

Thorstein Veblen on Washington Island: Traces of a Life

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And if a man dies,
with him dies his first snowfall,
his first kiss, his first fight . . .
All this he takes with him.

True, there remain books and bridges,
machines and works of art.

True, much is destined to remain,
yet something is lost nonetheless.
That is the rule of this merciless game.
Universes die, not people.

E. Evtushenko

The elucidation of explanatory relationships between individuated life experience and articulated thought is perhaps the least precise of all scholarly endeavors. It is the most susceptible to the subjective loadings of the explicator and the most likely to be exploited for non-scholarly ends. Scholarship on Thorstein Veblen is rife with examples.

The generally sordid legend of Veblen, the man, owes more to the imagination than to the life Veblen actually led. What many believe about him, notes J. K. Galbraith, about "his grim, dark boyhood in a poor immigrant

*This article is a revised and abbreviated version of a paper presented at the Inaugural Conference of the International Thorstein Veblen Association, held at the New School for Social Research on 4-5 February 1994. It represents a preliminary effort to reexamine critically the extant sources for the biography of Thorstein Veblen. For generous assistance and advice we are indebted to persons too numerous to acknowledge here individually. We do, however, wish to record our gratitude to the late Becky Veblen Meyers, who died on 3 March 1994 as this manuscript was nearing completion and to whose memory we dedicate the present article. We also wish to recognize the Department of History of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for material and logistical support.

Norwegian family" and "his reaction to these oppressive surroundings;" about his academic difficulties and his relations with the opposite gender in a "tightly corseted" world; about "the indifference of all right-thinking men to his work" — has minimal foundation in fact.¹

It was Veblen's older brother Andrew who first pointed out the serious flaws in scholarly speculation about the experiential origins of his younger sibling's genius. Commenting on an early manuscript segment of Joseph Dorfman's *Thorstein Veblen and His America*,² Andrew assured Dorfman that for him to make adequate explanations and corrections his notes "would be as great in volume as the 56 pages you sent me" and that he could only touch on "an infinitesimal portion of [Dorfman's] misapprehensions, misstatements, and misleading notions."³

Andrew was especially distressed by Dorfman's inability to transcend his own urban perspective on the world when endeavoring to depict the rural frontier reality of the Veblens. In his attempt to explain the idiosyncracies of Thorstein Veblen's personality and the mordant thrust of Veblen's scholarship, Dorfman created a sophisticate's fantasy of rustic impoverishment, cultural isolation and ethnic angst that bore little relation to fact.

The search for a psychological explanation of Veblen's irreverent assault on the mores and mechanisms of power and wealth was carried to its height by David Riesman, who relied uncritically on Dorfman for the biographical elements that informed his infelicitous foray into psychohistory.⁴ Even while protesting that "it does not help determine the truth of a doctrine to penetrate into its personal and psychological sources in its originator,"⁵ Riesman proceeds with great determination to do precisely that; to reduce Thorstein Veblen to emotionally crippling origins on the margins of Yankee society, which, despite genuflections to Veblen's intellectual stature, in effect seeks to neutralize his most penetrating criticisms of the prevailing societal order.

The practice of assailing the messenger rather than the message is an artifice of ideological defense as familiar in the academic world as in society at large. Riesman's resort to it in treating of Veblen is a reflection of the political climate of the time. His analysis of Veblen, observes Rick Tilman, "revealed more about academic liberalism in the 1950s than it did about Veblen. Indeed, politically it is an ideological form in which a façade of objectivity and detachment is employed that avoids any substantive criticism of the American social system and political economy."⁶

In his treatment of Veblen, Riesman was himself a defender of the status quo. His undisciplined use of psychoanalysis to explain away the apparent brilliance of an ideological deviant reveals well the mechanisms of ideological conformity in liberal democracy. Should a dissident voice be

raised, notes Tilman, "a respected and responsible member of the profession will come forth to draw connections between the dissident's ideas and his or her personality." Not only does Riesman's study of Veblen contribute nothing to the sociology of knowledge, but it does a disservice as well by portraying Veblen as a hopeless eccentric whose disquieting views are subtly discredited with an erudite appeal to conventional wisdom and respectability. "Not surprisingly," concludes Tilman, "the dominant political ideology [is] once again confirmed as legitimate and sensible."⁷

In his own hermeneutic inquiry, *Thorstein Veblen and His Critics*, Tilman concerns himself with the logic of ideas rather than the psychology that produced them. While acknowledging the relevance of internalized life experience for the generation of thought, he expresses a well-founded wariness of what he terms *psychobiography* and roundly censures those of its practitioners who have written on Veblen for failing to deal with the substantive content of Veblen's thought. Individuated life experience, nonetheless, remains central to the development and articulation of ideas — all the more so when formulated by so singular a personality as Veblen — and is a primary concern of the present article.

While an abundance of anecdotal material about Veblen has been preserved over the years and some evidentiary basis exists for drawing conclusions about the individual he was, he remains persistently elusive from those who would discover the inner Veblen. Jacob Warshaw and Robert Duffus are important exceptions but exceptions, nonetheless, who remind us how thin the biographical sources are.⁸ Veblen's annual sojourns on Washington Island, Wisconsin, in turn — until recently all but ignored by scholars — have left an uncharacteristic concentration of traces that add significantly to those sources and now permit a fuller appreciation of the personality behind Veblen's uncommon intellect.⁹

"History," E. H. Carr reminds us, "cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing."¹⁰ This, it seems to us, has been the salient flaw in much that has been written to date about Thorstein Veblen: an inability on the part of intellects formed within the confines of established wisdom and experience to make contact with a mind that transcended those confines. By fleshing out Veblen's private time on Washington Island and familiarizing scholars with the relevant sources, we hope that others will be moved to reexamine this still problematic facet of Veblen's imposing intellectual legacy.

Washington Island is an irregularly shaped expanse of rolling woodlands and farms lying six miles off the tip of Wisconsin's Door Peninsula between Green Bay and Lake Michigan. A piece of the Niagaran Cuesta carved by glacial ice, it was first settled in the 1830s and '40s by

Yankees, Irish and other whites anxious to exploit its timber and surrounding fishery. Population declined during the Civil War but recovered again in the 1870s with an influx of Scandinavian immigrants, among whom Danes and Icelanders were especially prominent.

Exactly when Veblen first journeyed to Washington Island is not certain but oral testimony of local oldtimers suggests that it was while on the faculty at the University of Chicago. Available evidence further indicates that his initial reason for going there was to study Icelandic and that the first place he stayed on the island was in the Gislason home at Detroit Harbor. John Gislason was one of the first Icelandic immigrants to settle on Washington Island, where he arrived with three of his countrymen in 1870.¹¹ In 1963 his son Lawrence recalled that when he was a boy of nine or ten Veblen had appeared at their door to inquire if he might board with them for the summer and that he remembered the occasion distinctly because Veblen had insisted that the Gislasons speak only Icelandic in his presence. Lawrence Gislason was born in 1886, which would date Veblen's first visit to the island in the mid to latter 1890s.¹²

In subsequent summers Veblen boarded at establishments in both Washington and Detroit Harbors, situated on the Island's north and south shores respectively.¹³ In the first years he traveled to the Island alone, reflecting, perhaps, the strains of his marriage to Ellen Rolfe or, alternatively, his determination to immerse himself in the study of Icelandic, from which a companion untutored in that language might have distracted him. When asked one day by Augusta Gislason if he was married, Veblen is said to have replied dryly in Icelandic, "Very!"¹⁴

Veblen may in fact have summered on Washington Island with his future wife, Ann Fessenden Bradley, and her two small daughters while still married to but separated from Ellen Rolfe. His step-daughter Becky recalled at age 92 how he would "visit us in the summers and take us to places like Washington Island, where [Ellen] couldn't track us down." Two or three times, by her recollection, they "put up tents and spent the summer together."¹⁵ Ellen eventually agreed to a divorce in 1911, the year Veblen began teaching at the University of Missouri. Three years after that Thorstein and Ann Bradley married.

