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Service-Learning, 1902

Julia Garbus

“[W]e are all segregated in the prison of class,” mused turn-of-the-century literature professor Vida Dutton Scudder. “More than we recognize, our inner life is shaped by the traditions of the group to which we happen to belong; and until we escape from such prison, at least through imagination, or better far through personal contacts, our culture is bound to remain tragically cramped and incomplete” (*On Journey* 67–68). In innovative literature courses, Scudder offered college students escapes from their class prisons through “imagination.” She facilitated “personal contacts” by encouraging students to work with people of other classes and races in inner-city settlement houses she had founded. In this essay, I argue that Scudder’s pedagogy predicted a college-community connection increasingly popular one hundred years later: service-learning. I outline Scudder’s teaching, settlement work, and the ideologies underlying both; critique her work with the benefit of twenty-first-century hindsight; and conclude by reaffirming that in the context of her times she was a remarkable figure. Although I focus primarily on the young women Scudder taught and supervised in the settlements, I consider as well settlements’ complicated relationships with the inner-city communities in which they were located.

SERVICE-LEARNING, SCUDDER, AND SETTLEMENTS

In the past twenty years, service-learning has emerged in its current form and become increasingly popular. Briefly defined, it is a form of experiential education in

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which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities designed to promote student learning and development (Jacoby 5). Scholarship on service learning is flourishing as well. Recent publications within English studies include overviews of service learning in composition, such as Thomas Deans's *Writing Partnerships* and Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, and Ann Watters's *Writing the Community*; a new journal founded with CCCC support, *Reflections on Community-Based Writing*; and articles parsing the meanings of "service," "learning," "community," and other fraught terms (in *College English* alone, see Parks and Goldblatt; Cushman; Schutz and Gere). However, extended scholarship on the historical bases of service learning remains slim. Current service-learning practitioners sometimes trace the movement's origins to settlement houses and Progressive education. For example, the founders of one service-learning program based in a settlement house acknowledge their debt to the settlement tradition, noting that settlements functioned "as contact zones among people of different cultures" and "as centers for national political advocacy" (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 202). Several longer pieces focus on the theories of John Dewey, "fast becoming *the* touchstone for service-learning practitioners" (Deans 29; see also Morton and Saltmarsh; Giles and Eyster), Jane Addams (Morton and Saltmarsh), and other Progressives (Adler-Kassner, "Ownership"). Other articles examine Progressive-era relationships between college and community through the story of the University of Chicago's brief commitment to university extension courses (Harkavy and Puckett; Mattson). I discuss Progressive-era work at the level of practice—what college students actually learned and did—as opposed to examining Progressive reformers' theories, on the one hand, or the workings of a large institution, such as a university, on the other.

While virtually everything published about contemporary service-learning within English focuses on composition, service-learning and literature is a less familiar but equally rich field. College students in a service-learning course involving literary texts find that textual study and community work can illuminate each other. They can write about fiction or nonfiction that centers on social justice or community-oriented topics, drawing on their community service experiences as they write—an approach Robert Coles and others have used (Coles 145–73; Deans 106). Cathy Comstock's students use discourse analysis techniques to examine cultural texts, including those stemming from their service work. Comstock also teaches deconstruction—a conceptual framework much easier to understand when students see its principles played out in real life in their service experiences. One hundred years before these professors taught, Scudder brought the outside world into the literature classroom. She realized that community work provoked questions that study could illuminate: "Sometimes it seems as if the topics that interested us most, and the questions that searched most deeply, had never got into the educational

system at all [. . . T]he matters that most need thinking about are often the new issues that rise from life as it progresses and have not had time to enter accepted interpretations” (“Small” 1). She taught texts about poverty, injustice, and the committed life. Her courses fostered a worldview that helped structure what students saw in the ghetto. She arranged, encouraged, and in effect supervised service opportunities. In all these ways, her pedagogy anticipated today’s service-learning.

Vida Scudder (1861–1954) was born into an affluent Boston family of publishers, ministers, and scholars. She attended Smith College, founded five years before she enrolled. During a post-college year at Oxford, Scudder heard John Ruskin’s last series of lectures, after his switch from lauded art historian to fervent social critic. His words galvanized her. “I [became] sure that the social order was gravely diseased; Ruskin, and commonsense, had taught me that,” she recalled (*On Journey* 140). Back home, though, with job opportunities limited by her gender, Scudder struggled to find an outlet for her awakened zeal. Fortunately, she was able to begin teaching English literature at Wellesley College; she enjoyed the work and continued it for forty years. The same year that Scudder started teaching she and several college friends developed the idea of opening a settlement. The concept, like Scudder’s radicalism, had originated in England. Educated young people would move into a house in a poor city neighborhood, where they would live simply and use their skills to help and “uplift” neighborhood residents in whatever ways seemed needed. Naming themselves the College Settlement Association (CSA) to emphasize the significance of the college-community tie, the friends founded a settlement in New York in September 1889. Jane Addams opened the most well-known settlement, Hull House, shortly afterward. Denison House in Boston, Scudder’s “home” settlement, followed in 1891. The idea caught on quickly; by 1911, there were 411 settlements around the country (Woods and Kennedy, “Handbook” vi). Denison offered typical settlement activities: clubs and classes for children and adults, parties, a savings bank, bath facilities, a summer camp outside the city, a library. It helped community members (“neighbors”) find jobs, clothes, and food. Unlike some other settlements, Denison welcomed union activity. The Garment Makers’ Union met there; professionals formed a “Federal Labor Union” to educate the public; and students, clergy, and labor leaders discussed current issues twice a month at the Social Science Club.

