from a different point of view. He is not so much concerned with regional conflicts and discrepancies; however, he believes "from what I have seen of your country [...] that no other

American city could have brought this to pass" (209) - unfortunately, the motives for his opinion remain shrouded. The banker goes on and on to describe how Bostonians or New Yorkers would have tackled the organization of the Fair in a different manner, but Homos, for obvious reasons, cannot quite follow him.

The two men talk about the mixed crowd that can be observed at the fair, and then suddenly Homos interrupts his account of the debate with the banker in order to relate to the addressee of the letter an observation that emerges again and again in his various missives, namely the obvious inequality between the American people, despite all assertions to the contrary, and their simultaneous indifference to it. Poorer visitors who have brought their lunch in paper bags are a case in point for Homos; they meekly watch their rich fellow citizens who dine in fancy restaurants, unruffled and without greed or jealousy, or so it seems.

Everywhere the economic inequality is as passively accepted as if it were a natural inequality, like the difference in height or strength, or as if it were something of immemorial privilege, like birth and title in the feudal countries of Europe. Yet, if one of these economically inferior Americans were told that he was not the peer of any and every other American, he would resent it as the grossest insult, such is the power of the inveterate political illusion in which the nation has been bred. (214)

Judging from the entire corpus of the Altrurian's letters, this seems to be the feature of life in the United States which is most puzzling to him. He simply does not see himself able to cope with the blatant incongruence of theory and empirical reality. While every American believes in the "political illusion" that all men are created equal, no one seems to have the slightest

intention of enforcing this claim or even of so much as publicly pointing out the discrepancies.

Returning to his report on the conversation with the banker, Homos is happy to have found out that the two men have at least one thing in common: They both share the hope that the classicist beauty of the White City will have a lasting aesthetic effect on American civilization. But here, common ground already ends again. The banker ventures that his country is in need of "some standard of taste." (216) But the foreign visitor is sure that the banker is oversimplifying the matter. He points out that

until there was some enlightened municipal or national control of the matter, no excellence of example [can] avail, but [...] the classicism of the Fair City [will] become, among a wilful [sic] and undisciplined people, a fad with the rich and a folly with the poor, and not a real taste with either class. (216)

Rather, he hopes the effect of the White City will be of a different kind:

Nature is picturesque, but what man creates should be beautiful, or else it is inferior. Since the Greeks, no people have divined this but the Altrurians, until now [...], and I do not believe that [the White City] will have any lasting effect with you unless you become Altrurianized. The highest quality of beauty is a spiritual quality. (218)

The banker is confused and asks Homos what the spiritual quality of the White City might be. Homos answers:

The quality of self-sacrifice in the capitalists who gave their money, and in the artists who gave their talent without hope of material return, but only for the pleasure of authorizing and creating beauty that shall last forever in the memory of those it has delighted. [...]
[...I]t will remain still in the hearts of your great people. An immortal principle, higher than use,

higher even than beauty, is expressed in it, and the time will come when they will look back upon it, and recognize in it the first embodiment of the Altrurian idea among them, and will cherish it forever in their history, as the earliest achievement of a real civic life. (218f.)

By "spiritual," as we can infer from this quote, Homos does not so much refer to a spirituality in the religious sense of the word which found such clear expression in Burnett's and Burnham's novels, where the White City was likened to the Heavenly City. For an Altrurian, such a comparison is redundant since the earthly images of a Heavenly City have taken material shape already in every single city in Altruria. Rather, the spiritual quality he speaks of is the Altrurian bud which is growing right in the center of American culture and civilization. Like John Holt in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel, Homos believes that the most significant fruit of the exposition, developing out of the bud he is observing now, will be harvested by coming generations. Homos's friend, the banker, will have nothing of these predictions for the American future, but according to the Altrurian, there is no doubt that the White City is the cornerstone a new America is to be built upon.

5.3 The voice of William Dean Howells

As Clara and Rudolf Kirk have established,¹⁹⁰ the Altrurian writings were an opportunity for William Dean Howells to voice his displeasure at certain developments in American society which took place during the late 1880s and early 1890s.

¹⁹⁰ C.M. Kirk/R. Kirk, *William Dean Howells*, 133ff.

Howells was outraged at the conviction of the alleged agitators of Haymarket Square. It was not that he subscribed to the views of the anarchist movement; rather, he felt that the trial had been unjust and that the convicts had been taken to court not for murder but for being adherents to a school of thought which made the majority of Americans squirm. In a letter to George W. Curtis, editorial writer for *Harper's Weekly*, Howells fumed: "Civilization cannot afford to give martyrs to a bad cause; and if the cause of these men is good, what an awful mistake to put them to death!"¹⁹¹ An open letter to the *New York Tribune* to the same effect was generally misunderstood by the public who, as a consequence, accused him of fighting for the cause of the anarchists and socialists. While the author was, indeed, a strong adherent of socialist ideas, he now thought it necessary to exercise more caution in the decision of where and how to voice his beliefs.¹⁹²

When John Brisben Walker, who had recently become the publisher of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and was hoping to turn the magazine into an instrument for social reform, suggested that Howells write a series of sociological essays, the latter accepted. Many years later, in 1909 when he was editing the Library Edition of his works, he wrote a short bibliographical note as a preface to *A Traveller from Altruria* and *Through the Eye of the Needle*; in the note, he refers to these works as "fables" and the original mode of their publishing as a "sociological serial." There can thus be no doubt that Howells made use of Aristides Homos and his acquaintances to put forward thoughts and arguments which it would have

¹⁹¹ Cited after: J.W. Crowley, 7.

