

no “murmured thanks”

women and johnson brigham's *midland monthly*

peter benson

Midland Monthly's combination of support for regional literature, for realistic literature and for social reform was exceptional among American magazines in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In addition to women's issues, Johnson Brigham's magazine maintained a determined interest in social problems such as the plight of the poor farmer, the industrial laborer and the unemployed; and, although the circulation of this local magazine never exceeded 13,000, *Midland's* editorial idealism led a group of capable writers to contribute progressive literature, features and editorials.

In its interest in women's "advancement" in particular *Midland Monthly* brought a new voice and a new forum to American writing. Women had been important contributors to many nineteenth-century national magazines, but their voices had been modulated by the prescriptive editorial formulae under which they were able to find publication. The tone of much of their writing, at least in fiction, is captured in a *Midland* satire, "The Stamp Bizness" by Frank Wing, where the narrator says, " 'I breathed a murmured thanks,' as the books about wimern say" (II, iv, 52).¹ *Midland Monthly*, however, in its commitment to the cold honesty of the realists and its determination to publish writing about controversial subjects, gave women a fresh outlet for speaking about themselves. And they did not always "murmur" or say "thanks."

Midland Monthly began in Des Moines, Iowa, in January, 1894, in imitation, its editor and publisher Johnson Brigham later admitted, of Boston's *New England Magazine* and San Francisco's *Overland Monthly*,² regional magazines dedicated, as were the frontier

newspapers upon which Brigham had gotten his start, to “booming” their own geographical sections.³ *Midland Monthly* was to be “devoted to the development of the country” (*Overland’s* logotype) in a social and cultural, as well as in an economic sense, and women’s issues were among its editor’s first concerns. In his editorial notes to the first issue, Brigham announced that the purpose of *Midland Monthly* was to “supply something long . . . felt to be lacking in our midland community,” a home magazine attracting “the best talent in literature and art” and providing “wholesome diversion and mind-stimulating entertainment” directed “not solely to one member of the family” (I, i, 95).⁴

The themes and issues which found expression in *Midland Monthly*, in its features, reviews and editorial departments, had a clear unity and coherence. Literary commentators have commonly treated material published in magazines as if it were, somehow, detachable—as if a magazine were only the sum of hundreds of separate, aesthetically independent parts. In the nineteenth century, however, the degree of control which editors exercised over copy—which they often either co-authored⁵ or co-inspired—gave their yearly series of paperbound volumes very nearly as much unity and clarity of purpose as any hardbound book by a single author.

In fact, the use of the word “contributors” to designate magazine authors was no accident. As Algernon Tassin wrote in 1916, “It seems to have been taken for granted that the author voluntarily severed all connection with his manuscript when he sent it to the [editor’s] office. If rejected, it was not returned or it was carved up for the Editor’s Table in anonymous slices; if accepted, the author need not be notified or paid or thanked.”⁶ Literary and cultural journals had a philosophy, character and tone which outlived single groups of contributors, and even single groups of editors and publishers. *Midland*, with its one opinionated editorial and business director, Brigham, maintained an especially integrative voice. It contradicted itself a good deal less often than most authors do in their careers.

Even on as volatile a subject as the “woman question,” *Midland* volumes managed to present a range of opinions without losing their essential focus. Although its voice was sometimes inconsistent, *Midland Monthly* gave more sympathetic attention to women’s causes and women’s issues than any but a handful of other American magazines at the end of the century, and Brigham’s overall sympathies were clear.⁷ Brigham had been a partisan of the campaign for women’s suffrage and carried his support into the editorial pages of his magazine. In one 1896 issue, for instance, he chided Massachusetts for overwhelmingly rejecting a suffrage proposal (V, i, 86), and in another he lavished praise upon temperance, dress code and “women’s advancement” advocate Amelia Bloomer (VI, i, 94). Bloomer had earlier been eulogized on a *Midland* editorial page (III, ii, 204).⁸

Brigham also paid serious attention to the women’s club move-

ment. In fact, for a period *Midland* devoted an entire department to the doings of the new clubs throughout the Midwest. As originally conceived, “the clubs” were not comfortable gatherings of provincial society, but agents for broadening the experiences and liberalizing the attitudes of their members—that is, for what has come to be called “consciousness raising.”⁹ The editorial tone which they brought to *Midland Monthly*’s “Women’s Club Department,” in fact, was often far from docile, and, as Mrs. Lillian Monk wrote in an early column, “They [did] perhaps more than any other agency to lift women out of the atmosphere of petty, sordid details, and to give them an outlook into that large other world which lies beyond their own immediate horizon” (I, ii, 190).