Educated elite women founded settlements as a response to what they perceived as personal and external needs. Earlier in the nineteenth century, elite white females had been expected to be “True Women”—domestic, pious, quiet, and pure. (Nonwhite women and women who had to work to support families, of course, were barred by color or class from achieving this ideal.) By Scudder’s generation, the pluckiest (and luckiest) women, like Scudder, could attend college. But after graduation, they found themselves all educated up with no place to go—excluded from most professions, often scorned by men as “unsexed,” and frequently expected to

spend their lives tending aging relatives. Women who worked in settlements could forge careers, live with supportive friends, and feel independent as well as useful. They became “New Women.”

Like other Progressive reformers, settlers were concerned about the nation. They saw huge inequities between rich and poor, squalid inner cities, and an antilabor environment. Immigrants pouring in from eastern and southern Europe crowded into unsafe tenements and worked under inhumane conditions. Settlers wanted to use their education, money, and skills to lessen the disparity between rich and poor, improve inner cities, help immigrants, and foster national unity—a unity based on assimilating new arrivals into the Anglo-Saxon culture settlers thought of as “American.” Thus, they taught immigrants a specific set of values and cultural norms, such as cleanliness, sobriety, and thrift. Some settlers, like Scudder, introduced immigrants to English canonical literature and other “high” intellectual pleasures, hoping to further unify the country by doing so. Like Jane Addams, Scudder also tried to introduce elite Americans to immigrants, writing texts and making speeches offering her viewpoint on immigrant laborers’ troubles, worldviews, and needs.

Though some scholars portray settlements favorably, over the past twenty years others have criticized settlers’ paternalism and assimilationism. Some recent historians write that, although settlers consciously challenged the basic problems of American society, their actions aided “the consolidation of a corporate capitalism that rested on wide inequalities of wealth and power” (Crocker 5). As Howard Karger puts it, “The early settlement was a mechanism for the reproduction of ideology. The socialization activity of the early settlements coupled with the paternalistic and uplifting nature of the settlement houses were a means of justifying and legitimating the reigning authority” (xi). Contemporary debates about settlements’ means and ends parallel heated discussions on the same issues during settlements’ heyday; Scudder recorded many such debates in a novel based on her Denison experience. A committed socialist, she would have been horrified at the notion that settlements helped consolidate the inequalities she deplored. Still, she eventually left settlement work because she felt settlements were not doing enough to further class equality.

SCUDDER’S STUDENTS AND CLASSROOM TEACHING

We might term Scudder’s pedagogy “settlement learning.” Like contemporary service-learning practitioners, Scudder wanted her students to do community work not just to benefit the community, but to teach themselves. Scudder wrote, “[Settlements’] chief values were educational; consisting, not in the work they did for the underprivileged, [. . .] but in the enlightenment they brought to the residents” (*On Journey* 161). She anatomized this “enlightenment” in countless speeches and ar-

ticles. Settlements, she argued, spurred personal growth and self-discovery, providing young adults an opportunity to “shap[e] conviction and discover [. . .] vocation” (“Challenge” 34). They brought cerebral young women into contact with the grim realities of life, and this experience “strengthened ideals. . . quickened enthusiasm . . . and enlarged wisdom” (“College Settlements” 10). As Scudder concluded, “No resident who has entered a settlement has ever left it in the same attitude as that in which she entered. [. . .] Our settlements [. . .] give exactly the highest and best training that a woman could possibly have to enable her to be of the best service to her day and generation” (10–11). Although she didn’t always say so, Scudder also wanted to transform students’ worldviews: to “permeate the middle class with conviction that the social order in which its members moved tranquil and prosperous, should be intolerable to any decent person” (*On Journey* 160). The best way for college women to come to this conclusion, she felt, was to “[enter] into direct and intimate relations with people who lived under conditions of housing, occupation, opportunity, which parents in my group would never tolerate for their daughters” (*On Journey* 140).