¹⁹² Nevertheless, in 1906 he would be publicly supporting the socialist candidate for presidency, Eugene Debs. Cf. K.E. Eble, 120f.

been impossible or at least unwise for him to submit as his own. If Homos cannot be called the author's *alter ego*, it is safe nevertheless to describe him as his mouthpiece.

A few examples may serve as evidence for this link. After Howells had heard of the Homestead incidence - a strike of iron and steel workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania, which ended in bloodshed and led to casualties on both sides - he wrote a letter to his father documenting his outrage. Although he sympathized with the steel workers' cause, he felt that the means they were using to gain their end was entirely wrong. Labor, he wrote, "has the majority of votes and can vote the laws it wants, and it won't, but prefers to break the laws we share."¹⁹³ He then immediately incorporated these views into the Altrurian essays which *Cosmopolitan* would be starting to publish a few months later. The banker, who appears to be among the more liberal of Twelvemough's friends, shares his views about workers with his friends:

They are in the majority, the immense majority, if you count the farmers, and they prefer to behave as if they were the hopeless minority. They say they want an eight-hour law, and every now and then they strike, and try to fight it. Why don't they vote it? They could make it the law in six months, by such overwhelming numbers, that no one would dare to evade or defy it. They can make any law they want, but they prefer to break such laws as we have. (128f.)

Here, the banker serves as a thinly disguised spokesperson for Howells, repeating almost literally what the author himself had written to his father.

For the most part, however, it is Aristides Homos more often than any other character who directly voices or

¹⁹³ Cited after C.M. Kirk/R. Kirk, *William Dean Howells*, 134.

comments on Howells's thoughts. In the first of his letters to Cyril, Homos observes: "I think that the old American maxim that it will all come out right in the end, has less and less acceptance. Some of them are beginning to fear that it will come out wrong in the end, if they go their old gait [...]." (189) A few years earlier, in 1888, Howells had written in a letter to Henry James that "after fifty years of optimistic content with 'civilization' and its ability to come out all right in the end, I now abhor it, and feel that it is coming out all wrong in the end, unless it bases itself anew on a real equality."¹⁹⁴ And it is precisely this equality which he has his Altrurian traveler preach.

In the trilogy's first part, Twelvemough, try as he might, is unable to distance himself from the Altrurian's strange views and practices; this is no surprise since, "as the reader slowly realizes, Mr. Homos and Mr. Twelvemough are two sides of Howells himself."¹⁹⁵ Ultimately, therefore, the Altrurian novels are the minutes of Howells's dialogues with himself. His strong social concerns during the late 1880s and early 1890s directly endangered his novel writing. Since he saw no way to safely vent this conflict in his novels, he dramatized it in the Altrurian essays.

In 1876, William Dean Howells had visited the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and had recorded his impressions in an essay with the title "A Sennight at the Centennial" which the *Atlantic Monthly* published in the same year. Seventeen years later, he again visited a world's fair. In a letter dated September 20, 1893, he wrote to his wife about the experience: "Last night we

¹⁹⁴ Cited after J.W. Crowley, 11.

¹⁹⁵ C.M. Kirk, *W.D. Howells*, 4.

went for our first sight of the fair, and we are simply in rapture and despair! Nothing like it was ever dreamed of. [...] We had beautiful moonlight for our launch ride on the lagoon; and closed with coffee at the out door tables in Old Vienna."¹⁹⁶ Although this is the total of information that can be gathered about Howells's personal feelings about the World's Columbian Exposition, it is clear that he used this visit to the Old Vienna Café as an inspiration for Homos's trip to the same place; the letter the Altrurian traveler writes to his friend is dated a mere eight days after the letter Howells wrote to his wife, and it was published three months later, so supposably, the impression was still very fresh with the author. As has been demonstrated above, Howells used the means of his Altrurian "fables" to voice his own thoughts and opinions about outstanding events in his country, and there is no reason to assume that this is not the case with regard to the Chicago exposition. Howells uses Homos to express his hopes that cultural and "spiritual" values (in the sense of the word which I have described above) will supplant the materially-minded orientations of American society, or, for that matter, civilization as a whole. In the World's Columbian Exposition, the author, like his creature, sees the cornerstone for such a development; to him, it embodies a spirit of cooperation, of the creation of beauty and art for their own sake. "The much-publicized Chicago Fair gave Howells the perfect example of socialism in action [...]."¹⁹⁷ It appears to Howells as if a small piece of his Altrurian fantasy had indeed taken shape in reality. Although a few other questions are introduced - the conflict between Chicago and her sister cities, the stark contrast between the

¹⁹⁶ T. Wortham (ed.), *W.D. Howells: Selected Letters*, 50.

¹⁹⁷ C. Kirk, *W.D. Howells*, 98.

Midway and the White City - this clearly is Howells's key issue with the Fair.

6 **Emma Murdoch Van Deventer: *Against Odds***

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, the World's Columbian Exposition has served as the scenery for a number of popular crime novels. Although most of them have dropped from cultural memory during the course of the last one hundred years, it may prove interesting in this context to have a look at how they made use of the great event and why this was the case. As an example, I will use the novel *Against Odds : A Detective Story* by Emma Murdoch Van Deventer.

