

**ELITHE HAMILTON KIRKLAND:**  
**THE MARCH TOWARD PERFECTION**

THESIS

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By

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my husband, William J. Miller, Jr.,  
in recognition of his support and understanding  
during the creation of this thesis.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
CHAPTER 1	
KIRKLAND'S LIFE AND CAREER	4
CHAPTER 2	
KIRKLAND AND DOBIE	27
CHAPTER 3	
KIRKLAND'S NOVELS	40
CHAPTER 4	
<i>DIVINE AVERAGE</i>	48
CHAPTER 5	
<i>LOVE IS A WILD ASSAULT</i>	73
CHAPTER 6	
<i>THE EDGE OF DISREPUTE</i>	103
CHAPTER 7	
<i>ON THE TRELLIS OF MEMORY</i>	120
CHAPTER 8	
KIRKLAND'S OTHER WRITINGS	129
CHAPTER 9	
THE MARCH TOWARD PERFECTION	143
ENDNOTES	149
WORKS CITED	155
OTHER SOURCES CITED	157

## FOREWORD

Elithe Hamilton Kirkland (1907-1992) is best known as the author of *Love Is a Wild Assault*, published in 1959 and listed in A. C. Green's *50+ Best Books on Texas* in 1998. Granddaughter of Texas pioneers, she grew up on a ranch in Coleman County. Following her years in a one-teacher rural school and high school in Coleman, she graduated from North Texas State Teachers College in 1928. Before she became a novelist, her varied career included teaching and journalism, interrupted by a stint as school publicity director for the Texas State Centennial in 1936, and writing for radio. Along the way she earned a master's degree from the University of Texas while working with J. Frank Dobie as his student and as a writer and director for Radio House at the Texas State Network.

In 1947 eleven years after her first marriage to Roy Beal ended in divorce, she married her second husband, Dr. Roy Kirkland, and began her career as a novelist. Her first novel, *Divine Average*, published in 1952, was a success, praised by Dobie as "the best historical novel Texas has so far produced" and often called a "Texas *Gone With the Wind*." She trumped herself with an even greater success in 1959 with the publication of *Love Is A Wild Assault*, the story of Harriet Moore Page Potter Ames, known during the Texas Republic as "the bravest woman in Texas."

Kirkland's publication of other novels and short stories as well as the creation of her musicals, television scripts, song lyrics, and poems over the years affirm her long

creative life. Her many awards are listed in the finding aid for the Elithe Hamilton Kirkland Papers:

American Association for State and Local History Award for Merit (1953)

Theta Sigma Phi Outstanding Authors of 1959

North Texas State University Distinguished Alumna (1985)

National Society Daughters of the American Revolution History Award  
Medal (1987)

Texas Women's Hall of Fame (1987) (Oates 22)

Kirkland's mystical beliefs began to play a larger role in her writing as her career progressed. A Christian mystic and member of the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship, Kirkland expanded her philosophy to encompass mind control, channeling, hypnotism and healing, readings by mediums, awareness seminars, numerology, prophecy in dreams, power spots, and reincarnation. Her novels especially reveal her major belief that spiritual consciousness is vital to the eventual perfection of mankind. As her philosophical message permeated her works, her literary creations became accessible to fewer readers. At the presentation of the Elithe Hamilton Kirkland Archives to the Southwestern Writers Collection at Southwest Texas State University, Billy Porterfield paid tribute to her grand theme when he remembered her as "a country girl from Coleman County and a traveler of the cosmos."

While I was a student of Southwestern Studies II: The Consequences of Region, the presentation of the Elithe Hamilton Kirkland Papers to the Southwestern Writers Collection here at Southwest Texas State University directed my attention to this Texas writer. Over the summer I enjoyed her first two novels and discovered many reviews of Kirkland's novels containing high praise for her historical research and her skill in incorporating history into her novels. However, I found an absence of scholarly articles on Kirkland's works. I decided that such an author invited investigation. This thesis is designed as an overview of the life and works of Elithe Hamilton Kirkland. Arranged

chronologically, the first chapter, a biography, is followed by a chapter detailing her relationship as student and protégé of Texas folklorist J. Frank Dobie, who influenced her writing and assisted her in finding her first publisher.

The next section of the thesis, a five-chapter investigation of Kirkland's published novels, begins with Chapter 3, an introduction to the novels pointing out major similarities among *Divine Average*, *Love Is a Wild Assault*, and *The Edge of Disrepute* contributing to the view of these three as a trilogy. Chapters 4 through 6 present each of these three novels, analyzing each one for main ideas; structural organization; the problem of race; historical sources, incidents, and characters; folklore; critical response; and evidence of the author's main theme—the belief that in each generation humankind takes a step forward toward the ultimate goal of perfection. Chapter 7 investigates *On the Trellis of Memory*, an unusual novel of “psychic pre-history.” Although its atypical nature excludes consideration of race, history, and folklore, analysis of its organization, characters, and ideas discloses the same major theme Kirkland presented in the trilogy—belief in the eventual perfection of mankind.