Brigham’s support of the club movement is exemplary of his effort to make his magazine a partisan of responsible efforts to improve the lot of Midwestern women. In particular, *Midland Monthly* interested itself in women’s issues such as the evolving ideal of the “advanced woman,” women’s unequal social status, the roles of women in business and industry, education for women and the roles of women in rural life and in the development of the Western frontier—especially as these issues were related to the realist movement’s redefinition of the character and ends of art and literature. The women who wrote for *Midland*, in the women’s departments, on the editorial pages and in the fiction and feature sections, approached women’s issues from a variety of viewpoints and prejudices. And yet the magazine’s essential commitment to progressive social ideals remained intact.

Ultimately, Brigham’s significant accomplishment was that he was able to make room in *Midland* for an uncommon divergence of opinion in a sophisticated cultural journal with regional roots and national credibility. *Midland*’s financial success and national credibility were virtually secured, before its first issue even appeared, by the support of Hamlin Garland and Alice French, two widely-read Midwestern writers who shared Brigham’s enthusiasm for realistic literature and for the development of cultural centers in the West. *Midland* steadfastly championed French, Garland and other Midwestern realists in their unpopular literary and social causes, women’s rights among them.

Garland and French headlined the first issue in January, 1894, contributing to several other issues that year as well. Later contributors were equally luminary. Every *Midland* issue carried articles by one or two prominent professional writers—many of them women—whose names were also appearing in the leading national magazines.¹⁰ It was a minor miracle, with his budget, that Brigham could attract such writers.

In addition to the women’s club departments, commentary about women’s issues appeared in *Midland*’s “Home Themes” department, in its book review department, in separate topical articles in the front sections, as well as in the editorial notes and publisher’s notes where

Brigham held dominion. *Midland's* "Home Themes" column, under its various editorial writers and editors, avoided offering the usual trivial domestic hints to housewives in favor of expressing divergent opinions about controversial social issues relating to women. One editor, H. Landis Getz, for example, used the column to argue for "the examination of candidates for matrimony by a local board of health," delicately avoiding any mention of venereal disease, however, and implying that the examinations would discover illnesses like tuberculosis (III, iii, 297).¹¹

Brigham liked to balance any strongly-worded opinion in *Midland* with an argument from an opposing quarter. Thus, when Annie L. Mearkle, in a *Midland* editorial, attacked the social propaganda which said that women were intellectually, physically and emotionally inferior to men, Brigham allowed Eugenie Uhlrich, whose short stories would not lead one to expect such from her, to advance the conventional arguments for male supremacy in another editorial column five months later.

Discussion of women's issues was both frequent and lively in *Midland's* critical and cultural articles as well. Brigham wrote many book reviews himself, but two women critics, Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Mary J. Reid, along with fiction writer Frank Calkins, also wrote regularly for "The Midland Book Table," and there were occasional reviews by other writers. Alice French, for example, reviewed a children's book by Elizabeth Harrison, *In Story Land*, in 1896 (V, i, 93-94).

Jones, Reid and other women also contributed critical articles to *Midland's* feature sections. Reid, for example, in addition to frequent reviews for "The Midland Book Table," contributed a series of major critical surveys about women poets, Western literature and the Chicago literary renaissance. Other feature articles by Reid were lengthy studies of single authors, such as James Whitcomb Riley and Alice French. Reid's writing was conventional, amicable, even gossipy, and only rarely substantial; but it also gave rare sympathetic attention to women literary artists. Her "Julia C. Dorr and Her Poet Contemporaries," for example, praised a list of women writers unfairly neglected in favor of male counterparts—among them Helen Hunt Jackson, Harriet Munroe, Celia Thaxter, Emily Dickinson and Mary Thatcher Higginson.¹²

Reid's sister reviewers in *Midland*—Jones, Idah Corvinus and others—were more radical politically and more enthusiastic modernists. Jones, for instance, perhaps the most doctrinaire modernist of the group, wrote an iconoclastic review of Harold Frederick's *Damnation of Theron Ware* in 1896 that expressed her ardent admiration for Frederick's symbolic trio of amoral moderns: Dr. Ledsmar, Celia Madden and Father Forbes—Frederick's prototypes, respectively, for the atheistic natural scientist, the hedonistic artist and the cynical

Romanist and religious revisionist. Of the three, Celia Madden, a cigarette-smoking liberated woman, is central. Jones wrote: "There is a wonderful glow about the story, an intellectual splendor and magnificence, and a voluptuous and sensuous glamour, with all the time the bed rock of common sense lying solid under one's feet, and a sharp and pitiless cynicism stinging one's sense of the mean, the false, and the ridiculous into painful activity, and cutting away a good deal of cherished sentiment besides" (VI, iii, 287). It is difficult to tell whether Brigham's own qualified feminism allowed him to share Jones' admiration for Celia Madden, but other literary heroines of advanced sentiments found favor in *Midland's* reviews and critical articles, and women writers of fiction, features and poetry found a new freedom of subject in *Midland's* front sections.