Only very little biographical information exists about the author. It may be assumed that she was commercially quite successful as a detective novelist between 1885 and 1912 since a large number of her crime novels were published during that period, all of them by Chicago publishing houses.¹⁹⁸ Many of these novels were later reprinted by British publishers for European audiences. In his volume *Fairground Fiction : Detective Stories of the World's Columbian Exposition*, Donald K. Hartman includes a facsimile of the British edition of Van Deventer's text and notes that the original edition, published by Laird & Lee of Chicago, carries the subtitle *A Romance of the Midway Plaisance*. It may be speculated that the term "Midway Plaisance" carried some connotations for American audiences which could not be presupposed for their British counterparts; at any rate, it is striking that the two different subtitles place the novel in a different genre, respectively: Whereas British

¹⁹⁸ For a detailed bibliography of Van Deventer's fictional works, cf. D.K. Hartman, 1992, 253f.

readers bought a "detective story," the same novel was sold to American readers as a "romance." It seems noteworthy as well that Van Deventer published all of her novels under the pen name "Lawrence L. Lynch," a name that gave her a male identity and also sounded aggressive and mysterious at the same time.

The story of *Against Odds*, while simple enough to read, is tremendously difficult to sum up; a large number of characters is involved in what seem to be different criminal cases at first. Conveniently, all the threads run together in the end, and secret service agents Carl Masters and Dave Brainerd eventually manage to solve all mysteries.¹⁹⁹ The novel is set exclusively on the grounds of the Columbian Exposition, both in the White City and on Midway Plaisance, and their immediate surroundings of hotels and boarding houses.

Masters, from whose point of view the story unfurls, has been sent to the World's Columbian Exposition together with his colleague Brainerd in order to find and arrest a criminal dubbed "Greenback Bob," who has been suspected of various counterfeiting offences, as well as a French swindler by the name of Delbras of whom only a vague description exists. Also, the two detectives are supposed to keep their eyes open for a young English nobleman called Carroll Rae who fled his home country after a fight with his half brother, Sir Hugo Rae.

After saving June Jenrrys, a young and pretty New York society lady and heiress, from an incident involving two Turkish palanquin bearers, Masters feels responsible for her and tries to protect her from two stalkers, one being

¹⁹⁹ These names seem to be a rather crude attempt at describing the characters - while Masters is the one who is drawn to action and thereby "masters" the dangerous situations, Brainerd is the "brain" who, through clever combination, comes up with the right solutions.

a persistent French suitor by the name of Voisin, the other a mysterious brunette woman who attempts to impose her acquaintance on June. But there are more new encounters afoot for Masters: He meets a young member of the Columbian Guard, the force which at the same time serves as guards and guides on the fairground. The young man is very secretive indeed, and while being personable and friendly, does not want to reveal his name to Masters, suggesting that he enrolled in the Columbian Guard under an assumed name for personal reasons. Moreover, through a series of absurd accidents, Masters' fate becomes entangled with that of the elderly and simple country couple Adam and Hannah Camp.

As if all of these responsibilities were not enough for the protagonist, there is more crime in the works: An Austrian diamond merchant is robbed of his most precious exhibits, and Gerald Trent, a young rich man from Boston and fiancé to June Jenry's friend Hilda O'Neil, mysteriously disappears, possibly kidnapped and held hostage because of his flashy diamond accessories. June's brunette stalker - Masters has a hunch that she is in fact a man disguised as a woman - is through various circumstances brought in connection with the diamond robbery and is also witnessed to be involved in a nightly attack on Masters' mysterious Columbian Guard friend. The guard, while he is fighting for his life in a hospital, turns out to be a young man by the name of Lossing, the same man who proposed to June Jenry several months ago and was rejected due to a misunderstanding which, induced by his rival Monsieur Voisin, caused June to believe Lossing to be only after her fortune. Now that the lovers are reunited, they combine their forces with Masters in solving the diamond robbery and finding young Gerald Trent.

When one of Trent's kidnappers finally steps forth in a letter and demands a ransom in order to have the means to break free from the clique of criminals, Masters finds out that this letter's handwriting is identical with that of the notes the brunette has been pestering June with. A few hours later a young man is found murdered in a back alley just a few blocks off the fairgrounds - Masters not only identifies him as the "brunette" but also finds the stolen diamonds sewn into his belt. A search and surveillance of the surrounding houses, where the clique's nest is suspected to be, proves fruitless. It is only through the curiosity and daring of the simple-minded and straightforward farmer woman Hannah Camp that the secret service agents finally hit upon the clandestine hideout where young Trent is kept drugged and hidden. The criminal clique is arrested, among their numbers being both Greenback Bob and Delbras; the latter turns out to be the infamous and cunning Monsieur Voisin who had plans of kidnapping June in order to force her to marry him, thereby securing her fortune for himself.

As far as marrying is concerned: Now that the criminals have been arrested, there is only one shadow left on the lives of all parties involved. Lossing does not want to propose to June for a second time since he fears to be accused by June's ward and aunt Charlotte for being after June's inheritance. Fortunately, Masters discovers that Lossing is in fact Carroll Rae, the fugitive and impoverished English nobleman, and it is even more fortunate that Masters's boss, in the meantime, has received a letter to the effect that Sir Hugo Rae has passed away and Carroll has come into his title and fortune, thus being financially independent and eligible to marry June.

6.1 *The depiction of the fairgrounds*

Emma Murdoch Van Deventer's novel features minute descriptions of the Columbian fairgrounds; although this is mere speculation, it seems evident that the author must have visited the event herself.

Even though both the White City and the Midway Plaisance are colorfully depicted throughout the novel, it is the Midway Plaisance which receives the narrator's special attention. The White City is praised for its beauty and the mere miracle of its existence, but only in passing; the Midway is the place where most of the novel's action takes place. The various characters - themselves quite a motley, international crowd - revel in the conglomeration of different cultures. However, the Midway is not only an exciting but also an exceedingly dangerous place, due to two reasons which it is not always easy to discern from one another. For one thing, it is the place where the criminals prepare and carry out their schemes; but what is perhaps even more noteworthy, the same conglomeration of foreign cultures which serves as the place's main attraction also provides a foundation for intense suspiciousness bordering on xenophobia.

