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## Show Me the Way to Go

THE ROAD PAST KEY CENTER went through second-growth fir trees and land cleared and domesticated. The occasional house was relatively recent, nondescript, sometimes with horses. No shopping centers, light industry, or even small businesses interrupted his progress, which, over country blacktop, was leisurely. As he drove, Professor Edward Williams, former academic administrator and now once again full-time historian, tried to imagine what it would have been like to come to the community of Home back in 1900. There were few roads in these parts then. When they existed they were little more than forest paths. The visitor from Scotland, Muirhead, reported in his diary that from Purdy he'd had to walk mostly along the shore, scrambling over or under fallen fir trees, negotiating huge stumps and gravelly sand. Six miles or more. Williams knew well what it was like on his own stretch of beach, which offered the added difficulty that you could sometimes sink almost to the knees in finer sand. It made for some good exercise, though nothing like what Muirhead got.

Back in 1900 there was no practical access to Home except by water. Three times a week and once on Sundays except in the summer, when it was daily except Saturday, the steamer *Typhoon* left Commercial Dock in Tacoma for south Puget Sound. If you were going to Home you reminded Ed Lorenz, the skipper, to call and let you off. It was he who had refused

to carry a party from the Loyal League of North America to Home to do something decisive about the anarchists there. He insisted they were good, peace-loving, harmless people. Others who had visited said the same. Still it was an anarchist who shot McKinley, and the Tacoma papers called all anarchists vicious beasts. The residents had planned to meet the raiding party on the dock with handshakes. No doubt, had it arrived, George Allen and the Penhallows would have invited them all to lunch or dinner. In those days, it had been all huge fir trees inland from the beach above the hillside. Below the trees each of the settlers had cleared his or her two acres. The anarchist colony of Home was strictly equalitarian about land and about the sexes. In her journal *Clothed With the Sun*, Lois Waisbrooker had made that clear—all too anatomically clear for the sheriff of Pierce County and the Tacoma *Daily Ledger*.

Suddenly on his left he saw the sign directing visitors to the Home community and another advertising the Home Community Church. The latter surprised him. For a moment in his musing he had forgotten 1990, and now he thought of its oppressive nowness, a world of ectoplasmic cyberspace that seemed to obliterate the past. In the old days there hadn't been any church. It wasn't that they were opposed to churches, George Allen had told the interviewer Lizzie Wilcoxsen in 1901, but they were all there "to get away from Predatory Spirits." If enough people wanted to start up a church, well, they were welcome to do so. As for him he'd rather lounge in a hammock reading Emerson and Whitman than listen to the average preacher: "But as for objecting to churches and preachers—not at all, so long as I am not obliged to go and hear them." Williams thought of the faculty over in the English department at State, arguing hotly and, as far as he could tell, from every conceivable position over whom they would appoint to the Morgan Professorship of American Literature and Culture. He would rather be in his hammock than witness any more of that. He had begun to think that with some severe qualifications an anarchist model—but not communal, Home style—might fit to describe the group. At Home it had been live and let live—with argument. At State, members of an English department that had pretty much forgotten its long colorful history of dispute with the administration, the legislature, and maybe the world or the real now fought among themselves for power; and although history was his department, he was going to be involved—in all innocence, he put it to himself. No, not innocence, after all. For many years the academic songs that he heard were songs of experience.

Edward Williams had held too many positions of power and responsibility at State to be able to hear anything else. That's why the dean had appealed to him to chair the committee to review the English department this spring. No hammock for him! These reviews occurred every five years and involved visitors on the review committee and a detailed report. Under the present circumstances of strife the whole exercise would be at least lively. Since he had left the vice-presidency nearly fifteen years ago when his heart had acted up and Marta had left him, he had been committed half to death. He'd gradually learned to say no some of the time, but not to Helen Grant, old cohort, first woman English professor at State, first woman dean. She was an admirably tough lady. For ten years after Jack Emory had left the chairmanship she'd ridden herd on those yahoos; and now, as dean, harassed by the various concerns of over twenty departments, she was still damned if she'd let her department collapse. Jack had said to Williams that he absolutely had to chair the committee, put up to it by Helen, no doubt. It was unfair of them both, they knew, but who else was there whom they could trust to do the job right?