Midland's fiction section was thick, varied, well-written and often unconventional. There were certainly sentimental stories—about reunited lovers, faithful spouses, grateful children—but there were also stories about abused wives (Alice French's "The Prisoner"[III, i]), homesteaders who have been cheated by land-sharks (May Phillips Tatro's "The Trail of the Vampire"[V,iv]), deserted wives (Harriet Talmadge's "A Midland Vitagraph"[II,i]), illicit love affairs (Nellie R. Cady's "The Silence of the Flowers" [II,ii]), lynchings of innocent blacks (Marguerite Chambers Kellar's "The Tragic Trees" [IV,v]) and the degradation suffered by college-educated Indians (Elaine Goodale Eastman's "A Hasty Conclusion" [II,iii]). Nor were *Midland's* fictions as inexorably moralistic and as sexually antiseptic as those in other magazines. In James Clarence Jones' "Boomtown and the Whiplash River," for instance, Tommy Todd is a repentant sinner whose "unswerving preference for . . . maidens under the age of eighteen had won for him the title of 'the youth's companion' " (IV,ii, 167-170). "The Sphynx," an unrepentant sinner in Miles Menander Dawson's "In the Surgical Ward," recalls, on his deathbed, having fleeced "callow youths" and "cast into the street the trusting girl who wearied him" (V, vi, 537). His memories also included a scene of marital infidelity "in a chamber off the parlor" that broke the nineteenth-century taboo against explicit references to sexual intercourse.

In this liberalized atmosphere, *Midland's* women fiction-writers wrote with a refreshing open-mindedness and subtlety. Some fiction was progressive, some not; but at least it did not reek, as nineteenth-century magazine fiction so often does, of *de facto* censorship. And women wrote in sub-genres far removed from romance or sentimentalized domestic melodrama. Frances Roberts, for example, contributed a wry sketch in the classic frontier tall-tale genre about a land company town in South Dakota ("A Rhyming Robber," IV, v). Her view of Western developers, promoters, "boomers" and "boosters" was broadly deprecatory. "Siste Viator," a town "handicapped . . . by a name 'no fool could spell, let alone pernounce,'" has "no water fit for

household purposes in the length and breadth of its townsite." No one in town works, has money or ever expects to settle his bill at the general store, and the only potential reprieve is in selling out to gullible strangers. Roberts' comic cynicism is not simply aimed at the unabashed materialism that settled the frontier, however, but also, in a quiet aside, at the conventional assumption that a woman, whatever her social identity, is primarily a commodity—and a commodity of no special importance. When the stranger of the title, the "Jimtown robber," gets away without paying for anything and with the only pretty girl in town, her father's only regret is the reward money—" 'Twelve hundred dollars lost from carelessness!' " he says (458).

Midland's feature section was not generally so daring, but it was lively, instructive and broad in scope. Although aimed at a "home" audience, *Midland's* features were never really domestic. The magazine ran few "household hints" articles, children's stories or treatises on child-raising. It sought, instead, to be educational, intelligent, informative; and *Midland's* women writers did not toil, as Willa Cather did at Pittsburgh's *Home Monthly* during the 1890s, over treatises about the "care of children's teeth."¹³ Instead they might, as Idah M. Sturbridge and Clara H. Holmes did, provide descriptions of women's roles in roughshod adventures (Sturbridge's "The Lost Mine Found" [III,v] and Holmes' "The Cripple Creek Boom" [V,iii]) or, as Emma Yarnall Ross did, a diary recording impressions of the Civil War ("The Way We Came" [II,ii]).

It would be misleading not to add, however, that *Midland* also published its share of inoffensive copy in the tame, traditional general-interest genres—of the sort that was meant to satisfy no higher need than idle curiosity. One article by G. F. Rinehart, for example, asked the pregnant question, "Is Cycling a Fad?" (IV, iii, 277-82). Another, a description of Major and Mrs. McKinley by Mrs. C. F. McClean (V, vi, 515-30), replicated the "famous person at home" genre which persists so tenaciously even today in family magazines. Like nearly all of its predecessors and descendants, with a few striking exceptions (among them Elbert Hubbard's "Little Journeys" series), Mrs. McClean's piece was unrelentingly banal. It began, "Our whole political fabric rests upon the sanctity of the American home" (V, vi, 515). For a time, the feature section was preceded, on each issue's frontispiece, by a portrait photograph of a "type of Midland beauty," a sort of genteel pin-up of a local woman, who was identified in the "Publisher's Notes."

Of all the writing in *Midland's* feature section, however, its poetry was probably least distinguished. One correspondent trenchantly observed about his poem's rejection: "I suppose it is too radical, too unconventional. People like love poems best."¹⁴ Brigham's answer was evasive (III, ii, 206); himself an aspiring poet, he favored verse with neatly-packaged sentiments and morals, with "poetic" diction, me-

chanical metrics and thumping rhymes. Only a few *Midland* poems deviated from this popular norm.

Again, however, it would be misleading not to add that there was more progressive poetry in *Midland*. In 1894, for example, Elizabeth Moore's "In the Women's Building" commented, through the symbolism of a piece of handicraft, on the empty uselessness of one woman's life. This powerful theme became de-fused when the woman in question was described as being "from some far-distant heathen land" (II, iv, 268).