Early on in the story, the Turkish Bazaar - located approximately at the center of Midway - becomes the scene of crime where Greenback Bob and his accomplices deal out their counterfeit money to the unsuspecting Camps (cf. 18ff.). The crowd and the many "Arabs" in their foreign clothes make it easy for the thugs to simply vanish into the throng after the deal has been struck. Later on, the Bazaar and the Street in Cairo are described as hideouts where the members of the criminal clique, disguised as Orientals, blend in with the Arabs in order to distract

and confuse the secret agents. When Masters and Brainerd finally manage to track Delbras to the Midway, they observe him standing in front of a Turkish theater, hustling in the crowds to see the show, and "disguised" as a Turk by wearing a red fez (104). But he disappears just as quickly through a secret door inside the theater, and the two detectives are none the wiser. Delbras, being black-haired and dark-complexioned, apparently does not have a hard time passing for a member of the Mediterranean show crews. This, of course, implies that the show crews and exhibitors willingly or at least unquestioningly throw open their doors to criminals and thus abet them, presumably for a generous amount of "baksheesh." It further insinuates that, ultimately, the Orientals are of the same ilk as the criminals - a notion that is one of the novel's key elements and shall be further investigated below.

At any rate, Masters soon realizes that this circumstance "means that [...], in addition to the task of watching all the European faces in search of our men, we shall have the added perplexity of peering under the hoods, turbans, fezes, etc., of all Midway." (105) It remains unclear how Masters manages to distinguish between "European" faces and American ones, as well as in what way a Turkish face is not "European," but the two agents have to face the problem nevertheless,

that, given the open sesame of the temples and pagodas, the booths and pavilions, the villages, with their ins and outs, and our tricky and elusive trio would have an advantage against which it would be difficult to contend. [...] Those Midway throngs made veritable sanctuary for a fleeing criminal [...]. (106)

The infamous brunette retreats to the Turkish theater in order to change her costumes. Billy, a boy hired by the secret service agents to assist them in their

observations, watches the brunette disappear behind a curtained door; a little later, "a young Turk came out, smallish, with a little dudey moustache." (131) This, as the reader will learn later on, is Harry, one of Delbras's accomplices who frequently dresses up as a brunette woman.

The Midway, recurrently throughout the novel, is described as a "labyrinth," full of "intricacies." On a visit to Cairo Street, Masters watches Delbras, again cleverly disguised, walk through a back door apparently not open to the public as it is guarded by a "tall Oriental." (202) Behind this door, open only for a brief instant, Masters spots the face of Greenback Bob. The fair's entertainment center is thus depicted as a "sinister bazaar of aliens."²⁰⁰

But not only the Midway Plaisance is susceptible to crime in all its variations. There must be some reason, after all, why such a strong police and secret service force has been sent to Chicago in the first place. Prior to the big event, Masters's boss states that "they are going to want a lot of good men at that World's Fair [...]." (8) The reason is obvious: "To the man who can speak several tongues, and is an adept at disguise, this Fair, with its citizens from every clime, will be a better place for concealment than London, Paris, and New York rolled into one." (43) What makes the Midway first and foremost among the fair's dangerous places is its labyrinthine character, so that "if there's a place that is better than all other places in which to hide one's self, that place is the Midway," as Brainerd cleverly concludes (59).

²⁰⁰ C. Smith, "Foreword", in: D.K. Hartman, *Fairground Fiction*, xiii.

The security officials devise a "splendid system by which the White City [is] to be watched over and protected" (29); however, the reader is not bothered with too much detail about this splendid system. In addition to the Columbian Guard and the regular police forces, there are "three hundred men, trained detectives" (40) on duty. Their tasks include not only the obvious responsibility of finding and arresting criminals but also of maintaining a perfectly peaceful and serene picture for the public. After the diamond robbery in the Austrian pavilion, the secret service chief warns his staff: "These are not the things that we like to let the public into. It wouldn't harmonize." (41) Therefore, "no word of the robbery must reach the vigilant reporters who [are] everywhere in search of news." (46) When Masters rides the Intramural Railway, he has the opportunity to take a look at the fairgrounds as a whole: "I gaze off upon the blue and shining waters of the lake, and realize fully for the first time the awful incongruity between all this stateliness and beauty and our mission in its midst - a criminal hunt!"²⁰¹ (54)

It seems strange that the detective should be so surprised about this apparent "incongruity" when he himself has given many reasons why the Columbian Exposition might be a paradise for criminals. Statistically speaking, a certain amount of crime had to be expected from an event on this scale. The mere number of people convening in one place made it highly improbable that the crowd consisted only of upright and honest citizens. At any rate, the fair is here pictured

²⁰¹ This quote is taken from one of the three passages where the narrator leaps from the past into the present tense. These passages are not particularly outstanding in the sense of an unusual amount of thrill or suspense which could justify the use of the *praesens historicum*. Thus, the reason for this technique remains unclear.

as a fruit which looks beautiful on the outside but is indeed rotten to the core.