In any event, once Veblen had remarried he was moved to acquire property on Washington Island. In 1915 he and "Babe," as family members affectionately called his second wife,¹⁶ purchased a 15-acre parcel from Kari and Sigurline Bjarnarson on the Island's northwest shore. The property lay on a wooded stretch of land separating Green Bay and a small body of water called Little Lake, and, for a vacation camp, was one of the most desirable sites on the Island. The Bjarnarsons sold this property to the Veblens for the sum of \$300.¹⁷

The following summer the Veblens pitched their tent on the Little Lake property and Thorstein set about building a permanent shelter. He built a two-room cottage with a sleeping porch and, a short distance away by the edge of Little Lake, a small study cabin for himself. His two stepdaughters, Becky and Ann, assisted the accomplished carpenter as best they could. "We girls thought we helped a lot with handing out nails!" reminisced Becky more than three quarters of a century later.¹⁸ "Ann and I were mostly lugging nice polished limestone . . . for the fireplace."¹⁹ Together with their mother, she has written, they "learned a lot of carpentry [and] how to build a fireplace."²⁰

The study cabin was a one-room structure measuring roughly 12' × 18'. Inside, Veblen fashioned a modest writing surface next to a large paned window that looked out on Little Lake. He installed a small laundry stove for heat, put in several shelves above and next to the writing surface and affixed wooden packing cases to the opposite wall to accommodate his books.²¹ The result was rustic but functional, reminiscent of Veblen's approach to his material requirements on other occasions. In Chicago, recalled a former graduate student, his flat near campus "had only the barest furnishings possible. The only things in the room were a table, lamp, a few plain chairs, a set of plain boxes placed one on top of another, containing books crowded into the shelf-like open side."²² So it was at Veblen's Little Lake cabin, which, for the few summers that Babe's deteriorating health allowed her to spend on the Island, doubled as separate sleeping quarters for Thorstein and his spouse.²³

However bare by other standards his necessities on Washington Island may have been, primary among them was a place to work. And the workplace he built leaves little doubt that much of his time on the Island was in fact devoted to his work. This is reflected by the books that occupied the shelves and wooden packing cases in the Little Lake cabin — several hundred volumes comprising Veblen's working library — as well as the extensive collection of clippings, papers and research materials left behind following Veblen's departure from the Island in 1926.²⁴ That the packing cases were affixed to the cabin wall, the very same cases in which he previously had transported his books from place to place, suggests a sense of permanence not observed in Veblen before.

Veblen transported the bulk of his books to the cabin when he left Columbia, Missouri, in 1918,²⁵ although in subsequent summers he continued to arrive on the Island with trunks of books. "He'd bring them every year," recalls Ted Bjarnarson from his early boyhood. "Regular steamer trunks they were. And they were heavy! Ninety-nine percent books!"²⁶

The Bjarnarsons would meet Veblen at the boat dock and cart his trunks and other luggage by horse and wagon along an old logging road to the Little Lake camp. "I remember him coming with [the books] in the spring," Ted remarked, "but I don't remember what he did with them in the fall . . . I know those bookshelves, those orange crates he had nailed to the wall, they always stayed pretty full. We used to check the place every so often." And the trunks, adds Ted's older brother Fritz, "lined the whole walls . . . They used 'em for seats. They were all full."²⁷ Veblen had constructed the trunks himself from redwood, according to Becky, and left them filled with books and manuscripts when he departed the Island "to go into cold storage," as he put it, in California.²⁸

That Veblen indeed devoted himself to his scholarship on Washington Island is confirmed by oral as well as documentary evidence. He would "disappear" into his little cabin, recalls his grandniece, Colette (Sims) Van Fleet. "The door was always open, but we [children] were told we didn't go in Uncle Thorstein's cabin."²⁹

There were two cabins on the Little Lake property, clarifies Veblen's stepdaughter Becky: "the little one on the lake, where he wrote, and the bigger one where we lived."³⁰

"Uncle Thorstein made his own pen," remarks Van Fleet. "He wrote with this little quill handpen."³¹

"And he passed the manuscript to my mother," Becky adds. "I proofread with her when she typed his books. I think she must have typed four or five of them before she got sick." Becky thought that she herself may have typed *The Laxdaela Saga*, but at age 92 she was no longer certain.³² She did recall that he worked on the *Laxdaela* while summering at Little Lake.³³

By 1923, when Veblen would have been at work on the *Laxdaela*, Becky was in fact doing some of his typing. Three days after arriving on Washington Island in June of that year, he wrote her in Chicago that she "should probably bring the typewriter, with paper and carbon." He also asked her to bring "the large clip which I have been using on my writing-board."³⁴ The Island, in fact, seems to have become so much a place of serious writing for Veblen that when some years later Leon Ardzrooni persuaded him that *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904) should be revised to include a discussion of the Federal Reserve system, "he suggested that they both go to Washington Island to do the work."³⁵ Veblen died, however, before the trip could be arranged and the proposed revisions were never made.

The place occupied by Washington Island in Veblen's personal universe is intriguing, all the more so because it has been so thoroughly ignored by Veblen scholars. Dorfman, to be sure, has noted the special

attraction that the Island held for Veblen, suggesting that he was a "different person" there than in the academic circles of Chicago, New York or the West Coast. No sooner had Veblen arrived in California for what was to be his final retirement, Dorfman writes, than he was talking about going back to the Island. He had a "nostalgia" for the place and appears to have considered returning there to die. He was only "waiting for the clock to strike," and in his view it could do that "equally well in any place."³⁶

At once embellishing and distorting Dorfman's few passing references to Washington Island, David Riesman writes that he spent summers on a "Wisconsin island where he lived among Icelanders [whom] he appeared to enjoy leading . . . in games, footraces . . . and other folkish pastimes."³⁷ This "un- and anti-intellectual side of Veblen" was offset for the hidebound Riesman by the fact that at the University of Chicago Veblen "would take long walks with select students," while at Stanford he "studied Homer and Minoan antiquities."³⁸ Riesman remained, it would seem, an inveterate academic élitist, the antithesis of this non-conformist mind he ultimately failed to comprehend.

Neither Riesman nor Dorfman nor any other Veblen scholar to date has examined the now apparently significant connection between Veblen's time on Washington Island and his contributions to the intellectual discourse of the 20th century. While it might be argued that until very recently the sources for such an inquiry were not available, more to the point has been the failure to ask the pertinent questions that would have helped to unearth those sources. Minimal firsthand oral testimony remains at this late date to be gathered, although a few significant fragments have been preserved. Print, manuscript and graphic sources, on the other hand, do survive and have yet to be studied, including a portion of Veblen's personal library recently recovered from Washington Island and now preserved at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota.³⁹

It seems clear that Veblen was not drawn to Washington Island by some frivolous fancy for folkish pastimes, as Riesman disparagingly describes his interest in the Island's Icelandic residents. Nothing suggests that any of the diverse directions in which Veblen's fertile intellect moved were frivolous; on the contrary, they all converged in a complementary way to shed greater light on questions only partially elucidated by the traditional disciplines. Thus, his quest for a fuller comprehension of the language and folklore of the Icelanders led eventually to the publication of his translation of *The Laxdaela Saga*, which rather than an idle indulgence of an aging man's nostalgia for his cultural roots was but one more facet of Veblen's lifelong effort to grasp and explain the larger world around him.⁴⁰

The Laxdaela, Veblen wrote in an introductory essay, was above all “an ethnological document” of “prime significance” for any understanding of the late Viking Age and the advent of Christianity “in Iceland and in northern Europe more at large.” Lest the reader miss the connection between 10th-century Scandinavia and the 20th-century industrial West, Veblen stressed in passing that the earlier Viking practice of seeking material gain “by force and fraud at the cost of the party of the second part” was actually much the same “as the national politics pursued by the statesmen of the present time.”⁴¹

“The different historical episodes and factors discussed in [Veblen’s] preface,” notes Dorfman, “appear merely as different ways of portraying the nature of modern capitalism. For an understanding of Veblen,” he opines, “this is one of his best essays.”⁴² And it would appear to have been on Washington Island where he refined and articulated many of the thoughts contained in that preface.