The college women who composed her main audience hoped to be “of the best service” possible. A 1910 Wellesley graduate remembered, “[T]he majority of the girls [. . .] were training for some kind of service” (Hurwitz 221). “Service” did not necessarily connote subservience for these women. Indeed, if women believed that their gender had a special aptitude for service and morality, they could see these perceived abilities as a source of strength. Scudder used this “special aptitude” argument in articles and speeches urging women to attend college and to work at settlements, invoking a sense of *kairos*—an attention to the needs of the particular moment. As she put it, “the women of the new order” possessed “the exact union of elements which the times demand [. . .] the willingness for personal service, joined with wisdom and control; the emphasis on moral and sympathetic elements as factors in human life, mingled with perception of practical possibilities and of the sacredness of law” (“Relation” 5–6).

Until they met Scudder, most turn-of-the-century Wellesley students expected that their service would take the form of classroom teaching. These upper-class or upper-middle-class Protestant girls had grown up shielded from the unsightly poor. Wellesley’s beautiful suburban campus, dubbed “Adamless Eden” by faculty, offered no hint of outside troubles; with all of the campus newspapers housed in the Bible library, students could easily ignore off-campus turmoil. A student recalled:

How untouched we were by the outside world, teeming with problems! [. . .] There was no dearth of burning questions, but they didn’t ignite us[. . .] I am convinced my experience was common not only to the majority of Wellesley girls of the nineties but also to the majority of boys in our large Eastern colleges. [. . .W]e had no great concern with the crucial domestic and foreign problems of our time. (Gilson 15–18)

By encouraging settlement work, Scudder aimed to jolt students out of complacency, offer them new ways to channel their service drive, and—ideally—radicalize them.

Students enjoyed settlement work. The Wellesley CSA chapter boasted over a hundred members even before its closest settlement, Denison House, opened (Carrell 89). In the 1890s and early 1900s, Wellesley students could climb on the commuter train and work at Denison with Irish, Syrian, and Chinese immigrants. They could spend vacations at Denison, among Russian Jews at New York City's Rivington Street Settlement, or at CSA's Philadelphia settlement, in an extremely poor African American neighborhood. When they finished college, they could move in; all three CSA houses were staffed almost exclusively by students and alumnae of various women's colleges. Although most residents paid their own room and board, some held post-graduate fellowships through individual colleges, the CSA, or private organizations such as the Russell Sage Foundation, which also required attendance at the local "School of Philanthropy."

Ruskin's words had spurred Scudder's activism; she hoped her words would catalyze her students in a similar way. In her courses, students learned that injustice spanned the ages, that writers in each era proposed different remedies, and that they themselves were creative, analytical, and effective individuals who could tackle injustice and better their world. She taught that "masterpieces of the past live not only in terms of their own times, but as parts of a social heritage" (Gilson 12). Great literature, she told her classes, records a great struggle, great writers reflect their times, and art's harmony of form makes it able to "[blend] all phases of fear and strife into a lovely whole" (*Social Ideals* 2). "And so," she concluded, "it is good to look at the questions that beset us, the wrongs that torment us, through their reflection in art" (2). Scudder did not *require* that her students perform settlement work as part of her courses; that would never have passed muster with her department chair or the Wellesley trustees, already wary of her radicalism. Rather, she aimed to make students aware of social issues and offer them an opportunity to do settlement work if they chose.

The course relating most directly to the issues settlements raised was Scudder's favorite, and her most popular: "Social Ideals in English Letters." Gerald Graff has called it the first socialism and literature course in the country (83). Scudder recalled, "It was the permanent link between my social concern and my love of letters; I think most people left my classroom both more alive to the future and more sensitively conscious of the past than when they went in" (*On Journey* 128). Students studied "the imaginative expression of [. . .] the long struggle by which democracy and freedom are slowly realizing themselves, and the earth is becoming [. . .] the heritage of all the children of men" (*Social Ideals* 1). Scudder associated textual study with social action from the very beginning of the course, pointing to "the special

responsibility borne by our generation towards [the long struggle's] solution" (*Social Ideals* 1). Beginning with *Piers Plowman*, students went on to read More's *Utopia*, Swift, Blake, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, the Romantic poets, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Arnold's essays, and the *Fabian Essays*. To give students context, Scudder assigned voluminous background material, taught literary and rhetorical terminology, and emphasized the history of each text's period.