One fact that certainly has to be wondered at is how the criminals manage to blend in so well with the Turks and Arabs. For one thing, of course, their looks prove advantageous; in keeping with every cliché about criminals, they all have dark skin and hair. But for Masters, the case is clear for another reason. When his colleague wonders how the gang gains access to "those foreign holy of holies," (149) he simply answers: "Backsheesh." "They're here for money, and they won't let any pass them - see?" (150)

There is a clear xenophobic if not racist stratum running underneath the whole of the novel. The foreign exhibitors - or at least the majority of them - are depicted as virtually indistinguishable from the criminals Masters is looking for. All of the statements which I would like to term "racist" fall into one of two possible categories, depending on who actually utters these statements.

Adam and Hannah Camp are farmers from some unmentioned rural part of the country. They talk with a strong accent which immediately sets them off from all other characters, and apparently they did not receive much of a formal education. It is therefore comparatively easy for the modern reader to put their opinions into an appropriate context. After their first visit to "Middleway Pleasants," as Camp prefers to call it (6), he ventures his opinion as follows: "[T]hey're some, them furren fellers; only it seems to me they ain't no need of so many of them niggers of all shades, dressed up like Callathumpians on Fourth of July, and standin' round in everybody's way." (6) His wife dismisses his fervent interest in belly dancing by comparing the dancers to her old hen: "an' if that hen can't take more honest dancin'

steps than the hull posse of them hourys, as they call 'em. All the dancin' they know they'd'a'learnt from snakes and eels, an' sich like wrigglin' things." (196) Since it is the function of the Camps to serve as some sort of clowns in this novel, from time to time offering comic relief from the thrill and suspense, there is not too much emphasis put on their opinions.

The second category of racist statements is made by the other, more educated characters, and it is those that fill the modern reader with a decidedly higher degree of uneasiness.

An incident in the second chapter of the novel provides occasion for repeated attacks on the Turkish showmen. June is almost run over by two overenthusiastic Turkish palanquin bearers. Masters comes to the rescue:

"You fellows are not running in a tramway, Mr. Morocco, and you'll find yourselves switched on to a side-track if you try the monopoly business on free American citizens - see!" The last word, emphasized with a sharp shove to the right, was easily comprehended by the glowering sons of Allah, and they moved on, silent, but darting black glances from under their heavy brows. (25)

These "sons of Allah" are in the course of the story referred to by various characters as "foreign brutes" (68) and "poor benighted men of Turkey" (92). Monsieur Voisin, although he later turns out to be the criminal Delbras, has his verdict brought in beforehand, albeit for a different reason. June's Puritan spinster aunt Ann, otherwise a splendid and amiable lady, despises her niece's suitor: "He is a foreigner, with the soft, insincere ways that I cannot like nor trust." (98)

Generally speaking, the central core of characters - Masters, Brainerd, Lossing, June, Aunt Ann - are not in favor of the "foreigners" at the fair. They are something

to be gaped at but not to be meddled with. June is appalled by the "horrid Esquimaux band" (85), and the quantities of interest bestowed on the various attractions on Midway depend on their degree of "foreignness":

The glassworks [i.e. the Libby Glass Co. exhibit], interesting as they assuredly were, we passed by as being not sufficiently foreign; and the Irish Industrial Village and Blarney Castle were voted among the things to be taken seriously, and not in the spirit of Midway. [Aunt Ann] was full of interest in the little Javanese, and we entered their enclosure, feeling sure that here, at least, was something novel. (195)

Some exhibits are too close to the visitors' every-day experience (for example the glassworks) and thus not exotic enough, some are rated "serious," for instance the Irish Village. But the "spirit of Midway" calls for something else, something "novel" offering some thrill to the tourists.

The descriptions of Cairo Street, the Turkish Bazaar and the Javanese village form a stark contrast with the pavilions of the US States, where every tiny little detail evokes adjectives such as "hospitable," "home-like," "restful," and "charming" (59).

The portrayal of the White City proper, on the other hand, is very detailed but at the same time remains on a fairly superficial level. The different buildings surrounding the Court of Honor as well as the lagoons and State pavilions are repeatedly depicted; the City as a whole is referred to as "beautiful," "[f]airer than any dream," (6) and "fairylike". Masters notes, "'I tell you it's all a miracle, a nineteenth-century miracle!'" (43) But all those remarks are made off-handedly and casually; they seem to be mere fillers between the various action

episodes. There are no apparent emotions or deeper thoughts connected to the event by any of the characters.

6.2 *The role of the World's Columbian Exposition*

In *Against Odds*, it might be said that the World's Columbian Exposition as such plays no role of consequence. To be more precise, and maybe more fair to the author and her intentions also, it merely serves as a colorful and flashy backdrop, a cardboard piece of scenery, and it remains just as flat. The sensationalist crime and romance story that takes place in this scenery could basically have been set anywhere else instead. To be sure, there was no other event at that time which could have provided an author of any kind of novels with a backdrop more colorful and exciting. People from all over the world came together in one spot, as visitors or as "exhibits," and this crowd, most likely, consisted of nefarious elements as well as of honest citizens. Although the series of accidents taking place in Van Deventer's novel are a tad too ludicrous to seem credible in the least, one can hardly imagine any other event or location where it would have been even remotely likely to have a French marriage impostor, a New York society lady, a Puritan aunt, a sweet but dumb old country couple, a gang of kidnapers and diamond robbers, and an impoverished English lord all in one place.

The event obviously provided the author with some colorful motifs, but she let the opportunity pass and transformed her impressions into a run-of-the-mill dime novel. Several inconsistencies in the plot leave the reader confused: In a note to the "brunette," June

addresses her as "Miss B." (110); later on, the notes she receives in return are signed "H.A.". Farmer Camp refers to his wife as "M'riar," (51) but she herself recognizes one of the criminals "as sure as my name's Hanner Camp." (231) The narrative agent, which is Masters throughout the novel, is decidedly not present when June and Lossing, in a *tête-a-tête* in a gondola on the lagoon, pledge their love for each other, but this scene is colorfully described nonetheless. Here, the convention of the first person narrator is broken with in order to be able to present the reader with the heart-rending and melodramatic love scene which would have had to be omitted otherwise.