In addition to publishing varied writing by women in several genres, *Midland* tried, in its treatment of specific women's issues, to allow for a diversity of opinion while preserving a consistent commitment to the reformation of society's attitudes toward women. *Midland's* approach to the five women's issues identified above (the ideal of the "advanced woman," women's unequal social status, the roles of women in business and industry, education for women and the roles of women in rural life and in the development of the Western frontier) formed a complex pattern.

Midland's image of the advanced woman, in particular, balanced difficult antagonistic elements. Mrs. Jones' admiration for Celia Mad-den and Brigham's own admiration for her sister heroine in Garland's novel *Rose of Dutcher's Cooley*, expressed in an earlier "Midland Book Table" (V, iii, 285), define *Midland's* positive image of the advanced woman. She must be, like Celia, socially self-reliant, an artistic and intellectual equal to men. Brigham's admiration for Rose extended, as well, to her relations with other men and women—especially her sexual relations. He wrote of Garland's murky heroine: "Rose is a noble woman, artistically pictured amid surroundings as real as those all about us, and those surroundings take on new dignity because a grand woman has lived and moved and had her being among them" (V, iii, 285). Brigham went on to praise the "unconventional freedom" of Rose's upbringing and of her social relationships—picking, in doing so, the facet of the girl's character which other reviewers found most shocking. He wrote, "Rose is . . . strong to the verge of masculinity, and yet in all essentials womanly, and fascinatingly beautiful in those qualities which command the admiration of women and the devotion of men" (285). He added, "The marvel of birth and the mystery of sex are fearlessly approached by her," and praised her father's "good sense" in raising her that way.

One feminist writer, however, went too far in her criticism of society's attitudes towards women and towards sexuality. Brigham expressed only disappointment when Idah Corvinus' novel *The Juggernaut of the Moderns* appeared in 1896. Editor Benjamin Flower of the *Arena* had predicted that it would be the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the suffrage question, and Brigham had shared his hopes. But it was more a new *Pamela*, Brigham complained, with "not one man . . . in the

entire book who can be said to be free from moral leprosy" (IV, v, 478). He added: "The damning fault of the story is its unfairness in picturing our community life" (478).

Like William Dean Howells, Brigham curiously combined, as an editor and a critic, a commitment to progressive realism and a reluctance about exploding the myth of middle-class decency. To Brigham, feminism and sexual liberation were related, and there were clear boundaries beyond which his progressivism might not go. Of Hardy's prefatory warning to *Jude the Obscure* ("A Novel Addressed by a Man to Men and Women of Full Age"), Brigham wrote: "There is something radically wrong with a novel which requires such an introduction. The young man or woman of twenty-four is almost as easily polluted as the youth or maiden of nineteen." A review of a novel by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, one of Brigham's favorite British novelists, added: "Mrs. Ward's book should be followed, not with other stories of beclouded lives, such as Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, but with literature that is sunny and work-inspiring and hope-inducing" (I, iv, 408).

Perhaps a more telling instance of Brigham's inconsistency was in his editorial role. The stories, features and poems he printed in *Midland* had their own fair share of the uncomplimentary social stereotypes, including that of the liberated woman, which filled the national magazines. Emerson Hough's realistic cowboy yarn "Belle's Roses" took the occasion of a woman's desertion of her lover to attack "the advanced woman," commenting sanctimoniously: "These already form a class. Presently the class will fade away" (III, vi, 532-40). Janet Buchanan's dialect story "Liz" focused on Indian childishness and brutality; in Eugene Schafter's short stories and descriptive articles, "dagos" (Latins and Hispanics) were characterized by illicit sexuality, knife fights, superstition and "strange odors."

Brigham was not alone in his inconsistency, however. Corvinus, in an earlier *Midland* critical article about Henrik Ibsen, had allowed herself to indulge in hero-worship which Ibsen abjured, one may infer from her description of their brief personal relationship. Her statement about Ibsen's place in the question of women's rights, however, is illuminating. "Individual freedom," she wrote, "is the point Ibsen always hints at; but he wishes woman to obtain it herself, that he can respect her" (V, iv, 322).

In *Midland's* more direct editorial commentary on the "woman question" and on the history of discrimination against women, Brigham also stopped short of radical fervor. He did, as I have said, argue for suffrage, and, in general, for equal rights; however, he shied away from any radical extension of those principles. When British feminist Mona Caird was quoted, first as advocating "the social elimination of the male," and later as leaving that task, "should it unfortunately prove necessary," to "my successors in a more advanced

generation" (II, ii, 154), Brigham wryly commented: "This is doubly gratifying; first, in that the social elimination of the male sex is postponed until after our day; and again, in that something is going to be left for the next generation of social reformers to do" (*ibid*). Brigham, as odd as it may seem in light of his review of *Rose of Dutcher's Cooley*, particularly disapproved of Caird's "refined free-lovism" and "unrefined masculine-woman-ism" (*ibid*).