Scudder proposed unconventional ideas, but she taught canonical authors. Besides "Social Ideals," she handled Victorian prose, Shelley, Wordsworth, Browning, "masterworks" courses, and Arthurian romance. Outside the classroom, Scudder translated the letters of Saint Catherine of Siena, read French socialists and the Bhagavad-Gita, and enjoyed Irish folk legends. But at Wellesley she defined her domain as British literature only. One reason is that her department discouraged curricular innovation. As JoAnn Campbell notes, women's colleges "were in the position of having to match the curriculum at men's colleges in order to gain credibility (and funding) and were thus paradoxically disinclined to be innovators" (113). In 1924, Scudder's chair boasted in the department's annual report that Wellesley approached English studies more wisely than other women's colleges because it was "less carried away by the modern fads of dramatics and current literature." Scudder agreed with department policy, feeling that students should avoid "research" and study of contemporary literature "till the great masterpieces have become part of the blood and bone" (*On Journey* 125). She also needed to hew to the curricular line in whatever ways she could, since "Social Ideals" generated "administrative disapproval and departmental indifference" at best (127). After Scudder spoke at a controversial strike in 1912, Wellesley trustees asked her not to teach the course for several years.

Observations about the young women in her classroom drove Scudder's pedagogical style. She felt that women needed both teachable skills and increased self-confidence before they would venture into the public sphere to effect change. "Direct thinking is desperately needed among young women," she wrote. "Enslavement to formulae is a persistent curse, with groups and with individuals. [. . .] Our job is to discredit the habit and shatter the formula, whatever it may be" (*Privilege* 88, 87). Therefore, she crafted discussion questions, paper topics, and exam questions to spur independent, creative thought. For example, one day Scudder asked her Victorian prose class if they would rather live in the London of *The Pickwick Papers* or New York in the present day. Students that semester could write a paper in which George Eliot's characters discussed Matthew Arnold's works in the present day (Perrin). As a novice teacher, Scudder asked the department chair for permission to ask students on an exam to "draw up in three pages the scheme of a novel that they think would give scope to the genius of some great novelist and tell me why they think it peculiarly adapted to him; thereby exercising at once their critical and creative powers"

(Letter). Many exam questions required this blend of critical and creative. In February 1915, students tackled “The place of the poet in the social economy. Discuss from the point of view of Plato and Aristotle, and supplement with your own theories and ideas.” In February 1917: “What points of similarity and dissimilarity do you find between Plato and Tolstoi’s *What Is Art?* Give Tolstoi’s tests. Give your own tests for determining what is good art. Illustrate concretely” (Wellesley College English Department). For the final paper in “Social Ideals in English Letters,” students wrote their own *Utopias*. In her Arthurian legend course, they wrote an adventure in the style of Malory.

Besides learning to think independently, Scudder’s students had to speak their minds. She claimed that her one maxim was “Never ask a question which can be answered by Yes or No” (*On Journey* 121), and referred to her “secret methods” to “set young minds free from convention and orthodoxy” (*Privilege* 87). These methods did not include the then-common practice of recitation, in which students memorized and repeated textbook passages. Instead, she often began each course by collecting written statements about what students wanted to talk about. A typical year’s questions included, “How remove the stigma attached to the word ‘Labor?’” “How meet the problems of racial antagonisms, especially in America?” “Relation of the college girl to the working girl,” “In the light of human nature, can we hope for the perfect state?” and other weighty matters (*Privilege* 105, 104). The class discussed their chosen issues throughout the year, she wrote, while she herself often withheld her own views; at year’s end the group “tried to ascertain what [had] happened in our thinking” (*Privilege* 90).

Through an interdisciplinary program Scudder initiated, she encouraged students to think systemically about social problems: she offered “Social Ideals” as a “liaison course” with classes taught by two other Wellesley professors who worked at Denison, economists Katharine Coman and Emily Greene Balch. In Coman’s industrial history course, students studied contemporary social problems through a combination of lectures and investigations of industrial conditions. In Balch’s social economics courses, students produced case studies of Boston’s South End, home to Denison House. Each wrote a final paper describing the area from personal observation, together with a “social map” showing community social centers such as schools, churches, bars, and settlement houses. Wellesley students could also join the study group sponsored by CSA’s Wellesley chapter, where they were encouraged “to read and discuss the latest books and periodicals dealing with social movements then considered somewhat radical” and debate issues such as “women’s suffrage, public ownership of utilities, [and] the airing and remedying of political corruption and graft” (Hurwitz 228).

As Scudder brought social justice concerns to the attention of Wellesley students, she simultaneously brought academic study opportunities to social justice

workers, arranging lecture courses and independent study options at CSA settlements. Denison had its own library, and residents were encouraged to spend at least an hour a day in sociological readings. They could undertake supervised study of “the social problem in its more vital and human aspects” if they wished; texts included Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* and books by Jane Addams and other settlement pioneers. “Systematic observation of some aspect of surrounding conditions” was also recommended (“Information” 2). The goal was ambitious: through “reading and observation, plus active work,” settlers would develop “the unusual but essential union of the wide vision of the scholar with the moral courage of the pioneer” (“Information” 2). Scudder also taught a version of “Social Ideals” at Denison. She prepared course syllabi on various topics for the use of other settlements, CSA chapters, and women’s clubs as well.