Admittedly, it was probably not the author's objective to use the Chicago World's Fair as anything other than a splashy backdrop. Rather, the novel was intended to be sold - whether as a "romance" or a "detective story" was of no further consequence, and the market value of the international event could not be underestimated. Van Deventer "exploit[s] the special possibilities of the fair - including the ready-made interest in it - as a setting for an intricately convoluted plot that closely adheres to the conventions of narratives of courtship, mystery, or adventure [...] familiar to a broad audience of readers."²⁰² The function of such formulaic literature was twofold: On the one hand, it provided its readers with a means of escape from their own worries and problems by offering novel experiences, while on the other hand fulfilling their expectations and reaffirming their values. John Cawelti explores these "different pleasures and uses of novelty and familiarity"²⁰³ in his analysis of

²⁰² C. Smith, "Foreword", in: D.K. Hartman, *Fairground Fiction*, ix.

²⁰³ J.G. Cawelti, *Adventure*, 1.

formulaic literature, especially romance and crime fiction, and their relation to popular culture. The familiar aspect of *Against Odds* lies in its stock characters - the young and handsome English lord, the blond and virginal heroine, the scheming and intriguing Frenchman, the resilient and clever detectives - as well as in the general story line, where upright and virtuous people fight the evildoers, and the admirable heroes get married in the end in order to ensure a future generation of upright and virtuous people. Another subject of reaffirmation are popular values and images like, for instance, that of the evil and cunning foreigners: conspirators, murderers, robbers, counterfeiters, and generally disagreeable and uncivilized fellows giving the meticulous detectives a hard time and threatening the life and happiness of the respectable protagonists.

The White City and especially the exotic and gaudy Midway Plaisance, already figuring prominently in the American subtitle, came in handy to provide the author with the novelty aspect of the story, namely a stage set that was alluring, exciting, and out of the ordinary for the readers of such novels. In direct comparison with the other works analyzed for this dissertation, however, the depiction of the World's Columbian Exposition remains sadly two-dimensional and lackluster.

7 Conclusion

The World's Columbian Exposition, as I have shown, received quite a number of diverse representations in literature. I have tried to demonstrate this by studying four very different texts that may serve as examples of different genres. In this final chapter, I will collect the results of my analysis.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect that differentiates the texts into two different categories is the way in which they do or do not invest the World's Columbian Exposition with a connotation that goes well beyond its mere physical appearance: Frances Hodgson Burnett, Clara Louise Burnham, and William Dean Howells do; Emma Murdoch Van Deventer does not.

The imagery employed in both Burnett's and Burnham's novels works on a very similar plane; there are, however, some differences. In *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*, the subtext associated with the White City shifts its character twice, whereas it remains relatively constant in *Sweet Clover*. The latter text introduces the Midway Plaisance as an additional level which remains conspicuously absent in Burnett's children's story.

The little pilgrims, first of all, see the White City as a distant goal, as the ultimate aim of their escape from captivity. In this capacity, the City is intermingled in the twins' imagination with two other cities: the Celestial City out of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and the City Beautiful Meg has created in her stories, taking Bunyan's city as a point of departure. For the children, the White City in Chicago epitomizes these other two cities; thus, it is the place they strive to reach through their determination and willpower, the

same sort of willpower that built the White City, according to the children's idea. The city and the forces that built it are an object of worship for Meg and Robin. From the moment of their arrival on, the White City exists as a mixture of an enchanted and a quasi-sacred place; at the same time, various elements of popular fairy tale imagery replace the pilgrimage concept. John Holt, the wise helper figure, leads them through this magic world with the help of his financial means while being led in turn by the children and their vivid fantasy and imagination. Both the real world, that is to say the city of Chicago as personified by poor and crippled Ben Nowell and his family, and the Midway Plaisance remain half-tone threads in the novel which at best serve to set off the beauty and enlightenment offered by the "genie palaces."

Another sense in which the White City is enchanting is its rejuvenating or healing capacity. Meg and Robin, forced to think only of themselves in the first part of the story, now learn to think of others instead; they buy an admission ticket for their poor friend Ben, and they help John Holt in overcoming the loss of his wife and child. Ben is refreshed both physically and mentally - however, it is debatable how much good this will do him in the long run. John Holt is rejuvenated in that his sad and depressed life is given a new meaning; from now on, he will care for Meg and Robin and provide them with a home and a proper education. The only person which, strangely, does not profit from the healing process induced by the White City is Aunt Matilda, although it has to be admitted that her position, seen from her point of view, has improved somewhat since she no longer has to care for her nephew and niece.

Eventually, when the protagonists remove themselves spatially from the White City, its meaning shifts again

as it passes into the realm of memory, only to inspire the thoughts of present and future generations alike, as John Holt points out. Meg and Robin as well as John Holt thus carry a part of the enchanting city over into their new lives as a family. The values for which the city originally stood in Meg's model of the City Beautiful - beauty and education - have become reality for the children, and they have finally reached their very own City Beautiful, through the catalyst agent of the enchanting White City at Chicago.