Midland's other editorial writers argued more directly about the social status of women, historical or contemporary. One of the first "Women's Club Department" columns, for example, reprinted a speech by clubwoman Emma Yarnall Ross entitled "Woman" which gave a bitter account of the ignominies of women's unequal status throughout history—the scold's bridle, ducking stool, stocks—and concluded by arguing for "the place of woman as a wage earner" (VI, ii, 174-80). The debate in 1894 between Annie L. Mearkle and Eugenie Uhrich (mentioned above) was even more pointed. Mearkle said simply, "We want to be like men" (IX, ii, 176), arguing forcefully the unfashionable doctrine that women differed not in "nature," but in "circumstances." They had the right to develop the highest qualities of the species, not for the sake of pleasing a man, but for personal satisfaction: "When a woman knows that she in fact stands on her own two feet, lives her own life, thinks for the sake of thinking, does things because she wants to do them, has the will and the power to act independently, and some man assumes to pet and praise her, or humor and discourage her, just because she is a woman, — she feels that life is a failure and is ready to try prussic acid on the chance of being a man in a future state of existence." "Is woman to live forever in moral infancy?" she asked, answering: "One appeals to one's own consciousness. The woman who knows she has a mind is not frightened when told she cannot think" (174).

Uhrich's reply, five months later, connected a woman's best qualities to native passivity: "Her unselfishness, her humility, her unwearying faithfulness—what is there in the bare mental excellence of man finer than these, where woman's love resolves itself into a holy zeal for her fellow creatures?" Women, Uhrich thought, were out of place as bread-winners.

For the most part, however, *Midland* did not subscribe to Uhrich's opinion. Brigham himself seems to have seen women's problems as they began to move into the labor force as related to other labor issues, with which he was deeply concerned—unionization, industrial "armies," labor violence, unemployment. Women's changing roles, he felt, demanded changes in businessmen's attitudes. In his "Editorial Notes," for instance, he argued that businessmen should keep their hats on when businesswomen entered elevators because women should be treated in a way that recognized their right to a natural place as wage-earners: "A modest lady . . . must inwardly feel like exclaiming,

'Gentlemen, please don't pay any attention to me! I'm here on business, like yourselves, and you make me feel supremely uncomfortable' " (III, v, 490).¹⁵

Strangely enough, one especially subtle treatment of the complex situation of the new businesswomen was Eugenie Uhlrich's short story "Home O' Me Own" (part of a *Midland* series, "Sketches From Life in Labor's World"), which united two themes—a new woman clerk's kinship for the plight of an unemployed laborer, and the subtle machinery of domination and subservience which exists between her, the laborer and her male employer. Uhlrich's story is about an Irish tramp looking for work in a Midwestern city and a secretary who first pities him, and then, when her boss turns the tramp out, is ashamed of her compassion. The laborer and the boss are two-dimensional characters, but the young woman is subtly drawn. Her emotions are slaves to her boss'. When he turns the tramp out, her feelings change, almost against her will, and the reader's sympathy for her and the laborer's cause is enlisted almost unasked (IV, v, 445-46).

The most common social perspective for the treatment of women's themes in *Midland* fiction, however, was rural; many of *Midland's* best stories were about women on the Midwestern homesteads and farms. One of the first, and the best, of these was Alice French's "The Canada Thistle," an unflinchingly bleak narrative about a Midwestern county poorhouse which harbours a notorious fallen woman and her child. The "dull blacks and dingy browns" and the "ungraceful poverty of form" of the prairie in spring overwhelm the story's characters. Mrs. Reynolds, the scrupulous Vermont woman who runs the institution, calls her troublesome inmate a "Canada thistle"—"almost indestructable; there isn't a useful plant growing that has such a grip on life, and it spreads like the measles. Nothing but absolute extermination of every root can save the land" (I, i, 13). But Eliza Hinds' danger of, and seeming concern over, losing her whining, ill-nursed baby win the sympathy of Mrs. Reynolds' idealistic assistant, Cardine.

The issues raised by the short story are complicated. Eliza is an object of sympathy—degraded by her past, trapped in institutions, of insufficient intelligence to understand her predicament, hopeless of any reformation. But the third-person narrator's views of her range from helpless amusement—"[Cardine] found [Eliza] in the garden teaching the baby to dig holes in the flower beds"—to grim moralism—"The woman laughed, an odious laugh which had the hint of all her degraded life in its ring" (I, i, 17 and 10). The story ends, predictably, with Eliza's death, after she steals from Cardine, runs away with her common law husband and abandons her baby. But if French could not solve the conflict she so carefully built in the story, at least she did not back down from its final dilemma—the insufficiency of mere sympathy and good will in the face of intractable social evils. When a troubled critic complained that "The Canada Thistle" made "no

recognition of the saving power of Christianity," Brigham answered evasively, "It properly leaves the reader to his own application of the moral in outline drawn" (II, ii, 196).