Ah, vanity. They had their man. They knew him well. He was ready. Why, he admitted to himself, he was anxious to get started. Of the rhetoric of reports he knew he was a master, of the interview an expert. An old horse, first of instruction and then of administration, who had cut some stylish furrows to get scientists to teach in the humanities core course and humanists to introduce philosophical thought to medical students, who had forced the dean of medicine and the biology chairs into the same room and prevented mayhem until they decided to speak somewhat civilly to each other, he needed to expend little effort to grasp the current politics of a department of English.

But, if you want it from the horse's mouth, as his favorite aunt used to say before delivering it right through the teeth, the historical past had been for him the real challenge. There was something of a game about administration, and he'd learned those moves. Too easily, maybe. To recover the past and think it out, that was it. Yet for some time now, things had been a little different. About a decade ago he'd stumbled on Vico's *New Science* the way Gulley Jimson had encountered William Blake.

Giovanni Battista, Giambattista! He was the man.

Vico had struggled to imagine himself into the minds of those first human creatures he called giants, they who had walked the forests even before history, before the thundergod had driven them into caves to

cohabit and create society. Who was it? Keats, who had tried to imagine himself into a billiard ball? And into the sparrows when they pecked around in the gravel outside his window? But those things were of the present for Keats. They were *there*. Easier maybe than historical resurrection. Vico and Keats: either way they had to free themselves from the quicksand of the abstract, maybe see certain things for the first time.

You get older, it gets harder, they say, surrounded by acres of language, dead and dying. Recapture even a fairly recent past? This old horse, once tiger of the classroom, hurler of chairs, startler of sleeping sophomores? Not without some inner poetry. Vico recognized that: All history begins in fable. Proust nearly brought it off: All fable begins in history. How long do we take most historians' histories seriously? *As* history, that is. How long Proust's? Perhaps after all it's a bum's game, the former, and hard as hell, the latter.

Yes, there is a certain pomposity in historians, as if they thought they commanded events. Better the stress in Proust, in Joyce, the shouts of self-encouragement in poor Will Blake.

Williams recognized that Home was becoming a sort of historical poem in his mind, as yet unshaped, something he was collecting from old newspapers, diaries, and photographs. This was his first actual visit to the place. What would it do to the inchoate poem inside him? Erase it? Transform it into history? Liberate it?

He had stopped to stare at the sign indicating Home and had nearly left the present moment. Then behind him he heard a single, discreet honk. His mirror revealed that the woman's patience was wearing out. He turned left quickly onto McEwan and drove slowly downhill toward Joe's Bay, as they called it back then. The story he liked best about the name was that it commemorated a drunken fisherman named Joe who fell into the bay there and drowned. Now, on maps that were detailed enough, it was Von Geldern's Cove. He didn't know why, but he'd find out.

The woman who had honked no longer followed. Had she driven straight on to Lakebay, or perhaps to Longbranch down the peninsula where there were bigger houses of summer folk from Tacoma? At the cove his road curved right along the edge of the shore. The tide was out and the shoal at the cove's mouth was visible. It was a narrow entrance at best. The *Typhoon* must have had to arrive near high tide. Along the shore nothing remained of the old dock he'd seen in pictures or of the buildings at its head. There was a simple concrete ramp for launching small boats, but it did not look much used. In the bay only one small sailboat lay at

anchor. The only waterfront activity was that of a child with a bucket, digging on the beach. As he proceeded slowly up the north end of the cove, he observed neat homes, lawns, and gardens, all of a later period than Home's notorious days. He saw nothing that could have dated to the old photographs in the library. That old Home had moved on or away. He was raising a ghost. Forget, remember. Remember me.