Enchantment is also an issue in Burnham's *Sweet Clover*; here it serves to accentuate the romantic aspect of the novel. The lovers repeatedly find themselves in situations that seem to have their models in the *Arabian Nights*. Also, the fair - both the White City and the Midway Plaisance - possesses the curious capacity to mirror the protagonists' emotions. But these magic aspects play only a minor role. What is more important is the spiritual quality that is attributed to the White City as opposed to the more physically oriented features of the Midway Plaisance. The dichotomy resulting from the White City as the "emblem of the mind" and the Midway representing matter is prevalent throughout large parts of the novel and receives additional emphasis through the quasi-religious experiences the White City offers to its visitors. It is the spirit of the ephemeral city, as it were, that helps Jack van Tassel to cope with his father's death, and the transition from Midway to the White City reminds Aunt Love of dying and going to Heaven. Whereas Burnett's Rob and Meg Macleod see the exposition city as a promise of a better world which they, as individuals, manage to reach in the end, Burnham treats the White City as a foretaste of the afterlife. William Dean Howells, too, describes the Fair City as a promise. However, neither is it a promise to only a few

individuals, nor does it point to life after death. Rather, Howells depicts the exposition as the germ of a development that will ultimately change the face of the United States for the better. Mr. Homos, the author's mouthpiece, is convinced that the Fair City and the idea on which it is based - the concept of a "coordinated creative achievement"²⁰⁴ - are going to produce repercussions that will, in due course, introduce Altrurian ideals and values to the United States. It is not only the mere physical appearance of the White City which reminds the traveler of his own country. In the fair's organization, construction, and overall conditions, he sees the ideas of equality and democracy materialized, the ideas which are the foundation of Altrurian society. The Midway Plaisance represents the old American social order, the capitalist system; Homos embraces this part of the fair since, by its obvious contrast, it makes the system exemplified by the White City all the more desirable. Howells, through the voice of Mr. Homos, expresses the feeling that if only all American cities were founded on the same ideals, Altruria could become reality in the author's own home country - the seed has been sown with the construction of the White City.

All of these three authors, as I have shown, depict the White City as a promise and, in one way or another, as the epitome of hope for a better future. For Emma Murdoch Van Deventer, on the other hand, the fair holds no such meaning. She uses the exposition grounds as a colorful foil, a backdrop against which her story unfolds. Her formula characters and plot line are complemented by a novel and unusual scenery. What makes the World's Columbian Exposition a particularly attractive setting

²⁰⁴ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 143.

for a detective tale with such an intricate if predictable story line is its capacity as a social mass event. A host of people from many different countries came together in one place, forming a veritable mosaic of a crowd. The Midway Plaisance, already figuring prominently in Clara Louise Burnham's romance, apparently was Van Deventer's main hunting ground in the search of motifs. The only promise the exposition thus holds for the author of *Against Odds* is the promise of a vibrant and flamboyant setting that helped her sell her story.

Of all the narratives studied here, Van Deventer's is interestingly the only one which capitalizes on the fair as a mass event. By comparison, the circles of characters in the other three novels remain closed, which is surprising given that the grounds were crowded by millions of people. Mr. Homos meets with the banker, but he already knew him from his summer vacation. The protagonists of *Sweet Clover* are either relatives or childhood friends, and no new acquaintances are made at the fair. Meg and Robin form a few new short-time friendships, but except for John Holt, none of them leaves a lasting impression.

Another feature which sets off *Against Odds* is the frequency of overtly expressed xenophobia which is much higher here than in any of the other novels. All foreigners, from the Frenchman Delbras to the Turks and Arabs populating the Midway, are depicted as potential criminals or at least as prone to venality. In *Sweet Clover*, the Midway Plaisance represents everything that is "dirty and barbaric," to use Aunt Love's words. While Clara Louise Burnham repeatedly describes her central core of characters as an elite who make slightly condescending remarks about members of other cultures or about those less educated than themselves, no such tendency is discernible in William Dean Howells's

Letters. For the Altrurian, himself a foreigner, it is the Americans who are a species subject to close observation. The other foreign cultures represented at the fair seem of no consequence to him; rather, it is the direct juxtaposition of Altrurians and Americans that is insightful for Homos. It is debatable whether Frances Hodgson Burnett's almost complete omission of the Midway Plaisance betrays a sign of xenophobia or suspicion of other cultures. It appears more likely, however, that she wanted to present particularly her young readers with the educative aspect of the fair, as represented by the White City and as opposed to the gaudy entertainment of the Midway.

One of my leading questions in studying these novels was how the United States as the Columbian Exposition's host nation are represented. However, a close analysis of the texts reveals that the United States are hardly represented at all. None of the books depicts the Chicago world's fair as an American achievement.

In Burnett's children's story, the White City is presented as a creation of genies. According to little Meg's creation myth, these genies together represent the spirit of humankind, the willpower and determination of people from all countries to work together and create a great work of art and beauty. These attributes of willpower and determination, so Burnett's book tells us, are common to all human beings. They are present in everyone who worked to build the White City as well as in Robin and Meg who take their lives into their own hands - in keeping with the tale's moral: "Human beings can do anything they set their minds to." This human spirit, then, constructed the fair; the United States do not figure at all.

Neither do they figure as a whole in Burnham's romance. *Sweet Clover* tells us the story of a young lady by the name of Chicago who stands up to her older sisters from the east coast. During the course of the narrative, she matures from an upstart scrawny and ill-bred girl to a young, determined, and dutiful young lady, a mother figure even. With the opening of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago has come of age and has proved that she has been able not only to meet the expectations but to surpass them. America, the house in which young Chicago lives with her sister cities, remains divided, and the east coast cities insist on their cultural superiority. However, despite all attacks, aggressions, and arguments from the east coast cities, the fair is a success.