Another French short story, published in 1895, confronted a social issue even more fundamental to the "woman question"—this time within the respectable confines of marriage. French's "The Prisoner" told of a farm woman brutalized by a possessive husband. His violence is partially suppressed—directed against her friends, her belongings, her pets. But a psychological terrorism is directed against her: "Most of the time he did not speak to her at all; but occasionally an excess of anger would possess him, making him almost like a maniac." Her family is no refuge, since Ned has long since co-opted them with gifts and deference. "'There ain't no use pestering the old lady with our bickerings,' " he says (III, i, 6).

The picture of her vulnerability and desperation is intensely vivid—perhaps too much so for French. Halfway through the story, she retreats from the impasse she has created and provides the "saving power" which the earlier critic had demanded. "The prisoner," it turns out, is not Aggie but Ned—prisoner to his own anger. After plenty of heart-warming soul searching, he repents and learns control. And Aggie is left happy—the reader, uneasy.

Ida Baker's "Cedar Chips," a local color story which appeared in 1894, about a homesteader's wife in Washington, describes another kind of emotional brutality—of which the husband is a cause but not the instrument. The woman spends all her waking hours building fires with wood chips, to clear the land. The life is exhausting, dreary, occasionally dangerous. She is trapped in a "shake shanty" in a small clearing, five miles by "blazings" from the road to town; and when he leaves, she must stay behind, to maintain their claim. To escape hardship and terrifying loneliness, she runs away to cook for a logging camp (II, v, 348-55).

The husband is not, apparently, cruel, only absorbed in his struggle with nature—his territorial imperative. She is brushed aside. Even with the obligatory marital reconciliation at the end, the story's grim picture of a woman's lot is not abrogated, and, again, the reader's final uneasiness is the story's essential feature.

Midland was not committed exclusively to social criticism—to bad news about women's separate lives. Its editorial program, in addition to suffrage and the development of the women's clubs, included an essential commitment to women's education. And the clearest polarization of the debate over the proper role for and conduct of women's education was again in the "Home Themes" department. The column began with a reactionary enough tone. Mary E. P. Smith, its first editor, attacked university education for women: "Our girls contend for a 'higher education' which too often is nothing but a name; they clamor for what they consider their place in the world, and fill their

minds . . . so full of worldly trifles that they enter the home with no thought of fulfilling its sacred, beautiful duties" (II, ii, 149). In an earlier column, she lectured about how improperly girls were being raised in the home: "When asked the other day to name the girls of whom I felt perfectly *sure*, I found the list lamentably small. House after house had to be passed over" (II, i, 72, italics added). Mrs. Smith's emphasis upon the awful secret—sexual purity—and upon domestic duty, is revealing of her prejudices, but not of Brigham's reason for thus compromising with conventional prejudice by retaining her as "Home Themes" editor.

However, by the second year of *Midland Monthly's* existence, Smith's Podsnappery had given way in "Home Themes" to Eva Paul Sikes' progressivism. She argued that "education is a right of personality and not of sex" (III, iv, 379), and pointed out the injustice of sex-role stereotyping. "We allow our girls to feel that someone will take care of them—always," she wrote, adding, "I wish that mothers would allow their girls to run and romp and make a noise, just as freely as they do their boys" (380). She asked what women would do to earn money, in an emergency, if they were not educated, and she added: "It is a primitive idea that labor is more degrading to woman than to man" (379).

There were also many educational articles in *Midland's* feature section, both articles about education and articles that educated. However, *Midland's* educational writers began by accommodating themselves to social prejudice, and only later exhibited any progressive revisionism. Tom Burke's "Student Life at Ames" in the third issue, for instance, conformed to Mrs. Smith's point of view. "Some co-eds," Burke reported, had higher ambitions, "but the great majority . . . — God bless them!—are content for a time in the modest and noble occupation of training the youth of the country; and, when they change that occupation, it is generally to continue that training in a little home circle of their own and often at the request of some Ames boy" (I, iii, 275). Burke slavered over the home-economics students, with their "white caps and aprons and rosy cheeks," adding, "It was a question which to eat—the pies and things, or the girls" (I, iii, 269-283).

Nonetheless, Brigham was committed to educational innovation, and there was extensive discussion in *Midland* of liberalizing tendencies in education, among them co-education, public education, agricultural education, the "elective system," science education by the "laboratory method" and the elevation of education itself to the status of a social science, with objective methodology. Brigham favored wide access, for men and women both, to education, as well as to books and the arts. And characteristically, when he sold *Midland Monthly*, in 1898, it was in order to accept an appointment as Iowa's first state librarian.