Chapter 8 reviews the wide variety of Kirkland's other writings—short stories, musicals, television scripts, songs and poems. Chapter 9, the final chapter, draws the conclusion that over her long writing career, her interest in history enhanced by her pioneer family background, her early work in newspaper and radio writing, an adventure in pre-World War II Mexico, and her close working relationship with J. Frank Dobie, as well as her life-long interest in parapsychology combined to produce Elithe Hamilton Kirkland, “a fine and rare poetic stylist in novel writing,” whose novel *Love Is a Wild Assault* “continues to be the best-selling historical novel over the longest period of time ever to come out of Texas” (Oppenheimer *Book Lover* 105). This novel shares the main theme of her other work—the march toward perfection.

## CHAPTER 1

### ELITHE HAMILTON KIRKLAND'S LIFE AND CAREER

#### Descendant Of Texas Pioneers

Lena Elithe Hamilton, the granddaughter of two pioneer Texas families—Hamilton and Purcell—was born on September 1, 1907, in Coleman County. Her birth was registered in Brooks, Texas, east of White Chapel, her hometown. White Chapel boasted a four-room schoolhouse, with up to one hundred students; a church; a grocery store; and a telephone exchange operated by Mrs. Jamison, with the assistance of her children.

In “The Cabin in the Woods,” Elithe and her cousin John Hamilton tell the story of their family. Elithe Hamilton Kirkland’s parents were Benjamin Freelove “Free” (1881-1940) and Eva Purcell (1886-1971) Hamilton. Her grandparents John Thomas (1842-1900) and Julia Gowans (1846-1940) Hamilton arrived in Texas in 1876. Kirkland took the first name of Julia’s mother, Luvisa Gowans, as the name of her main character in her first novel *Divine Average*. Her Hamilton grandparents traveled in a covered wagon pulled by oxen to Texas from Council Bluffs, Iowa, where the family had been since their move from Kentucky in the 1860s, bringing with them a large plantation bell that had been used as an alarm system in Kentucky and a “pot of gold,” which enabled them to buy 1200 acres in an area later known as White Chapel. In their log cabin six children were born. The iron bell, dangling from a high pole, sounded the “alarm for danger or accidents or to summon everyone within hearing distance to hunt for a lost child” (2). Years later,

Kirkland told her granddaughter, Shareen Elithe Allen, that Elithe herself had once wandered away into the tall broomweeds and sat down where the family could not find her. Her grandfather Hamilton sounded the alarm bell bringing the neighbors to help in the search much more quickly than the telephone would have. When the grandfather was about to dive into the tank to search for her drowned body, she was found. By the end of her life, Elithe and a cousin were the only family still in possession of the original Hamilton purchase in Coleman County.

Her mother's parents, Daniel E. and Minnie Gilmore Purcell, arrived in Coleman County from Burnet County about the turn of the century. They raised seven children. Both of the Purcells had been born in Texas in Fayette County. An earlier generation of Purcells had migrated to the Republic of Texas from Illinois, settling near the Red River. As the only child of Free and Eva Hamilton, Elithe found companionship with her many cousins on both the Hamilton and the Purcell sides.

Her childhood memories connect her to the past of her grandparents. She spent many happy days at

the historical [Hamilton] log cabin "monument" and the big two-story double-chimney Purcell house across the railroad tracks to the east with its landscaped yard, fine orchard and beehives, [inviting] barns, carriage house, and cozy, spacious outhouse furnished with catalogues, magazines, and a large bucket of fireplace ashes (a most refreshing deodorant that today could foster an industry capable of sponsoring a soap opera). (5-6)

Just like their pioneer grandparents, the young people created their own fun. She remembered watermelon time and "snap" parties. Within the security of a game of snap, boys and girls are free to choose, pursue, and hold hands with members of the opposite sex.

The simplicity of an earlier time is reflected in her memories of Christmas at the Purcells. Grandfather Purcell provided a whole stalk of bananas as well as other exotic

fruits and nuts. For Elithe the excitement peaked with her “fantasy horseback ride behind Grandmother on her side saddle.” Grandmother Purcell was a gifted equestrian who wore a riding habit as she and her granddaughter galloped along. Another fond memory, “frothy golden eggnog in a crystal bowl,” (6) appears several times in *The Edge of Disrepute*. In “Sketch of My Life,” a college essay, Elithe, who pronounced her own name “Leet” when she was very young, again recalled happy Christmases at her grandparents’ house where she and her cousins hung their stockings. In a small book titled *Leet’s Christmas*, she later painted a picture of one of those childhood Christmases.