The available evidence indicates that Veblen frequented Washington Island over a thirty-year period, the most productive of his life. While there were years when he traveled abroad or was otherwise occupied and consequently had little opportunity to visit the Island, the cumulative time he did spend there is of such duration as to invite closer scrutiny. Qualitatively, moreover, it offers perhaps the clearest view of any documentable segment of Veblen’s life into the inner Veblen.

Whether or not there may have been other times and places where Veblen felt at ease with himself and his surroundings, Washington Island certainly was such a place. Here, Veblen’s putative flaws of character fell away like the yellowed needles of a swamp larch. Rather than the “different person” that Dorfman perceived him to be on the Island, he would appear to have been uninhibitedly himself, a state of being that quite eluded him in the artificially constricted halls of the academy.

Whereas the unexamined consensus holds that Veblen was a behavioral deviate obtusely contemptuous of prevailing social norms, that is not the individual we find summering at Little Lake in the sixth and seventh decades of his life. To the contrary, at his Washington Island camp Veblen reveals himself to be a family-oriented man ready to share space with kith and kin, sensitive to the requirements of others and, in general, giving of himself for the enjoyment and edification of those around him.

At meals, records Becky, he would tell funny stories and recite verses from Yeats, Swinburne and Kipling.⁴³ With humor and purpose he ritualized camp activities: birthday celebrations, berrying expeditions, nature walks. He constructed a raft for the children with a wry protuberance at one end vaguely suggestive of an ancient Viking vessel and christened it “The Mock Turtle.”⁴⁴

On one occasion Veblen quietly observed his mother-in-law, Harriet Ayre Towle Bradley, as she sat at the edge of Green Bay enjoying the sunset, an evening ritual in which she partook with evident pleasure. Making mental note of her proportions, he proceeded to fashion a waterside bench for her that she might thereafter watch the sunsets in greater comfort.⁴⁵

On another occasion, he awakened everyone in the night to observe an exceptional display of the aurora borealis. "Lights of pastel to rainbow colors were flashing from all sides of the horizon," Becky remembers. They reached to the zenith, "encircling the whole sky." Never again would she see or hear of so spectacular a display.⁴⁶

One night he awakened Babe and the girls to watch the mist spiraling into "a dozen ghost-like people" who in the pale moonlight passed eerily over the surface of Little Lake. (Becky believed that Veblen "assembled his thoughts at night" to be written down the next day. "He wrote neatly without crossouts or anything [thrown in] the waste-basket," she records, "as if it was clear in his head!"⁴⁷)

While personally frugal, Veblen was generous with his limited resources. In Becky's memory, he could not refuse a friend, relative or neighbor in need, even if it meant that he and his family had to go without.⁴⁸ He continued to support Becky and Ann after their mother died;⁴⁹ loaned money to his brother Orson;⁵⁰ financed his niece, Hilda Sims, through teacher certification at UC-Berkeley;⁵¹ and, in his final years, fretted over his stepdaughters' ability to manage their affairs once he was no longer there to look after them.⁵²

He even loaned money to his Island neighbors, the Bjarnarsons, who for their part looked after Veblen's place when he was absent⁵³ and lent him whatever assistance he required when he was there. "Our nearest neighbors were Kari and Sigurline Bjarnarson," recalls Becky. "From them we bought our milk, butter, eggs, vegetables, and an occasional chicken."⁵⁴

"The keys to the place are at Kari Bjarnarson's," Veblen advised his sister Emily, "who can also do any needed carting and other work."⁵⁵

The Bjarnarsons delivered milk and mail to the Veblens. And Thorstein, often accompanied by his stepdaughters and his grandniece and grandnephew, Colette and Allan Sims, would regularly call on the Bjarnarsons. While the youngsters sat reading Katzenjammer Kids comic books, he would visit with Kari and Sigurline.⁵⁶ During these visits Veblen would share his stogie-like Turkish cigarettes with Kari, occasioning much envy among the Bjarnarson boys, who desired nothing more than to be able to smoke that exotic tobacco. "Veblen," recalled Oliver Bjarnarson many years later, "treated my father like royalty!"⁵⁷

Veblen's relationship with the Bjarnarsons was indeed cordial and over the years would appear to have developed into a genuine friendship of equals — the sort of friendship that David Riesman and other academics found difficult to fathom. Riesman, in particular, seems perplexed, even vexed, by Veblen's disdain of academic society. Perhaps out of his own insecurity he felt compelled to explain Veblen's eschewal of collegial communion in terms of "the somewhat schizoid person who fears entangling alliances, fears the claustrophobia that may come of having colleagues . . ." ⁵⁸ Citing Duffus, he remarks with incredulity that Veblen would "talk to farmers and working people more easily than he could to so-called intellectuals." ⁵⁹

Riesman's own immersion in the culture of the academy seems to have so compromised his critical faculties that he could not account for Veblen's disregard of that culture except in terms of an afflicted psyche. No right-minded scholar, in his thoroughly socialized view, could fail to embrace the academic fraternity as the embodiment of human intellect.

There is, of course, life outside the academy and it remains a truism — as it was in Veblen's day — that as a caste academics constitute a rather unworldly lot. It was not the "claustrophobia of having colleagues" that Veblen feared — he in fact cultivated select collegial relations throughout his productive years — rather the suffocating rituals of the cloister itself, many of whose occupants he found hopelessly narrow in outlook. Spontaneous conversation with *farmers* and *working people* proved intellectually more stimulating, as a rule, than the contrived discourse of fellow academics.

Moreover, the notion — articulated by Riesman and echoed by others — that Veblen was psychologically incapable of entering into normal social relationships, that he "feared entangling alliances," is perfect nonsense. Veblen's commitment to Babe and his stepdaughters was perhaps the epitome of an *entangling alliance*, one he sought and nurtured for the emotional sustenance it offered. Likewise, his relations with siblings and relatives were close and enduring. And even Riesman notes, albeit in passing, that Veblen in fact formed fast collegial friendships. ⁶⁰ These, adds Becky, were more numerous than usually acknowledged. ⁶¹

The normalcy of Veblen's interaction with others manifests itself unmistakably on Washington Island. It is especially apparent in his attitude toward children, for whom he showed the tutorial concern of a tribal elder. The Little Lake camp "is really very good for an outing for children," he wrote his sister Emily in the spring of 1926, shortly before journeying to the Island for the last time. ⁶² The following year he wrote Emily from California to remind her "that the camp on Washington Island is waiting for you and any of your folks." ⁶³ In a second letter not long after, he again stressed that his place on the Island was "quite the right thing for children and old folks." ⁶⁴

Veblen took a personal interest in the offspring of his immediate and extended families, seeking at every opportunity to stimulate their curiosity and mental development. Colette Van Fleet recalls how on nature walks he would “always walk with his hands behind his back and a hatchet in his hand” and how he insisted that the children not raise their voices in the woods. “He never made a big deal about it,” she remembers, “but we did learn what a lot of things were. He really knew his stuff [and] we were interested in what he had to tell us.”⁶⁵ Islander Jesse Koyen recalled in a 1963 interview that Colette had been studying botany with Veblen his last summer on the Island.⁶⁶

Veblen often combined activities or drew creatively on the oral tradition of his own upbringing to help teach the children larger lessons about the world around them. Up the shore from his Little Lake camp, for example, stood a large conifer that he named the “Chief Spruce” and made the focal point of family birthday celebrations. After an expedition to the Koyens’ general store for favors and adornments,⁶⁷ the tree would be decorated and Thorstein would preside over a party beneath its stately boughs.