Scudder’s teaching drew accolades. College women, primed for service, absorbed her ideas about the connection between literature and social justice and their own abilities to be forces for good. In 1970, one student reminisced that after sixty-three years the “breathlessly exciting” “Social Ideals” course remained “one of the most important experiences in a long and eventful life. She made us aware that idealism would not excuse shoddiness of expression and literary facility would remain an unused tool without it” (qtd. in Corcoran 27–28). Another recalled, “[S]tudents kindled readily to Miss Scudder’s passion for a common way of life more intelligent, more righteous, more beautiful” (Sampson 337). “Vida Scudder made life more real and a sense of responsibility greater,” concluded another (Gilson 13). Students felt that Scudder’s courses encouraged independent thought. Twenty-four years after her retirement, an article notes: “Invariably, when talking with one of her former pupils, the remark is made that hers was the most interesting course they took at Wellesley. ‘She made you think,’ they always say” (Scudder Association). Apparently she drew students out and then recast their words more eloquently; one student remembered “those ‘winged’ thoughts so often lifted incomplete from our youthful minds, and transported by Miss Scudder into something iridescent and golden” (Class of 1913 file). Scudder stayed in contact with many former students throughout her life, a maternal older mentor. She enjoyed being called “Mother Vida.”

Today, though, some aspects of Scudder’s teaching seem simplistic or essentialist. She did not encourage any kind of substantive grappling with texts, such as close reading or rhetorical analysis. Instead, she defined genres, gave historical background, summarized and evaluated texts, and generalized about authors and characters. For example, one student recorded Scudder’s assessment of *Oliver Twist*: “Oliver a prig, impossible, not natural, insufferable, his only redeeming feature he never existed” (Perrin). Furthermore, Scudder never examined the cultural assumptions underlying her interpretations or asked students to examine theirs. Cathy Comstock describes the perils she sees in such an approach:

I have a strong aversion to simplistic readings of texts, especially those readings oblivious to their basis in a particular interpretive framework and thus especially vulnerable to assuming a unilateral hold on the truth of the matter. [. . .] One might easily question then whether a service learning experience would necessarily promote the training in skilled and sensitive textual analysis that most of us see as our *raison d'être*. Worse yet, what if the urgent desire to be helpful encouraged students to reduce the text to an illustration of a social problem or political value? (1)

Yet Scudder's reductionism had nothing to do with her emphasis on social change. It was simply the approach many turn-of-the-century literature professors took. Gerald Graff uses Scudder's words to sum up the position of these literary "generalists": "[T]eaching English literature means something other than investigating details of literary history, or studying technique. [. . .] It means, in the last analysis, establishing vital contacts between one's students and [human] experience at its most intense" (85; *On Journey* 114). The other pedagogical approach in English departments of the time, philology, struck Scudder as dull, dusty stuff. She provided extensive context, presented her own evaluations of texts, and then trusted that each text would speak for itself.

STUDENTS IN THE CITY

According to a recent large-scale study, in effective service-learning placements students interact with people from diverse ethnic, religious, or class groups, work as peers with and meet needs identified by community members, exercise initiative and responsibility, and reflect on their service experiences (Eyler and Giles 167–68). Wellesley students certainly worked with people of diverse ethnicities, classes, and religions; introducing them to diversity was one of Scudder's main goals. In this section, then, I discuss the other factors listed above: the ways settlers thought of and worked with neighbors, the opportunities students and settlers had to exercise initiative and responsibility, and the reflection processes Scudder hoped settlement work would spur in students.

Community Relations

One threshold question is whether settlers thought of themselves as "peers" with community members at all. Settlers' writings yield different, sometimes contradictory answers. On the one hand, they sometimes represented themselves as superior to the neighbors and hoping to "uplift" them. For example, Scudder wrote in an appeal for money to start the first settlement that "if a hold is gained upon the [neighborhood] children," they might become "not only wealthier but also nobler than their fathers" ("Appeal" 1). Perhaps she thought this patronizing language would appeal to potential donors; perhaps she believed it as well. On the other hand, once

settlers moved into their new homes, they began referring to themselves as good community residents with no fixed agendas, living simply among their neighbors. In her autobiography, Scudder acknowledged and rued the patronizing words she had written fifty years earlier, insisting that at heart, settlements always stood for fellowship, not charity.