The Mutual Home Association, which held the land from 1889 and parceled it out in two-acre lots, had been ordered dissolved in 1919. True to the anarchist spirit, George Allen and others were found in contempt of district court for going on acting as officers. It was two years before things were cleaned up, so to speak, and Home was never again the same. Actually, Williams thought, the end had been predicted when in 1911 some relative newcomers, in an anti-anarchist act looked on with contempt by the others, complained to the county authorities about the nude bathing that had gone on for years down the cove among some Russian immigrants. An elderly woman, among others, was jailed for this offense. The true spirit of Home had been sullied from within.

Edward Williams was not a historian of the West or even of America. His subject had always been Ireland and England. But for years he'd had a summer home on Osprey Island in Long Bay. Around two corners called Roamer's and Devil's Head, about six miles away, he guessed, by boat, was Home. He'd known about it as part of Northwest lore, read Charles LeWarne's history of Puget Sound utopias, and many briefer accounts, usually newspaper feature articles. Then he found himself in libraries reading microfilms of a succession of old Home weeklies: *Discontent: Mother of Progress*, *The Demonstrator*, *The Agitator*. He'd even found a copy of Lois Waisbrooker's feminist journal *Clothed With the Sun*, but not the one with the article that landed her in court. He regretted this and wondered how feminism had been made to jibe with the Book of Revelation.

But today was his first visit to Home, and it would be brief. Originally he hadn't thought of any of this as a scholarly project, but now more than idle curiosity and the pleasure of it had brought him here. Beside his sense that he might write about Home or the more general topics of utopia and anarchism was relief from the academic discontents and agitations of a spring that had nevertheless failed to produce student demonstrations in the Quad. Since his appointment to chair the review committee, which hadn't yet begun to function, he was not even safe on Osprey Island from campus politics. He knew he should have removed



The shoreline of Home today, looking toward the mouth of Joe's Bay. Photo by Hazard Adams.

the phone years ago when he got out of administration (it was a phrase academics used, as if such jobs were prison sentences). He'd been co-opted by the phone, just as years previously the hand pump had given way to an electric one and a hot-water heater was installed. The price paid was that young neighbors, who sentimentally insisted on maintaining the ways of the rustic life on their long weekends, now came sheepishly through the trees to mooch a shower or use his phone. In a crisis at State his old friends and some people he preferred to regard only as acquaintances would, after a weekend's brooding, call with urgent reports, from the front, pleading for reinforcements. On Thursday the calls had come earlier than usual. His evening had been dominated by several long conversations almost from the moment he'd arrived and got the fire lit. The first was from a neighbor deploring the commercial geoduck fishermen and the proposed salmon pens in Case Inlet. The rest were from State faculty members. There was panic in the English department in anticipation of the meeting scheduled for Friday over who was to be appointed to the Morgan Professorship. For three years the department had sought and failed to make this appointment. It was becoming a joke around campus and at professional meetings. Either the person offered the position had declined, or the department could not come to a decision. The reasons had been various, but this year the disagreements had become political in the way that the whole profession had seemed to become politicized. Race, class, gender, the canon of great works, Western culture, multiculturalism, diversity—all these words buzzed around the simplest question of curriculum or faculty recruitment. These buzzwords, he thought, represented questions that over time would be thrashed out, settled, or simply passed over in meetings on curriculum, in changes of fashion, in the coming of a new generation. The real threat was elsewhere and from without: what the university, increasingly co-opted by technologically oriented businesses, would do (if anything) with or to the humanities. Would one day someone visit an English department as he was visiting Home only to find it gone?