Embellishing for effect a favorite lesson about the importance of snakes in the balance of nature, he would relate with a straight face how one day he had happened upon a convention of water snakes assembled beneath the “Chief Spruce,” all listening raptly to one of their fellow serpents. Becky and Ann reinforced his point by ostentatiously handling live snakes in the presence of whomever might be visiting.⁶⁸ Veblen felt very strongly, related an Island neighbor, that snakes were useful and should not be killed.⁶⁹

Now and then Veblen would discipline unruly behavior. Ted Bjarnarson relates, for example, how on one occasion when he delivered milk to the Veblen camp, Thorstein’s grandnephew Allan Sims — “a little smart aleck!” — grabbed the previous day’s milk container and threw it up in a pine tree. “I was just a little kid,” he recounts, “and I couldn’t get the pail and I didn’t want to go home without it. Mr. Veblen evidently had noted all this going on. He came out, grabbed this Allan by the ear and marched him over behind the shed. ‘Now,’ he says, ‘you take that ladder and you go over and climb up in that tree and get that milk pail for this gentleman! And when you come down and hand it to him, I want you to give him a full apology!’

“I can remember that so plain!” Ted laughed.⁷⁰

In striking contrast to the belabored legend of his poor classroom performance at Chicago, Stanford, Missouri and the New School for Social Research, Veblen reveals a subtle pedagogical sense where children were concerned. Islanders and relatives alike marvel at the lessons they learned

from him. Oliver Bjarnarson once stated that Veblen "was the smartest man he'd ever met." He and his brothers queried their erudite neighbor at every opportunity about the most diverse subjects. "No matter what you asked him," Oliver assured an interviewer, "he knew more than any book." Orville Cornell and the Bjarnarson boys often visited Veblen at the Little Lake camp, where, seated on a bench outside his cabin, he would talk and read to them about plants and the natural world.⁷¹

"He noticed every new flower, every new growing thing," confirms Becky. "He was very observant about nature."⁷²

"The pyrolas are in blossom and the service berries are beginning to ripen," he wrote Becky in late July 1926, "but tiger lilies and roses are going by. Strawberries are past and raspberries have not come on yet."⁷³

Veblen explained to his young interlocutors how balsam sap could be used to heal blisters and wounds and on their frequent treks in the woods he would identify mushrooms and "toadstools" and whatever else they happened to encounter along the way. "He could show us lots of things," muses Colette. "And he did."⁷⁴

Veblen's method with the younger generations was typically indirect and low-key, yet conceived to whet their curiosity. In conversation he would purposely drop new words to encourage youthful listeners to expand their vocabularies. Colette remembers it as an ongoing word game in which Thorstein's older brother Andrew also participated. "My grandfather and Uncle Thorstein used to sit around and introduce new words," she relates, "and wait to see how [we] would pick them up and misuse them, or not misuse them; how quickly [we'd] catch on. We got quite a vocabulary that way."⁷⁵

Veblen would also leave books he thought appropriate where the young people at his Little Lake camp would find them. "We had all sorts of interesting children's books," recalls Colette, "old classics like Kipling — lots of Kipling — and different things."⁷⁶

"Oh, yes!" Becky agreed. "He was good at bringing things that he thought we might enjoy. Or perhaps *should* enjoy . . ."⁷⁷

It was his method, Colette believes, unobtrusively to introduce some new element and then sit back to observe the results. It was a method he applied as well to the university classroom, where despite mixed reviews of his teaching it remained pedagogically sound, quickly separating creative minds from the conventional. Indeed, Veblen's cardinal transgression as an educator seems to have been his refusal to play the role of "teacher as authority," in Riesman's words;⁷⁸ that is, his rejection of the prevailing scholasticism of the day in defense of critical minds and free-standing intellect. A teacher, Veblen believed, "is, properly, a student, not a schoolmaster." One teaches "by precept and example," not as "a vehicle of indoctrination."⁷⁹

Veblen's sensitivity to children reflects his attitude toward others more generally, including the opposite gender about which so much has been made. This is not the place to dwell on that sorely abused subject, except to remark that the Veblen we find on Washington Island bears little resemblance to the philanderer and social misfit of popular and academic legend. Like most of us, the evidence suggests, Veblen desired the sustaining intimacy of a compatible companion, which he eventually found — albeit late in life — in his relationship with Ann Bradley.⁸⁰ Even his loudly decried infidelity to Ellen Rolfe over the course of their twenty-three year marriage points to emotional health, given Ellen's physiological inability to sustain normal conjugal relations.⁸¹

Likewise, assertions that Veblen shunned familial responsibility and desired no children of his own — further evidence of emotional immaturity, insist his psychologizing critics — collapse roundly in face of the facts.⁸² He embraced, nurtured and supported his two stepdaughters as his own offspring and with their mother sired a son that Babe lost in her seventh month of pregnancy. The loss of that child, Becky attests, weighed heavily on the expectant parents.⁸³

Like other mortals, academics too often reside in crystal houses and are ill-equipped to cast proverbial stones. We find David Riesman's performance in this regard especially egregious, from a scholarly as well as humane point of view. Riesman has not been alone, however, in his savaging of Veblen's persona and is, in fact, reflective of how dim critical wits have frequently been in their appraisals of Veblen.

A proper example of the gravely flawed criteria, even hypocrisy, with which academics have judged Veblen is Veblen's own brother-in-law, Wallace Atwood, a prominent geographer and university president whose professional façade concealed the crudest sense of social propriety. In a primitive attempt to dissuade his sister-in-law, Ann, from marrying the *radical* Veblen, Atwood struck her on the side of the head with a rifle butt, apparently inflicting an injury that caused her much pain in subsequent years and which Becky felt contributed to her progressive decline in health.⁸⁴ Like the guardians of self-serving truth and social pretense everywhere, he was ready to wreak harm wantonly in the name of convention. In this sense he, rather than Veblen, was the emotional cripple. Veblen, for his part, never learned of Atwood's demented assault on Babe.⁸⁵

Max Lerner has succinctly contextualized the critics' preoccupation with Veblen's private life and his contempt of convention. (Veblen was, in Colette Van Fleet's words, "conventionally unconventional."⁸⁶) Commenting on the difficulties Veblen's social comportment seemed to cause him with university administrators at Chicago and Stanford, Lerner

writes: "The Philistines knew that a giant was among them, but he was the wrong kind of giant, whose strength they feared, and they were glad to see him go packing before he pulled the temple down around their heads." It was less his "unstable ménage" that outraged them than it was his "dangerous thoughts."⁸⁷

But Veblen's "dangerous thoughts" went beyond his unsettling critique of the prevailing economic order. They also resided in his view of what it means to be human; of how one properly lives in the world. Riesman's belittling of Veblen's interest in botany and nature study, for example, reveals a deeper disquiet in the citified sociologist arising, perhaps, from latent doubts about the anthropocentric assumptions of Judeo-Christian civilization that Veblen implicitly challenges, or, alternatively, from Riesman's own cosmic alienation as a denizen of civilized environments.⁸⁸

Dorfman, too, appears disturbed by Veblen's acquiescent attitude toward nature. Both he and Riesman bristle at his implied diminishing of humankind's importance in the natural order. "He seemed to consider the human relatively unimportant among living things," reproaches Dorfman in a passage quoted by Riesman, who in turn comments disapprovingly that, like the women in Veblen's life, he "let nature move in on him" and "did not struggle against the cosmic forces."⁸⁹

Veblen's sense of life's meaning in fact bears a marked similarity to that of his contemporaries John Muir and John Burroughs, as well as to the views of later figures like poet/paleontologist Loren Eiseley, conservationist Aldo Leopold, Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess, and entomologist Edward Wilson — renegade voices of humility who return the human species to its proper condition of oneness with other life forms within a delicately balanced, finely woven ecological web.⁹⁰

"The land is one organism," affirms Leopold. "The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: 'What good is it?' If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not."⁹¹

"We cannot avoid 'identifying' ourselves with all living beings, beautiful or ugly, big or small, sentient or not," adds Naess, who first coined the term *deep ecology* and gave philosophical expression to what Leopold, Eiseley and Veblen experienced viscerally.⁹²

Like industry shills and latter-day ideologues of man's dominion over the Earth, Dorfman and Riesman found Veblen's disavowal of human preeminence deeply offensive. His final, perhaps greatest, offense was that no monument to his passing should be raised nor mortal trace remain to anchor his memory in man's limited realm. "We have little grasp of our true nature, of what it is to be human," writes Edward Wilson in words

that Veblen himself could have penned. "Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to discover the source of human sensibility and acquire the knowledge on which an enduring ethic, a sense of preferred direction, can be built."⁹³

Such, then, are the surviving traces of Thorstein Veblen's presence on Washington Island. He was drawn there originally by a desire to perfect his knowledge of the Icelandic language and in fact appears to have established close and lasting ties to the local Icelandic community.⁹⁴ Astonished at the sensitivity with which Veblen had rendered *The Laxdaela Saga* into English, an incredulous University of Wisconsin philologist inquired of the book's publisher, B. W. Huebsch, whether Veblen was "by any chance himself an Icelander — else, as an *economist*, how comes it he can read this speech of the twilight of the Gods?"⁹⁵ The answer, no doubt, lay in Veblen's long association with the Gislasons, Gudmundssons, Bjarnarsons and perhaps other oldtime Icelanders resident on Washington Island.