I cannot emphasize enough that the settlers did the best they could, and that they helped neighbors in countless practical ways. Late Victorians with a vision, they ventured into dangerous inner cities before the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, or social work had crystallized. In fact, their work laid some of the foundations for those fields. Their intellectual influences were Kingsley, Carlyle, and Ruskin, not Bourdieu, Foucault, and Freire. That said, contemporary service-learning practitioners would make different choices. Ellen Cushman, for example, outlines several steps responsible academics should take to do community work. First they must do significant research to see how the community developed, what types of contributions are needed, and whether or not there is precedent for the work proposed (“Rhetorician” 18). Then they must devise an access route into the community. After that comes “the long process of self-disclosure and listening from which we can begin to identify with each other” and “assess and redraw lines of power structures” (18–19). Wayne Campbell Peck, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins describe how their settlement-house-based service-learning program undertakes this process; the authors strive to “create an atmosphere of respect, a commitment to equity, and an acknowledgment of the multiple forms of expertise at the table” as community members and campus mentors sit down to solve problems together (210).

CSA settlers did not study neighborhoods and their needs in detail, think about access routes, or undertake long processes of self-disclosure and listening with neighbors. They found houses for rent in blighted inner-city neighborhoods, moved in, and waited for neighbors to appear. Children quickly investigated, followed by curious parents. A settlement worker reminisced, “The question of how the settlement was to reach its neighbors was never a serious one, for from the beginning the neighbors reached the settlement” (qtd. in *On Journey* 137–38). Settlers believed that the activities they created responded to community needs. But were they driven by actual community needs, by their *perceptions* of community needs, by their own particular interests, or by a combination? For that matter, where did *neighbors’* perceptions of what they needed originate? It is impossible to tell. Unfortunately, settlers’ voices have come down to us, but neighbors’ voices usually have not.

Neighbors probably requested many activities the settlement undertook, such as clubs. Scudder often told the story of how she and an Italian neighbor, Malgeri, founded a cultural group of one hundred Italians and Americans at Malgeri’s insistence. “Malgeri was the life of the enterprise” (*On Journey* 260), she wrote—although

her title was “Presidentessa” or “La Bossa.” The group, the Circolo Italo-Americano, held concerts, lectures and parties and produced newsletters and pamphlets—for example, an Italian translation of the Declaration of Independence. Settlers must have controlled the *particulars* of most activities, though. Daily records of Denison events hint at Christianizing and Americanizing agendas. For example, during the 1901 Christmas holiday season, one party featured “shadow pictures of Miles Standish,” a boys’ club put on a play called “The Freedom of the Press,” and another club gave “a short pantomime illustrating Christmas customs” (Denison House Daybook). Denison held twelve parties that season, complete with cake, ice cream, and singing, but their records show no attempt to incorporate customs from the neighbors’ homelands into the festivities.

One 1916 survey of former CSA settlers shows that by that time, settlers had noticed a disjunction between their own views of neighborhood life and neighbors’ perceptions. The survey compilers asked, “How far do residents share in the organized intellectual and social life originating in the neighborhood itself?” They reported “distinctly discouraging” answers: “Twenty say ‘very little,’ ‘not much,’ ‘not at all’—as opposed to nine who said ‘a good deal’” (Thayer and Converse 46). Another question, “How far do settlements further democracy by the spread of fellowship across class lines?” produced mixed responses. Although forty said settlements did further such fellowship, six wrote answers such as “[d]isappointingly little” and “[n]ot as much as was hoped in the beginning, but probably more than we realize”; two said “not at all.” A question about neighborhood participation on settlement boards produced only seventeen responses, “about evenly divided” among those who found it successful and those who did not (Thayer and Converse 45). Note, though, that the survey was conducted twenty-seven years after the first CSA settlement opened and four years after Scudder left the movement, in part because she saw increasing distance between settlers and neighbors.

Scudder herself longed to experience fellowship with members of other classes. In her semi-autobiographical novel *A Listener in Babel*, the settler protagonist talks at length with Irish and Russian working women from the neighborhood, Jewish children, a blue-collar union organizer, a Russian anarchist, a middle-class charity worker, uptown philanthropists, and others. She becomes best friends with a working woman. In life, Scudder vacillated on whether such fellowship actually was possible. In some writings, she insisted that settlements broke through “all barriers of convention” (“Place” 348), and that empathetic personal contact rendered class distinctions irrelevant, if only for the duration of a Christmas party. Elsewhere, though, she acknowledged the difficulty of friendship across classes:

One cannot pounce upon a fellow mortal, demand his friendship, and seek to penetrate the citadel of his soul, simply because he is a laboring man. A community of interests must arise before relations of a personal kind can arise in a natural and simple

way; and the difficulty of discovering any such community is as striking comment as could be found on the alienation of classes. ("Democracy and Society" 351)

Until class inequality disappeared, she reluctantly concluded, transcendent, almost religious moments of fellowship between rich and poor might occur, but no real community of interests would be possible.