Midland's liberal intellectualism ended abruptly when Brigham

turned over the magazine to new publishers in October of 1898—first to Conway and Shaw of Des Moines, for a “nominal consideration,” and later, after an unpleasant confrontation with Conway and Shaw, to new publishers in St. Louis for a more substantial amount. The new company, Twentieth Century Publishing, owned by John L. Settle and H. M. Whitener of Fredericktown, Missouri, reduced *Midland's* price from 15¢ to 10¢ per copy, and performed radical surgery on its format, style and content. No longer largely cultural, the new *Midland* tried to broaden its appeal, and the change in editorial policy was symbolized by its new look. *Midland's* familiar, homely cover—designed by Hamlin Garland's illustrator, H. T. Carpenter, and dominated by a simple etching of a single corn stalk—was replaced by a new cover ironically incongruous with its former interest in women's issues—with a cameo portrait of an attractive young woman, centered under a masthead whose Roman typeface conformed to a curved base line. The look was brassy and slick, emblematic of the new *Midland*. That the pin-up was no longer genteel and had moved from the frontispiece to the cover was perhaps a small circumstance, but it signalled the end of one of the Midwest's chief sounding boards for women writers. The magazine did not survive Twentieth Century Publishing's surgery. Brigham wrote: “It lived a few months in an alien atmosphere and died a natural death—for want of sustenance.”¹⁶

Midland's editorial history had been a battle between convention and reform, between sentimental stereotype and social realism. *Midland* never entirely became an organ for political activism, and its championship of progressive aesthetics was hindered by a social prohibition against sexual explicitness, but it did become a forum for writers whose themes were not common in American magazines then. At their best, *Midland* writers spoke about those themes with a directness and freedom from prejudice that was unique in *fin-de-siècle* America. One forgives French's “Prisoner” her unlikely final reconciliation when one remembers that battered wives were seldom mentioned at all in the magazines, and never in a way that expressed the real hopelessness of their plight. *Midland Monthly's* voice was somewhat lonely, especially in the prairies of its home region—but at least it was, by its own lights, honest. And unapologetic.

Humanities Division,
The Rockefeller Foundation

notes

1. Figures in parentheses refer to volumes, issues, and pages of *Midland Monthly*.

2. *Midland Monthly*, 4 (July 1895).

3. Brigham, a small-town newspaper editor and publisher, had gotten together a stake to risk on *Midland* by running the *Cedar Rapids Republican* for ten years (1882-1892), and, perhaps, by marrying banker W. W. Walker's daughter Lucy in 1892.

Brigham started in journalism at Cornell University, where he and four other students founded the *Era*. After leaving Cornell without a degree sometime before 1870, he worked

for the next twenty years for small town newspapers of the kind that E. W. Howe describes in *The Story of a Country Town* as reporter, editor, business manager, publisher. Brigham's first dozen years of newspaper work were in New York State where he began his business career in 1872 as editor and publisher of a country weekly in Brockport. In 1880 Brigham joined "an excursion, under the direction of Congressman Dwight," head of the Dwight Farm and Land Company, to North Dakota. On the way back, Brigham stopped at the office of Dr. J. B. Hall, editor and publisher of the *Fargo Daily Republican*, and Hall surprised Brigham by offering him a job as an editorial writer. Brigham accepted and "soon found that nearly all Dr. Hall expected of me was to boom the territory editorially." The Dakotas were then agitating for statehood, and Brigham's editorial championship, even though under orders, won him the secretaryship of the statehood delegation that appeared before a joint House and Senate committee in Washington. Later, as editor and part-owner of the *Cedar Rapids Republican*, Brigham became an advocate of state prohibition and a virulent partisan, attending the Republican National Convention in 1888 where he supported first Senator William Boyd Allison and then Benjamin Harrison. In 1892, Brigham sold the Republican for \$20,000, and accepted a post as American consul to Aix La Chapelle. A few months later, however, when Harrison lost the presidency to Cleveland, Brigham returned, ready with a plan for his next journalistic venture, *Midland Monthly*. See unpublished autobiography of Johnson Brigham, transcribed by Mary Brigham Johnson in a letter to Luella M. Wright (January 9, 1945), in possession of the State Historical Society of Iowa; also *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, XIV (New York, 1917), 375, and Luella Wright, "Johnson Brigham," *Palimpsest*, 33 (August 1952), 230.

4. It is always difficult, frequently impossible, to gauge a magazine's readership, and *Midland* is no exception. However, a publisher's announcement entitled "A Business Romance" in the December 1897 issue does give some clues to who read the magazine, listing over 1500 towns in which *Midland* had a paid circulation. Over half were in Iowa. Of the remaining towns, nearly two-thirds were elsewhere in the Midwest, most being small towns or farming communities. Brigham's editorial statements about his readership emphasized the magazine's "home circulation," its popularity with Midwestern women and professional men and its use in Midwestern schools, women's clubs and libraries. That it obtained wider currency, however, is testified to by the attention *Midland* received in Eastern magazines and newspapers, about which Brigham did not hesitate to brag (II, i).