But with time Veblen seems also to have developed a feeling for the Island beyond his initial interest in its Icelandic heritage. "He saw and fell in love with a plot of land which lay between Green Bay and a small inland lake on our property where he could see the sunrise over the small lake and the sunset over Green Bay," Sigurline Bjarnarson wrote Joseph Dorfman in 1934.⁹⁶ "He did just seem to love that little beach [by Green Bay]," his stepdaughter Becky told us recently.⁹⁷ Perhaps, speculates Island author Anne Whitney, "among these Scandinavian people he felt a spiritual affinity that gave him the peace of mind needed for study and writing."⁹⁸

The larger point, of course, is that Veblen's time on Washington Island constitutes a significant and hitherto all but ignored segment of his life which now offers additional insight into the individual he was and the work he produced. The relationship between individuated life experience and the conscious expression of ideas, in turn, poses important theoretical questions not directly addressed here but of which we are cognizant, namely the nature and specificity of that relationship. We are able to document, for example, that Veblen worked on his published writings during summer sojourns at his Little Lake camp. With the exception of *The Laxdaela Saga*, however, we cannot yet demonstrate any experiential linkages between Veblen's time on the Island and the ideational processes that generated those writings — although the fact that they were in whole or in part written on Washington Island remains a noteworthy datum of historical record.

As regards the articulation of ideas, we do not mean to imply a narrowly deterministic relationship between life experience and abstract thought, either in the specific case of Thorstein Veblen or as a more general epistemological principle. We do suggest that biography contextualizes individual intellects and that one's existential reality imposes conditioning parameters on one's mind. Accordingly, in our view, a full and proper appraisal of Veblen's thought cannot be accomplished without reference to the life he led — a premise tacitly accepted by those who have written about him in the past, especially his critics.

While the present article is an exercise in constructive revisionism, it is not our purpose to reconstruct Veblen sans blemishes and eccentricities, much less suggest the possibility of recapturing in any meaningful sense the essence of his inner being. Each of us is a universe unto ourselves, the poet pointedly reminds us, and when a person dies it is in fact a universe that ceases to be, forevermore inaccessible to other mortals even as it was in life.⁹⁹ Science, for all its virtues, cannot penetrate the particularities of subjective experience, which effectively renders the self unknowable to all but itself.

Objectively, therefore, we can have no direct knowledge of the inner Veblen. Nor can we discover objective existential relationships between Veblen's life and his thought, for we cannot ourselves directly access another's experience. With this important caveat, there are *historical* dimensions to one's life that bear significantly on our understanding of a person's thought and actions which are discoverable through disciplined inquiry. These biographical facts, in turn, allow us to speculate with some insight about the experiential origins of articulated thought.

In elaborating the foregoing account of Veblen's presence on Washington Island, we have sought not so much to sketch a new profile of Veblen as to highlight imperfections in the old rendering. We find it remarkable that for the past sixty years virtually all scholars writing on Veblen have deferred to a single biographer, Joseph Dorfman, for perspective on Veblen's life and personality. Dorfman's contribution to our knowledge of Veblen and his work is not in dispute here, but, as we have shown, Dorfman is nonetheless a source of serious and persistent misapprehensions, not least of which is the assumption that he has produced the definitive biography of Veblen and that little of biographical consequence remains to be done.

To the contrary, we conclude, there is yet a great deal of work to be done on Veblen's life, significant facets of which have been plainly overlooked. This is reinforced by what we have learned of Veblen's connection to Washington Island, as well as by substantial new material concerning other aspects of his life that has come to our attention in the course of our research.

Now the first order of business, it seems to us, is to correct those erroneous interpretations of Veblen's life that continue to hinder sober evaluation of his intellectual legacy. Next, scholars need to fill the biographical lacunae, of which there are a number. Finally, with time and a further refinement of our conceptual tools, perhaps it will be possible to delve deeper into the more elusive existential links between Veblen's published works and the singular life he lived.

ENDNOTES

Acronyms:

CCA	Carleton College Archives (Northfield, MN)
SHSW	State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison, WI)
WIHA	Washington Island Historical Archives (Washington Island, WI)

Abbreviated references:

Baran interview.

Transcript of tape-recorded reminiscences of Becky Veblen Meyers prepared by her daughter, Esther Meyers Baran, Sandpoint, ID, September 1991. Copy at CCA.

Bartley/Yoneda interview.

Interview with Becky Veblen Meyers conducted by Russell H. Bartley & Sylvia E. Yoneda, Sandpoint, ID, 27 August 1993. Transcript at CCA.

BVM, "Memoirs."

Becky Veblen Meyers, handwritten notes for memoirs, August 1990. Copy at CCA.

Diggins file.

File of materials gathered by historian John Patrick Diggins in early 1980s while writing documentary film script entitled "Conspicuous Consumption: Thorstein Veblen and Our Economy of Waste." Copies in authors' possession.

Dorfman, "New Light."

Thorstein Veblen, *Essays, Reviews and Reports. Previously uncollected writings*. Edited & with an introduction, "New Light on Veblen," by Joseph Dorfman (Clifton, NJ: Kelley, 1973).

Gunnerson, interview notes.

Esther V. Gunnerson, handwritten notes on interviews with former acquaintances of Thorstein Veblen conducted on Washington Island, August 1963. Copy at CCA.

Gunnerson, "Thorstein Veblen."

Esther V. Gunnerson, "Washington Island's Thorstein Veblen" (unpublished research paper, Oshkosh State College, 1963). Copy at CCA.

Hillemann interview.

Interview with Ted & Fritz Bjarnarson conducted by Carleton College Archivist Eric Hillemann on Washington Island, 6 August 1993. Original tape cassette at CCA; dub in authors' possession.

Paul Veblen interview.

Interview with Becky Veblen Meyers conducted by Paul Veblen (Thorstein Veblen's grandnephew), Sandpoint, ID, June 1993. Transcript at CCA.

Van Fleet interview.

Interview with Colette (Sims) Van Fleet conducted by Russell H. Bartley & Sylvia E. Yoneda, Eureka, CA, 23 July 1993. Transcript at CCA.

1. John Kenneth Galbraith, Introduction to *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. By Thorstein Veblen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973). v-vi.
2. Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America* (NY: Viking, 1934).
3. Andrew Veblen to Joseph Dorfman, Los Angeles, 25 February 1930, Andrew A. Veblen Papers (A. V395, vol. 45 & 46), Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.
4. David Riesman, *Thorstein Veblen. A Critical Interpretation* (NY: Scribner, 1953). "I read Joseph Dorfman's *Thorstein Veblen and His America* on its appearance in 1934," writes Riesman, "and have returned to it many times; it is by all odds the most useful picture of Veblen and his background that we have and, without its conscientious fullness of detail, such interpretive work as mine would be badly handicapped." [Paperback edition, 1960, p. iii. Subsequent references are to this edition.]
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
6. Rick Tilman, *Thorstein Veblen and His Critics, 1891-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 167.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
8. See Jacob Warshaw, "A Few Footnotes to Dorfman's Veblen," Jacob Warshaw Papers (1910-1944), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri; and R. L. Duffus, *The Innocents at Cedro. A Memoir of Thorstein Veblen and Some Others*. With the advice and consent of William M. Duffus (NY: Macmillan, 1944).