As he brought the car to a stop at the cove's head, where he again met the main road to Longbranch, he thought of an account in *Discontent* sometime in 1900. It went, in part, like this: "What is the Object of Life?" was the subject for discussion of our literary meeting. No small order to fill—upon my life. It goes without saying that we were not all agreed in opinion upon the matter, nor any other matter for that matter. What boots it, however? It is no case of 'circles' here; we are eccentrics and



Looking down a street in Home toward Joe's Bay today, dogs' names unknown. Photo by Hazard Adams.



concentrics at one and the same time; individually we have our own interior center from which our circumference springs, then communally we have a common center—which is HOME.” Williams wasn’t so sure about the common center in the English department. There were plenty of individual ones though. Centers, he was told by the local postmodernists, had been out of fashion for years.

He drove idly up and down a few quiet Home streets. Many of the houses were probably now owned by summer people, as they were surely called by the “true” inhabitants. On Osprey Island he was a summer person. Finally he headed out again for Key Center and beyond. On the way he continued to wonder if there was any longer hope of an intellectual center at which his colleagues could meet. And, indeed, would a center be but a stultification? To be followed by *ricorso* of course!

The phone rang, and it was Jack Emory. He, old friend, was usually a sufficiently cool head, but after a few moments Williams knew that Jack, too, was, in his way, among the agitated. The department had met Friday, all right, and the candidate who would visit them was Cynthia Ragsdale. Even the decision to interview her had been damned close. There was trouble ahead, for a vote to appoint would be even closer, unless she succeeded in charming or otherwise favorably impressing a number of people now opposed or influencing the department’s flabby middle group to wander with the flow. Jack thought the college personnel council unlikely to approve if a favorable vote was close. He’d pleaded with the search committee and John McComber, the chair, not to bring her name forward yet, but pressure from the feminists and culture studies people had won out. He couldn’t convince enough colleagues that all the politicking and acrimony would be in vain at this point. There was work to be done.

Who was she? Actually Williams already knew of her. She was well-known in American literature circles. She professed, according to the best rumors, Feminism and New Historicism, all in capital letters. She was much in demand to speak. There was a network of women supporters of her candidacy on campus. Women were good networkers, he thought, far better than men had ever been, it turned out. Probably by necessity.

Why was Jack calling about this matter? What role could Edward Williams play in English department affairs? Jack feared the department would be a shambles whether the appointment was voted up or down and in worse shape if the appointment were sent forward and the council recommended against it, or maybe even for it. At about that time the review

committee would be convened to study the department and perhaps advise on a new chair to replace McComber, whose term was ending. What to do? If the appointment passed, did it mean the likelihood of accelerated change in the direction of what people were calling “political correctness”? If it were turned down, there’d be deep resentment against the “mossbacks,” and the department’s national reputation would be hurt. This was Jack, who when he was chair had taken chances with the department’s reputation, but most had worked out almost like magic. Now he was doing the on-this-hand, on-the-other-hand dance. Williams was tempted to say something about viewing with alarm, but he resisted. Jack was also worried about Helen Grant. She was a more or less old-style literary scholar, but she was also among the older generation of feminists. She’d be caught in the middle either way.

Williams waited. Jack would eventually tell him, damn it, what his duty was. Certain people had gotten into the habit of doing this years ago when he was vice-president. But before Jack told him that it was his duty to head somebody off at the pass, Williams would be a little bit obtuse, for irritation’s and old times’ sake. He would ask, well, my goodness (putting on the folksy mask that irritated Jack), what’s the quality of her scholarship? How about her teaching? That’s really all that counts, isn’t it? (This last by implication.) A deliberate unpleasantness.

Jack heard the unspoken words and didn’t play, took a step ahead: “It’s a question these days of whom you ask. If you do race, class, and gender, say everything is political, and can’t get through the hour without reference to Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Ragsdale’s a great appointment.” But Jack didn’t proceed further in his exercise of putting her down as Williams expected. It was as if he’d regretted saying what he did. Jack had few doubts, if any, about her competence. The question was what an appointment of this type meant, whether in the end it could even be made, and whether, even if it could or should be, now was the time. Williams wondered silently whether he himself had gotten through a class recently without one of that secular trinity lurking at least in (as everyone was saying) the subtext. He thought of an advertisement in *Discontent: Mother of Progress* for August 14, 1901. It was for a book (price 15¢) by one Edwin C. Walker, *Our Worship of Primitive Social Guesses*. Two of its chapters were “When Men and Women Are and When They Are Not Varietists” and “The New Woman? What Is She? What Will She Be?” The notice shared part of a page with Professor Wilson’s Magnetic-Conservative Appliances: “Blindness Prevented and Cured. The Blind See. The Deaf Hear.”