The World's Columbian Exposition, in Burnham's book, is emphatically pictured as an achievement of Chicago and its citizens. Willpower and determination may be common to all human beings, but they are depicted as being especially prevalent in the population of the young metropolis. The author, then, does not offer a coherent and presentable national self-image. Rather, she hoists the flag of the Midwestern region with Chicago as its capital, a region that will have to be reckoned with, not only economically but also culturally, in the future.

In *Against Odds*, by contrast, the question of who is responsible for the fair's success remains not only unanswered but unasked. While the narrator makes a few casual remarks about the miracle of the White City's existence, these remain on the surface and seem to be merely copied from contemporary commentaries; said miracle as such is not further investigated. Both in Burnham's and in Burnett's texts, the fair's construction process is related; thus, the problem of who is responsible for the project and its success comes up only

naturally. In Van Deventer's story, however, the presence of the exposition is accepted as a given fact; the question of authorship is simply irrelevant. An element of nationalism can, in a sense, be found in the moral superiority displayed by the American characters as opposed to the foreigners - with the possible exception of the young English lord Sir Carroll Rae who, then again, has shown a certain degree of "Americanness" himself by being able to successfully blend in with his society acquaintances for several months without being recognized as English.

The only one of the four works that offers any kind of an American national image is *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*. However, in the discourse between Altruria and the United States, the latter are positioned simply on the wrong side of the argument. The national image Howells evokes is hardly a credit to the nation. The author makes use of his home country as a sharp contrast to his utopian blueprint, the continent of Altruria. American life and society, seen through Howells's and Homos's eyes, are not something to be proud of. Rather, in the light of the country's political ideals and theoretical aspirations - freedom, democracy, and equality - the *status quo* is deplorable, and Twelvemough and his friends, instead of expounding the advantages of the American system, should be ashamed of how far reality has deviated from the ideas on which the country was founded in the first place. Altruria, on the other hand, is the place where, through the process called "Evolution," freedom and equality have truly become a part of everyday life. The United States, then, are not credited with the World's Columbian Exposition and the spirit it embodies. Instead, it is the bud of Altrurian thought taking shape in some American minds that has to be held responsible for the creation of the Fair City.

Far from celebrating the American self-image, William Dean Howells rather challenges it. He suggests a new form of society and uses the United States and their appalling conditions as a negative counter image.

As I have demonstrated, none of the texts has contributed to forming a positive national self-image of the United States as the Columbian Exposition's host city. But it is equally questionable what Carl Smith states:

Much of the literature of the Fair discussed the Columbian Exposition's relationship to the city that built it. The official language of the Fair - and that of most guidebooks, history, poetry, and fiction - claimed in no uncertain terms that what all these splendid buildings signified was that Chicago [...] marked the culmination of all history.²⁰⁵

While the emphasis on Chicago as the event's initial creator may be perfectly obvious in the official literature, such as the guidebooks Smith mentions, this emphasis can certainly not be detected in "most [...] fiction." Only Clara Louise Burnham champions the metropolis. In *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, it is an alien school of thought that initiates the construction of the Fair City; at least it seems alien to many Americans although it teaches nothing but the most fundamental Christian ideas and ideals of equality and neighborly love. In *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress*, it is the spirit inherent in all humankind that raises the City Beautiful. In *Against Odds*, the characters as well as the narrator simply do not seem to care.

These results are also in keeping with the literary use the various authors make of the World's Columbian

²⁰⁵ C.S. Smith, *Chicago*, 141f.

Exposition. Burnett employs the event to arrive at a conclusive moral directed primarily at her young audience. Both Burnham and Van Deventer seek to entertain their readers and find adequate means in the depiction of the Chicago fair. Their different ways of attaining this goal may find their reasons in the different target audiences - it is evident that the pulp novel centering around detectives and criminals and the Houghton Mifflin-published romance dealing with the well-educated urban young middle class were not read by the same consumers. Howells sees in the event an opportunity to communicate his message concerning the state of the nation. His previous attempts at voicing his displeasure had led him into a situation where he almost fell from grace with the American public; now, in the disguise of the Altrurian traveler and confronted with an event that filled him with hope for the future, he used his second chance to inculcate his ideas of a better society to his readers.

The question lingers whether the Chicago world's fair of 1893 indeed "extended and carried forward into the cultural realm the political efforts to reconstruct the United States after the Civil War," as Rydell, Findling, and Pelle would have it.²⁰⁶ With regard to literature as an integral part of the "cultural realm," this claim clearly has to be refuted. The authors of the imaginative treatments of the World's Columbian Exposition were far from constructing or reconstructing a national self-image of the United States. If the American nation plays any role at all in their novels, it is either portrayed as riddled with regional conflicts, or it is presented as a negative counter-image for a utopian blueprint.

²⁰⁶ Cf. note 28.

Although the World's Columbian Exposition did stimulate a vast literary response, its direct influence on literary life in the United States was not as immediate as the sheer number of novels and poems suggests. The Literary Congress held in Chicago during the fair summer failed to have any notable impact on the future of American literature. Hamlin Garland, one of the leading supporters of the realist movement, continued his crusade along other paths. What the exposition did for the literary development, however, was that it successfully moved the city of Chicago into public consciousness. The subsequent rise of the giants of urban literature - Theodore Dreiser, Carl Sandburg, Henry Blake Fuller, to name but a few - was not immediately caused by the World's Columbian Exposition, but certainly facilitated by it. Future research projects may further investigate the influence this outstanding exposition had on the many fascinating imaginative treatments as well as on American literature in general.

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