9. After a long hiatus since Dorfman's ground-breaking research, a substantial body of new source material on Thorstein Veblen has recently surfaced, much of it, as was perhaps to be expected, in the hands of family members. It includes correspondence and miscellaneous personal papers, as well as photographs, oral interviews, and a portion of Veblen's library recently recovered from Washington Island. The bulk of this material has been or will be donated to Carleton College in Northfield, MN, which as a consequence now possesses a major collection of Vebleniana.
10. Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge, January–March 1961 (NY: Knopf, 1963), p. 27.
11. For the history of Icelandic immigration to Washington Island, see Conan Bryant Eaton, *Washington Island, 1836–1876. A part of the history of Washington Township.* Revised edition (Sturgeon Bay, WI: Self-published, 1980), pp. 49–74. See also *idem*, "The Icelanders in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 56:1 (Autumn, 1972): 2–20.
12. Gunnerson, "Thorstein Veblen," pp. 2–3. Ironically, the Gislason children had to struggle that summer to acquire a working knowledge of Icelandic, which until then had not been spoken in the home.

Gunnerson conducted valuable primary research for this paper, including a number of oral interviews with persons who had known Veblen on Washington Island, all of whom are now deceased. She communicated her findings to Joseph Dorfman, who in turn cites Gunnerson in reference to Veblen's initial visit to the island. See Dorfman, "New Light," p. 189, n. 122.

13. There is a record of Veblen having made purchases at the Gislason store in Detroit Harbor in August 1905. [WIHA, Gislason Store, Day Book (June 1905–March 1906), pp. 111, 113 & 115.] Veblen's step-daughter, Becky, recalls nighting over with Edward and Hannah Cornell at Washington Harbor. [Bartley/Yoneda interview.]
14. Gunnerson, "Thorstein Veblen," p. 3. Lawrence Gislason's rendering of Veblen's reply to the inquiry about his marital status would seem to reflect the boy's incomplete mastery of the language. In all likelihood the shading of Veblen's reply was closer to the English "Very!" than to "Much!," as reported by Gislason.
15. Baran interview, p. 5. Annotations in Veblen's copy of *The Instinct of Workmanship* indicate that he spent the summer of 1911 in Buck Prairie, OR, and the summer of 1912 in Mancos Valley, NM, which leaves the possibility that he spent the summer of 1913 on Washington Island with Ann Bradley and her daughters prior to their marriage in June of the following year. [Becky Veblen Meyers, notes in Diggins file.]
16. "Babe" was her mother's nickname from childhood, Becky explained to Paul Veblen in a recent interview [q.v.]. Babe was the youngest of four siblings and therefore the "baby" of the family. [Esther Baran, telephone conversation, 23 January 1994.]
17. State of Wisconsin, Door County, Register of Deeds (Sturgeon Bay), Vol. 27 of Deeds, No. 180814, p. 77. A copy of this deed, dated 6 November 1915, bearing the signatures of Kari and Sigurline Bjarnarson and witnessed by A[rmi] Gudmundsen and Edward H. Cornell, was donated to the Carleton College Archives by Becky Veblen Meyers and is preserved in that institution's Veblen Collection. See also WIHA, Assessment Rolls for the Town of Washington, Door County, 1915.

Becky recalled in a letter to historian J. P. Diggins that the Little Lake property had been "burnt over 20 years before" and how at the time Veblen and Babe purchased it the property was covered with "young birch, balsam fir, & cedar." [Becky Meyers to John Diggins, San Francisco, 18 January 1982, p. 2, Diggins file.]

18. Bartley/Yoneda interview.
19. BVM, "Memoirs," p. 1.
20. Meyers to Diggins, 18 January 1982, p. 3.
21. Amy [Koyen] Eichelberger, telephone conversation, 17 April 1990. Eichelberger's description of the interior of Veblen's cabin was based on her personal recollection of

- the property at the time it was acquired by her father and mother. We have confirmed and elaborated aspects of her description based on our own inspection of the property. At the time of that inspection (29 April 1990), the cabin stood in its original location and remained in essentially sound condition. It had been constructed of milled lumber, had exterior and screened doors at either end, small six-paned windows set in its south, west and north walls and a large 12-paned window on the east end next to Veblen's work corner. On warm days, Veblen could sit at his writing surface with both doors open and listen to the sounds of the surrounding woods while contemplating the view across the water to the cedar-lined far shore of Little Lake. The study cabin has since been moved and is now attached to the main cottage, where it serves as an additional room.
22. Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*, p. 276.
 23. Becky Meyers to Jack Diggins, [San Francisco], 26 February 1982, p. 4, Diggins file. On Ann Veblen's health, see below nn. 32, 84 & 85.
 24. Eldred Ellefson, interview, Washington Island, WI, 10 October 1993; telephone conversation, 7 December 1993. Ellefson recalled entering the Veblen cabin as a young teenager in the early 1940s via the window in the north wall and rummaging through its contents. He was particularly struck by a trunk filled to the top with clippings and pages torn from newspapers, which from hindsight led him to speculate that Veblen might have subscribed to a regular clipping service. There were boxes of papers in the cabin and perhaps a second steamer trunk. Ellefson remembered finding some sheet music among the papers. He had no clear recollection of either the books or any furnishings. Eugene Gislason recalled the boxes of papers when as a young boy he and his father visited Veblen at the Little Lake property. [Gunnerson, interview notes.]
 25. BVM, "Memoirs," p. 7.
 26. Hillemann interview.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. Meyers to Diggins, 18 January 1982, p. 5. Becky mistakenly gives the year of Veblen's final departure from Washington Island as 1927.
 29. Van Fleet interview.
 30. Bartley/Yoneda interview.
 31. Van Fleet interview.
 32. Bartley/Yoneda interview. Becky's mother appears to have developed a brain malady as a consequence of a blow to the head from a rifle butt delivered by her brother-in-law, Wallace Atwood, in a fit of anger over her decision to marry Thorstein. Atwood vehemently opposed any family tie to the *radical* Veblen. She began having headaches and in time manifested irrational behavior that eventually led to her commitment to the McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, where she died on 7 October 1920. [Baran interview, pp. 1-2; Dorfman, "New Light," p. 188, note 221.] As her condition deteriorated, she was obliged to spend much of her time on Washington Island resting in a hammock. [Bartley/Yoneda interview; BVM, "Memoirs," p. 5.] Also see below nn. 84 & 85.
 33. BVM, "Memoirs," p. 7. Veblen presented a copy of his translation of *The Laxdaela Saga* to Kari Bjarnarson, with whom he no doubt had discussed the project at length. Kari, one of the last Icelanders to emigrate to Washington Island, possessed a leatherbound collection of Icelandic sagas, including the *Laxdaela*, that he had brought from Iceland in 1899 and of which he was especially proud. [Hillemann interview.]
 34. Veblen to Becky F. Bradley, Washington Island, 17 June 1923, CCA, Veblen Collection. In preparing this letter for donation to Carleton College, Becky clarified in an accompanying handwritten note that she "changed 'Miss Veblen' to 'Miss Bradley,' fearing my 'painfully shy'ness would be bad. Thorstein called Ann & me 'painfully shy' and 'the young Barbarians.' After Univ of Chif[cago] I went back to 'Becky F. Veblen'."

Thorstein further informed Becky in this letter that mice had gotten into the main cabin and eaten whatever they could, "including your army shoes." She would have to get a new pair. And, he added, "I hope it will be a pleasanter pair."

The mosquitoes, he wrote, "promise to be troublesome," so she was to purchase a "mosquito tent." She also needed to bring bedding for herself "and the other folks," along with "knives and forks and spoons," and should buy as well "a small carving set (knife, fork, and steel) which is shown in the window of a hardware store on the north side of 55 St. not far from Blackstone Avenue."

35. Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*, p. 500.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 452, 497 & 503.
37. Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 28. Riesman's source for this version of Veblen's activities on Washington Island is a mystery. So at variance is it with his demeanor and attitude toward Island acquaintances, so condescending toward the Islanders he most respected, that we wonder if it might not have come from Veblen's former student and longtime associate, Leon Ardzrooni, who had visited Veblen on the Island and found the place not to his liking. [Bartley/Yoneda interview.]
38. *Ibid.*
39. An account of Veblen's Washington Island library and its preservation is included in the original version of this article as presented at the Inaugural Conference of the International Thorstein Veblen Association (4 February 1994), a copy of which is held by the Carleton College Archives.
40. University of Wisconsin philologist William Ellery Leonard lauded Veblen's rendering of the *Laxdaela* into English, a problem he himself had been pondering for several years. "His English in the flavor of the words, in the homely raciness of sturdy intimate turns of our folk speech, and in the dry grimness and pathos of its laconic sentence structure," he wrote the publisher, "is as imaginatively vital a transfer from language to language as can well be." [Leonard to B. W. Huebsch, Madison, WI, 16 May 1925, SHSW, Thorstein Veblen Papers, 1916-1926, box 190, folder 1. Hereafter: Veblen Papers]
- Francis P. Magoun, Jr., a Harvard philologist, judged Veblen's translation of the *Laxdaela* "an enormous improvement" over existing translations and applauded his "taste in rendering Old Icelandic prose into every-day English." [Magoun to Huebsch, Cambridge, MA, 7 July 1925, SHSW, Veblen Papers, box 190, folder 1.]
41. *The Laxdaela Saga*. Translated from the Icelandic, with an introduction by Thorstein Veblen (NY: Huebsch, 1925), pp. vi, ix.
42. Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*, pp. 492-493.
43. At age 89, Becky still recalled "The King of the Cannibal Islands, who dined on cucumbers cold and raw" and "King Solomon and King David [who] led merry, merry lives/with many, many concubines and many, many wives." She recalled as well Kipling's long poem about "The Sons of Martha" and could recite Yeats' "The Land of Heart's Desire." [BVM, "Memoirs," pp. 2-3.]
44. Van Fleet interview; snapshot of "Mock Turtle" in possession of Colette Van Fleet.
45. Bartley/Yoneda interview.
46. BVM, "Memoirs," pp. 1-2.
47. Meyers to Diggins, 18 January 1982, p. 3.
48. Becky Veblen Meyers, typewritten notes from letter to David Riesman, n.d., Diggins file.
49. After Babe died, Becky writes, Veblen "struggled on, in poor health, to give his two stepdaughters a chance to finish whatever college training we chose . . . He kept on for 7 yrs. til Dr. Benjamin Gross wrote me he could not survive another winter in New York." [*Ibid.*] "I'm quite sure Thorstein did his best to keep on at the New School," Becky adds, "not only because he was interested, but to keep sending Ann's children [to] college as long as we wanted to get more education." [Meyers to Diggins, 18 March 1982, p. 2, Diggins file.]

- See also Baran interview, p. 4; Veblen to Becky [Bradley], Detroit Harbor, WI, 26 July [1926], CCA, Veblen Collection.
50. Paul Veblen interview.
 51. Van Fleet interview.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. Sigurline Bjarnarson to Becky Veblen, Washington Island, 22 October 1929. Copy in authors' possession; second copy at WIHA; original donated to CCA.
 54. BVM, "Memoirs," p. 2.
 55. Veblen to Emily [Mrs. Sigurd Olsen], Palo Alto, CA, 26 June [1927], CCA, Veblen Collection.
 56. Van Fleet interview.
 57. Gunnerson, "Thorstein Veblen," p. 7.
 58. Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 26. The fact that Riesman came to social science scholarship from a career in the law and did not possess the traditional academic credentials suggests a possible source of professional insecurity on his part. He held A.B. (1931) and LL.B. (1934) degrees from Harvard University. See John F. Ohles ed., *Biographical Dictionary of American Educators*, 3 vols. (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood, 1978), III, p. 1103.
 59. Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
 60. *Ibid.*
 61. Baran interview, p. 4.
 62. Veblen to Emily, Chicago, 6 May 1926, CCA, Veblen Collection.
 63. "Among the reasons for going," he noted, "is the fact that you can live more cheaply, and quite as well, on the Island than anywhere else; so that in 10 or 12 weeks you should save the cost of transportation." Veblen to Emily, Palo Alto, CA, 26 June [1927], CCA, Veblen Collection.
 64. In this second letter Veblen explained that anyone traveling to his Washington Island camp "should go, preferably, by Green Bay, take stage or car to Sturgeon Bay and on to Elison's [sic] Bay or Gill's Rock, ferry to Detroit Harbor and car to Kari Bjarnarson's (pronounced 'Cowry') who has the keys and will do any carting or other work. This is the right route," he clarified, "unless one can get a boat (Goodrich) from Escanaba or Sturgeon Bay." [Veblen to Emily, Palo Alto, CA, 7 July (1927), CCA, Veblen Collection.]
 65. Van Fleet interview.
 66. Gunnerson, interview notes.
 67. A trip to Koyens' general store, Becky relates, began with a rowboat. "We'd go in the rowboat across the lake and then climb the hill to the Bjarnarson farm and from there we'd walk out to the Koyens' store." [BVM interview.] "We made this long trip through the woods," adds Colette, recapturing her childhood perspective. "It was the old-fashioned general store that had a barrel of stale chocolate. You know, with white centers and coated, always a little crisp because they were old! We'd buy candles and flashlight batteries and staples." [Van Fleet interview.] "Everything you could make," clarifies Becky, "the store wouldn't sell. They'd expect us to do our own stuff. But we'd buy the things that you'd have to buy, like cereal, cream of wheat, sugar . . . I suspect we used a lot of sugar!" [Bartley/Yoneda interview.]
 68. Van Fleet interview.
 69. Gunnerson, "Thorstein Veblen," p. 5.
 70. Hillemann interview.
 71. Gunnerson, interview notes. "He told us that there were snapping turtles in [Little Lake]," Ted Bjarnarson recounts. "And he said that some of them, the head would be as big as your two fists put together! So it's got to be a pretty good-sized turtle! They're still in there, but not that big." [Hillemann interview.]
 72. Bartley/Yoneda interview.

73. Veblen to Becky, Detroit Harbor, WI, 26 July [1926], CCA, Veblen Collection.
74. Van Fleet interview.
75. *Ibid.* Andrew Veblen appears not to have visited Washington Island. Colette's recollection of the two Veblen brothers engaging in word games refers most likely to the latter 1920s when Andrew was living in San Diego, although there may have been other occasions as well in Chicago and Minneapolis.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Bartley/Yoneda interview.
78. Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Cognizant as he was of the university's socializing function and of the fetters it imposed on students and faculty alike, Veblen chose to address only those students and colleagues agile enough intellectually to transcend the rote of prevailing ideology.
79. Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America. A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*. Introduction by David Riesman (Stanford, CA: Academic Reprints, 1954), pp. 18, 19–20.

"The student who comes up to the university for the pursuit of knowledge," Veblen held, "is expected to know what he wants and to want it, without compulsion. If he falls short in these respects, if he has not the requisite interest and initiative, it is his own misfortune, not the fault of his teacher. What he has a legitimate claim to is an opportunity for such personal contact and guidance as will give him familiarity with the ways and means of the higher learning, — any information imparted to him being incidental to his main work of habituation. He gets a chance to make himself a scholar, and what he will do with his opportunities in this way lies in his own discretion." [*Ibid.*, p. 20.]