As for himself, he'd heard Jack almost too well, even if he discounted Jack's tendency toward ironic hyperbole for dramatic, usually comic effect. Jack had never been one to resist new intellectual turns. He'd usually mediated arguments over curriculum and theoretical movements. He'd always "kept up." But this was a different Jack. He was now, it seemed, into the familiar faculty routine known as *viewing with alarm*: It was a question of what this meeting had really *meant*. It meant, Jack went on rapidly, no consensus, the absolute diffusion of interests, and the worship of power for power's sake: mere anarchy loosed upon their professional lives.

Williams thought it would be better to get the details face to face, so he managed to put off further discussion until the next day back on campus. The phone conversation ended. The world was changing, the world was rolling along.

In that same issue of *Discontent* was the account of what turned out to be an important event for the people of Home, a Sunday picnic:

### Our Sunday Gathering

Ho! for Anderson Island! It took the entire capacity of both launches, together with two rowboats, which were tugged behind, to carry the fifty-three picnickers, who set out on Sunday morning for a visit to our friends and neighbors. The day was beautiful, the company congenial, the launches (save for a slight delay at the start) in good running order. How could we fail to have a good time? And have it we did, to the very full, without a single marring incident. The trips both ways were pleasant in the extreme. Once there, our welcome was a hearty one. The basket lunch in Mrs. Lindstrom's splendid apple orchard was a treat to be long remembered. The afternoon was socially spent, under the trees, and about the place. The musicians found their way to the house,

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where they enjoyed their favorite practice. A little later, all gathered again in the orchard to listen to Comrade Morton's address on Liberty. A number of the Anderson Island people were present, and listened attentively to an uncompromising presentation of the principles of Anarchism.

The uselessness of government, the evils which it engenders and the fallacy of the arguments by which it is upheld, were clearly demonstrated. After the lecture, more time was spent in sociability, until the start home had to be made.

Next Sunday we shall meet in our own Home Park. Bring your lunch and come prepared for a good time. Comrade Morton will lecture at 1:30 p.m., on The Normal Life. All friends and neighbors are invited.

From all he could surmise, struggle was the Normal Life of any English department. Otherwise some of those people would have ossified or turned to dust in the library stacks. Clark Marshall's red face of anger, which he imagined at the meeting, was a sign, at least, that Clark Marshall yet lived. But Jack had told him that this struggle was not going to be normal.

## *Entre-Acte*

The advantages at Home are of a social and propaganda nature. Economic difficulties and sometimes hardships must be faced. Mutual helpfulness prevails to quite a large extent; but the main burden must be borne by the individual himself. It is a pity to be obliged to dwell so much on this least attractive side of the situation; but experience has demonstrated the necessity of so doing. People are apt to expect too much from a colony, forgetting that no small group can possibly so abstract themselves from surrounding conditions as to arrive at a full and satisfactory solution of the social problem. While the present inequitable system continues, labor must be a sore drudgery for the great mass of mankind; and local colonies and cooperative plans, valuable as their educational influence may be, can by no means be conducted on a sufficiently large scale to relieve materially the economic pressure. All we can do is to find means of working under somewhat more congenial conditions, with the companionship of congenial comrades, and of forming a center for active propaganda. Home is preeminently a place for hard and patient workers, who can endure the difficulties and who would go through fire and water for the anarchist cause. Others will be cordially welcomed as visitors, but would not be permanently contented under the conditions here.

—*Discontent:*  
*Mother of Progress,*  
August 14, 1901