Initiative and Responsibility

College students who worked in settlements exercised substantial responsibility in many different venues. They led clubs, investigated neighborhood conditions, taught classes, and counseled troubled neighbors—as well as performing mundane tasks they might never have done before, like washing dishes and scrubbing steps. CSA appeals emphasized that settlers would have the opportunity to use any talents they possessed. One settlement founder praised student volunteers in particular for their useful "readiness to strike out in new directions" (Woods and Kennedy, *Settlement Horizon* 366). An information sheet for prospective Denison residents shows that they were encouraged to carve out their own niches. Four hours a week of assigned settlement work was required, but the rest of the settlers' time could be spent in friendly visiting, housework, and "in any special branch of work, teaching, or investigation where the resident proves most effective" ("Information" 2). Thus, "an enthusiastic gymnast in residence" organized a gym class (Annual Report 1894), while a Harvard graduate student taught a class of "labor men who wanted to understand what poetry had done for the labor movement and who hope to find in Burns and Shelley refreshment from their hard practical work" ("College Settlement News" 58).

Today, college students doing service-learning in composition courses often tutor community members in reading or writing or do other literacy-based activities with them. During its early years, Denison House tried to bring "the joy and freedom of higher learning" to interested neighbors through the college extension program, a Scudder brainchild (Annual Report 1893). Scudder taught some courses and college women and men taught others. In October 1894, there was a Shakespeare reading class on Wednesday evenings, two literature classes on Fridays, and lectures by Scudder on Saturday nights. By 1895, classes took place in literature, art, travel, American history, and trade unions. Teachers and students met occasionally for evenings of talk, music, and readings, enjoying "a contagious enthusiasm for study and a sense of fellowship in the world of ideas" (Annual Report 1896). Scudder enjoyed introducing young boys to Homer and working women to Romantic poets. Although she focused on canonical works, another college extension teacher taught "Women Worth Knowing," featuring, among others, Deborah, Cleopatra, Mary Stuart, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Annual Report 1906).

College extension exemplifies what Ellen Cushman calls “missionary activism” (13). Scudder and the other teachers sought to promote a certain ideology—an integral part of which was that the works of literature she taught were ones that Americans should know and value. As Scudder (and Ruskin) saw it, industrial conditions prevented laborers from fully enjoying intellectual pleasures, but she could give them a taste of what awaited them in an equitable society (“Democracy and Education” 817). In her college extension years, Scudder never mentions facilitating the literate activities already taking place in the community—what Cushman terms “scholarly activism” (13). As with her hopes for fellowship across classes and races, however, Scudder’s desires that workers would find solace in great masterpieces were only partly fulfilled. She later remembered preparing, at the city’s request, a lecture on Socialistic Literature of the Middle Ages “only to be confronted by an audience consisting of eight little Italian girls, two melancholy teachers, and the school janitor” (“Democracy and Education” 817). In *A Listener in Babel*, a caustic settler parodies college extension, giving voice to Scudder’s own growing doubts about its value to exploited workers:

The topics will be chosen with a view to the popular mind. [. . .] I think the most valuable course will be on the History of Art. The class will be exposed alternately to photographs from the most dislocated of the old masters and to glaring chromos. Differences will be explained and tests of appreciation applied. Any expression of wandering thoughts will be severely reprimanded. Most of the class will be in a state of uncertainty concerning their food or shelter for tomorrow; some of them will have left hungry families at home. It will be a rare opportunity for them to practice concentration of mind and detachment from material things. (*Listener* 127–28)

Scudder stopped participating in college extension in 1901. After that, she devoted most of her settlement energies to the Circolo Italo-Americano. Although she believed for the rest of her life that humanities study intellectually and spiritually enriched everyone, she no longer championed it to those living in poverty.

Reflection

For Scudder, social justice work constantly sparked questions for thought and study; she assumed it would have the same effect on others. As she explained, “Within an hour of the dwellings of most of us is food for the thought of weeks” (“Relation” 7). Service-learning practitioners today write that reflection constitutes a vital tie between students’ community experience, on the one hand, and academic learning and personal development, on the other. “At its simplest,” Eyler and Giles write, “reflection is being able to step back and be thoughtful about experience—to monitor one’s own reactions and thinking processes” (171). Both discussion and writing can foster reflection (171–77). Scudder’s students wrote copiously in her classes, as well as penning diaries and letters home. In their writings about literary texts, they had the chance to reflect on justice issues.