5. Even lines of poetry were rewritten, without notice or permission, to fit a magazine's editorial requirements; as Algernon Tassin wrote in his *The Magazine in America* in 1916, "Every voicing of a new idea in the entire century of magazines represents a compromise between author and editor" (New York, 1916), 325.

6. *Ibid.*, 327.

7. Among the leading magazines in the 1890s, *Cosmopolitan*, Benjamin Otis Flower's *Arena* and the *North American Review* were notable advocates of reform (particularly on the suffrage question, on women's right to work and on education for women), and there were also partisan suffrage journals with more limited readership, such as *Woman's Journal*, published in Boston as the organ of the Woman Suffrage Association and ably edited by Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell. Most typical of the leading national magazines, however, was Edward Bok's fabulously successful *Ladies Home Journal*, which approached the unheard-of figure of one million subscribers in the early 1890s. In 1892 Bok devoted a full page editorial to voicing his opposition to the extension of the vote to women, explaining, in a tone very much like Mrs. Uhlrich's in *Midland* (see below, p. xx), that women were not intellectually prepared for, and did not want, the vote (Vol. 9, p. 12). A later issue opposed "improvements" in the education of girls, commenting that "conditions for the training of daughters have not changed in the past twenty-five years" (Vol. 11, p. 12). It was not until January, 1913, that an article favorable to women's suffrage found its way into the *Journal* from the pen of long-time contributor Jane Addams.

The best source of information about women's issues in turn-of-the-century magazines remains Frank Luther Mott's *History of American Magazines*, IV (Cambridge, 1957) although Ernest Earnest's *The American Eve in Fact and Fiction, 1775-1914* (Evanston, 1974) also discusses the portrayal of women in the popular press during that period. Barbara Berg's *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* (Oxford, 1978) contains an excellent analysis of the image of women in pre-Civil War magazines and newspapers.

8. D. C. Bloomer's long-out-of-print biography, *The Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer*, is available from Schocken Books (New York, 1975); see also Aileen Kraditor, *Up From the Pedestal* (Chicago, 1968), 51-52.

9. Shortly after the turn of the century, Bok, in *Ladies Home Journal*, was to provoke heated controversy when he criticized the clubs for the superficiality of their efforts to discuss cultural topics. Later, however, Bok, too, dedicated a separate department to the women's clubs. See *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (Philadelphia, 1973), chapter 27.

10. In addition to writing for *Midland*, critic Mary J. Reid, for instance, was then writing for *Overland* and *Review of Reviews*. Essayist Agnes Repplier, who was one of Guy Pollock's literary heroines in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, was then writing mostly for

Atlantic Monthly. War "poet" S. H. M. Byers's reminiscence of General Sherman was appearing in *McClure's*. James B. Kenyon's poems were in *Century*. Poet, critic and essayist Julia Ward Howe, who had written "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," wrote frequently for national magazines and edited *Woman's Journal*. Idah Corvinus's *The Juggernaut of the Moderns* was widely reviewed in 1896. Elaine Goodale Eastman had, with her sister Dora, become nationally-known as a schoolgirl in the 1870s and 1880s for her precocious poetry. In the nineties her writing appeared in such magazines as *Outlook*, *Overland* and *New England Magazine*. Naturalist Emerson Hough, who later wrote the best-seller *Covered Wagon*, wrote for *Forest and Stream*, and in 1894 began the public campaign that resulted in an act of Congress to protect the American bison. His first novel was widely reviewed in 1897. The names mean little now, but then they meant that Brigham was serious in his promise to provide "the choicest literature obtainable" (III, i, 107).

11. *Midland's* meek editorial preceded Edward Bok's famous crusade against venereal disease, beginning in the 1906 *Journal*, by more than a decade.

12. After the interest that greeted the first posthumous collection of Dickinson's poems, generally focusing on her eccentricities, had waned, further critical notice was brief and infrequent. By 1895, when Mrs. Reid's critical article appeared in *Midland*, general critical uneasiness had given way to virtual silence, interrupted only temporarily when a third collection of her poetry appeared in 1896. Dickinson's verse was not rediscovered until after 1914. Klaus Lubbers' *Emily Dickinson, the Critical Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1968), 68-69, cites Reid's as one of the few positive appraisals of Dickinson's verse during this low ebb in her critical and popular reputation.

13. Letter from Cather to Mariel Gere, August 4, 1896, in possession of the Nebraska State Historical Society; although Cather was, at least at first, exhilarated by her responsibilities as managing editor, she longed for some more subtle task.

14. His letter was reprinted in a special column of advice to and correspondence with would-be contributors that Brigham edited for a time.

15. Bok, meanwhile, opposed the entry of women into business, in the April, 1893, *Journal*, on the grounds that "the atmosphere of commercial life" was not "conducive to the best interests of women engaged in it." See James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States* (New York, 3rd ed., 1971), 104.

16. Unpublished autobiography in possession of the State Historical Society of Iowa.