80. In a little-known episode, Babe saved Veblen's life when, arriving at her Idaho cabin in a snow storm in December 1909, he contracted double pneumonia. She refused to accept a physician's prognosis that Veblen would not survive the combination of pneumonia and a weak heart and spent the better part of the next year nursing him back to health. She placed her young daughters, Becky and Ann, in an orphanage for several months while caring for Veblen. When he had regained sufficient strength to travel, she accompanied him to New Mexico for further recuperation. It was "a great scandal," by Becky's recollection. Even though Veblen was so sick "nothing could happen," it looked scandalous, "especially to Ellen [Rolfe] Veblen." [Baran interview, pp. 2, 5 & 7; BVM, "Memoirs," p. 15; Becky Veblen Meyers, handwritten account of "tragic event of Dec. 25, 1909," 5 June 1990, CCA, Veblen Collection.]
81. In the fall of 1985, Mrs. Henry Cowell, whose husband was the executor of Ellen [Rolfe] Veblen's estate, wrote the Carleton College Librarian that "Ellen Veblen proved to have a physical anomaly that made what was then referred to (if it was referred to at all) as 'family life' impossible . . .

"Nobody ever discussed such things aloud in those days," she noted, "but it explains so much about both Veblens, I thought the information should be on record somewhere." [Cowell to Carleton College Librarian, Shady, NY, 24 November 1985, CCA, Veblen Collection.]

Riesman gives this matter a perverse twist by suggesting that Veblen consciously married a woman "whom an autopsy showed to be sexually still a child, insufficiently developed to have children." He deceptively calls attention to Ellen's inability to conceive, while ignoring her equally significant incapacity for normal intercourse. Moreover, he assumes premarital intimacy, else how could Veblen know that he was entering into a sexless union? No matter how groundless, Riesman needs to make this assumption to sustain his *a priori* argument that Ellen's lack of physiological development demonstrated Veblen's fear of siring children and that he had "failed to exorcise his own father." [Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 8.]

The readiness of conventional academics to seize on the flimsiest evidence of abnormality in an unconventional colleague like Veblen and to formulate therefrom fallacious, even vicious, assertions about that colleague, is further reflected in a remark by Carleton College historian Carlton C. Qualey. Writing in the introduction to a volume on the College's "celebrated and perhaps most significant alumnus," Qualey comments offhandedly that "the most puzzling information" he had encountered about Veblen "was his seeming refusal to permit his wife to have a child." While the results of Rolfe's autopsy report may not have been available to Qualey, it is clear that the rumor mill was in full operation. [Carlton C. Qualey, ed., *Thorstein Veblen. The Carleton College Veblen Seminar Essays* (NY & London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 7.]

82. Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 8. Riesman's de facto ignorance of the quality and nature of Veblen's relationship with Ann Fessenden Bradley explains the vacuity, if not the irresponsibility, of what he has written about that relationship. Veblen married Bradley, he asserts, "to escape further dependency on his friends" and "perhaps also because his friends so strongly opposed it." Riesman is quick to attribute motives but fails to provide evidence, a cardinal sin for one who professes faith in the scholarly canon. So prudish is his outlook that he rejects *a priori* the legitimacy of Bradley's presence in Veblen's life, refusing so much as to mention her by name even as he uses her to demean the object of her reciprocated affection.

83. "Veblen never had his own children," Becky relates. "A year after he married my mother, they were expecting a child. And I remember how terribly disappointed he looked when the little boy died, a miscarriage at seven months. That cut him up. And of course, my mother never recovered. She felt so bad about losing that baby." [Baran interview, p. 1.]

In her own notes, Becky writes: "In Columbia, Mo. Babe had lost the baby they hoped to have — it died at 7 months pregnancy. The Dr. thought she was working too hard — painting a room for its nursery, etc. She should have rested more." [BVM, "Memoirs," p. 4.]

84. "I suspect the bash from [Atwood] may have started that mastoid [affliction]," Becky wrote John Diggins. [Meyers to Diggins, 18 March 1982, p. 1.] She attributed her mother's death in the fall of 1920 to complications stemming from the original injury inflicted by Atwood [Baran interview, p. 1; BVM, "Memoirs," p. 4], although the official certificate of death records the immediate cause as a "pulmonary abscess" of three weeks' duration. [Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Standard Certificate of Death, Ann B. Veblen, McLean Hospital, Belmont, MA, 7 October 1920. Copy in authors' possession.] and the official autopsy report contains no evidence of injury to the head or trauma-induced brain abnormality. [McLean Hospital, Autopsy No. 11525: VEBLLEN, ANN B. Copy in authors' possession.] In the judgment of UCLA cancer specialist Dr. Richard Steckel, Ann Veblen died of "a massive lung infection." [Steckel to R. H. Bartley, Santa Monica, CA, 3 April 1994.] Ann Veblen was committed to McLean Hospital at the end of July 1919 following an emotional collapse that Becky also attributed to the blow she had received to her head.

85. "I heard loud voices," Becky writes in her notes, "[and] silently approached to see [Atwood] bash Babe on side of head with rifle butt. She lay on the floor, hands protecting her head. She saw me & motioned me away. Later she told me to never tell what I'd seen lest it reflect on his children . . ." [BVM, "Memoirs," pp. 45.]

"Atwood took a gun," Becky recounted to her own daughter, Esther, "and bashed [Babe] on the side of the head to prevent her from going to Veblen — he didn't want to have a radical in the family." Atwood, she felt, "must have come from some violent kind of family. When someone did something he didn't like, he went 'wham!' My mother must not bring any horrible radical economist into his family, so my mother must not marry him! . . ."

- "My uncle Wallace used to tell us Indian stories and Eskimo stories. He was good that way, even if he didn't like Toyse [children's nickname for Thorstein — RHB]. I had always worshipped Wallace before the time when he bashed her head with his gun. I just saw Babe lying on the floor, trying to protect her head, and Wallace standing over her with his rifle, and [my aunt] Harriet saying, 'You cannot marry Prof. Veblen.'" [Baran interview, pp. 12, 6.]
86. "[Veblen] had a lot of ritual," Colette has stated. "A lot of things that he did we could predict." [Van Fleet interview.]
 87. Max Lerner, ed., *The Portable Veblen* (NY: Viking, 1967), p. 10.
 88. At a rudimentary level this reference is to the urban mind which, alienated from the world outside human constructions (i.e. uncivilized), assumes that water comes from a tap, heat from a thermostat, and light from an incandescent bulb or fluorescent tube. On the philosophical plane it refers to man's separation of himself from the *cosmos* (i.e. alienation) through the medium of civilization, as explored by Heidegger, Foucault, Marcuse, Roszak, and the contemporary proponents of biodiversity and deep ecology.
 89. Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
 90. See, for example, Loren Eiseley, *All the Strange Hours* (NY: Macmillan, 1977); *idem*, *The Innocent Assassins* (NY: Scribner, 1973); Aldo Leopold, *Round River*. Edited by Luna B. Leopold (NY: Oxford, 1953); *idem*, *A Sand County Almanac* (NY: Oxford, 1949); Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises," *Ecologist* 18 (1988): 128-131; *idem*, *Ecology, Community & Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (NY: Cambridge, 1990); Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (NY & London: Norton, 1993).
 91. Leopold, *Round River*, p. 146.
 92. Arne Naess, "Self Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," in: John Seed et al., *Thinking Like a Mountain* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988), p. 20.
 93. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, p. 348.
 94. Local Islanders, comments a longtime local resident, often referred to Thorstein as "Old Bevlen," a consonant transposition that we ourselves have observed both on and off the Island. [Conversation with Eelin (Mrs. Conan Bryant) Eaton, Washington Island, 28 April 1990.]
 95. William Ellery Leonard to B. W. Huebsch, Madison, WI, 16 May 1925, SHSW, Veblen Papers. Leonard considered the Icelandic of the *Laxdaela* "the most difficult of all mediaeval or modern languages of Western Europe."
 96. Dorfman, "New Light," p. 189, note 222.
 97. Bartley/Yoneda interview.
 98. Anne T. Whitney, *Let's Talk about Washington Island, 1850-1950* (Chicago: Techni-Graphics/Graphic Dimensions, 1973), p. 101.
 99. Evgenii Evtushenko, "Liudi" (1961).