Scudder also wrote about the experience of reflection in *A Listener in Babel*. She based much of the book on the daily record, the “daybook,” that Denison residents kept during its early years, as well as on her own life: “My book caught [. . .] the bubbling ferment of clashing forces in which I was trying to swim” (*On Journey* 181–82). The novel traces “certain phases in the experience of the modern seeker” (*Listener* ix) through an account of one college graduate’s residence in a Boston settlement. Each chapter relates an animated conversation about settlement life and reform issues. Participants vehemently express conflicting views on, for example, whether settlements are useful, mere band-aids, or insulting attempts to placate and assimilate the poor; how the indigent react to poverty; what the role of the church should be in social reform work; whether or not assimilation fosters equality. Through these discussions, quiet reflection, and friendships with several young immigrant women, the protagonist, Hilda, learns and grows. In one chapter, she broods alone in her room, reading Nietzsche and wondering if her efforts are fruitless. At the end of her settlement year, Hilda comes to an unusual decision. Forgoing an opportunity to teach college, she decides to join her working-class friends in manual labor and eventually start a workers’ cooperative with them. Hilda’s experiences and conclusions exemplify the life changes Scudder hoped settlements would kindle in their residents.

Scudder’s own reflection process led her to adjust her expectations about settlements and her work within them. Each time she began a project, whether founding settlements, encouraging college women to work in them, or teaching literature to laborers, she initially hoped for world-changing results. Each time, she was disappointed. In response, she rethought her claims and presented less dramatic ones, better tailored her actions to her audiences, or began new projects. By 1912, she was ready to leave settlement work. Despite the hundreds of settlements throughout the country, she felt that the movement had forgotten its original reason for existence. Sharing and attempts at fellowship had become service, settlers caseworkers, and neighbors cases. Scudder had also become convinced that settlements were band-aids, not potential incubators of social revolution. As she wrote, despite settlements and their related organizations and committees, “[t]he great mass of misery, corruption and injustice remained practically unaffected by our efforts. With the conviction, our activities lost half their interest” (*Socialism and Character* 19). Therefore, she resigned from the CSA board. The same year, she joined the Socialist Party and spoke at the incendiary Lawrence textile workers’ strike, nearly losing her professorship because of the speech. In the last forty years of her life, Scudder produced scores of articles and books arguing that Christianity and socialism belonged together; founded and worked with countless left-wing organizations, especially within the Episcopal Church; and wrote on Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Catherine of Siena. Her absorbing autobiography appeared in 1937. Her last book came out in 1951, when she was ninety; she died in 1954, alert and progressive to the end.

Scudder, as mentioned above, originally expected women to emerge from settlements “transformed and enlightened. They would return to their natural milieus [. . .] with crusading spirit” (*On Journey* 160). Looking back, she meditated, “Perhaps the people on whom the reaction of settlements was exactly what I had looked for, were few” (161). Still, settlement experiences often set the tone for college women’s later lives. Out of 145 respondents to a 1916 survey of former CSA settlers, 127 reported that they had continued in social and civic work after leaving the settlement, half as paid workers and half as volunteers (Thayer and Converse 37). Many others quietly incorporated an emphasis on personal service into their routines. In response to the question “What influence has your settlement experience had on your further social work?” 59 people gave details of its beneficial influence, while only 4 responded “very little” (41). Sixty-five respondents wrote that the settlement’s influence on their own personal development was “vital,” “deepening,” “broadening,” and the like. And Scudder must have been gratified to learn that 40 referred to themselves as socialist, although only 5 were party members (41).

FOUNDER OF A TRADITION

In 1937, looking back at her 1903 *Listener in Babel*, Scudder wondered if it would “excite the amused impatience of the twentieth-century reader, though I am not sure that our solutions today will seem any more adequate to the reader of the twenty-first” (*On Journey* 182). She was right. Twenty-first-century pedagogy and community work reflects postcolonialist and postmodernist worldviews. We lament settlers’ racism and classism, cringe at Scudder’s paternalism, and wince at her reductionism. English teachers have become more aware of the situatedness of individual discourse positions, our own and others. Our ideas of appropriate classroom texts and pedagogical methods have expanded. And neighborhood agencies, and the service-learning students who work there, try to listen to community voices and work in partnership with community members.

Yet we are still asking the same questions Scudder did. Does service learning lead students to increased community involvement in their future lives and, if so, to what extent? How can a teacher encourage independent thought? How can we foster self-confidence in students who have been told they are second-class citizens, like the women Scudder taught and many low-income students and students of color today? Is offering humanities instruction to the very poor empowering, or irrelevant, or even insulting? Can local organizations advance systemic change? Our answers may reflect a more complex understanding of the world than Scudder’s, but they are just as contingent and situated within our own times as were hers. As Scudder herself wrote at age ninety, “One must avoid the complacent assumption that one’s own position is the most authentic and advanced” (*My Quest* 81).

The most important reason to study Scudder, though, is not because she was like us but because her pedagogy was such an innovation for the discipline in her day. She was the first English professor to teach a course linking textual study and social change, and the first to provide structured opportunities for students to do community work. She initiated interdisciplinary courses so students could see their service experiences in a broad context—something that seems little tried within English studies even today. She anticipated service-learning's emphases on reflection and on the vital interrelationship between action and study. Scudder's experience shows us that service-learning within English studies is not just a trend, but a tradition.

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