Besides her Christmas memories, Elithe recalls memories of her mother, horseback riding, and school during her childhood on her family ranch in Coleman County. Her mother’s ill health required Elithe to take on many household duties, but, on the other hand, her mother desired strength and health for her daughter and encouraged her outdoor life of horseback riding and swimming. In *Love Is a Wild Assault*, the main character Harriet devises a similar plan, motivated by her own lack of survival skills in the wilderness, for her granddaughter’s training in swimming, fishing, shooting, and horseback riding. In real life, the mother and daughter were very close. Elithe wrote that she had never deceived her mother and that she shared everything with her. That suggests that the mother knew of her daughter’s “reckless riding.” The family spent 1918 in Bisbee, Arizona, for her mother’s health. Elithe reported that she went to school year round in Arizona with only a week off every three months. Elithe valued religion and music. As a member of the Presbyterian Church in White Chapel, Elithe taught a class and served as organist, but school was a delight to her from the beginning in the four-room schoolhouse at White Chapel.

### **Successful Student**

Elithe loved school and her teachers. Her mother reported that the young girl often repeated stories in her sleep that her teacher had told at school. Back in Texas after the year in Arizona, Elithe continued her education at Silver Valley through the ninth grade where

she had half a dozen boy companions for the five-mile horseback ride to school and back. She and her male friends competed in races, harmonized on “camp meeting or cowboy songs,” and debated religion—she, the Presbyterian; they, the Baptist—giving her “insight into the male point of view (perhaps that is why it is often said that I write like a man) and at the same time . . . a certain basic confidence in mankind” (“Biographical Resume” 6a).

Her father arranged for her to board in Coleman, fifteen miles away, to finish high school. She studied more than had been necessary at the country school to make up for things she had missed in the small school. She remembers that her “English teacher kept correcting me for saying ‘have wrote’ and that my history teacher was always putting little notes on the end of my papers about my ‘running on and on like Tennyson’s brook’” (“Biographical Resume” 6a). She did very well, earning the girls’ debating medal. In a fund raiser for the Literary Society, the boys debated the girls. Their subject was designed to bring out the crowd. For twenty-five cents the audience heard “Resolved: Boys are Mentally Superior to Girls,” followed by a spelling contest “open to the world.” The boys won, but Elithe must have been pleased by the note, sent to her by some of her classmates, thanking her for representing the girls so well. Her extra study paid off: she tied with her best friend for second honors. Elithe won the draw for salutatorian and delivered the salutatory address. Her topic was “The Relationship of Improved Highways to Home Life.” In a tightly organized speech, she pointed to the economic, political, cultural, and religious benefits of modern highways. She and her best friend also wrote the class prophecy together including a lengthy introduction with references to the three fates: Clotho, who spins the light and dark threads of life; Lachesis, who twists the threads making some areas stronger and others weaker; and Atropos, who cuts the thread of life at its end. In the Prophecy, her Lachesis indicates a huge volume filled with a record of the “lives of all men,” an idea she explored in *On the Trellis of Memory* many years later. When she mentions a Greek artist named Zeuxis, the characters of Hudson and Sarah Belle, disguised in Greek robes as Zeuxis and Zantea, in *The Edge of Disrepute* spring to

mind. Disappointingly, she left herself out of the prophecy, but in her college essay, “Sketch of My Life,” she stated that her ambition to be a missionary had changed. She wanted to be a teacher, in college perhaps, and to get a good musical education.

At North Texas State Teachers College in Denton from 1924 to 1928, Elithe, nicknamed “Peggy” by her college friends, continued to achieve. Her grades were mostly A’s and B’s, but she had an occasional C in English literature, analytics, physics, and Spanish. However, years later Efrain G. Dominguez, Mexican Acting Consul, requested five or six copies of Elithe’s translation of the Mexican National Anthem to send to other departments of the Mexican government. “I believe,” the Consul wrote, “your wording is not only true to the sprit of the Anthem, but beautiful.” Excellence in both athletics and forensics earned her the Golden Eagle award. Membership in the YWCA and Pi Kappa Delta, an honorary forensic fraternity, election as a favorite, and appearances in stage performances testify to her involvement on campus. Elithe was editor of both the yearbook, *The Yucca*, and the newspaper, *Campus Chat*.

In a 1926 letter to her mother, signed with her family nickname “Dought,” detailing her breakup with a college sweetheart, she hinted at a desire to write, “Honest to goodness, we are going to write a story about it and see if we can get it published and then send him a copy. Of course, we’ll have fictitious names and all that. I think it would be a nice dose for him.” During her junior year in college, “her words first appeared in print” (Porterfield “She Lived a Life”). She gave credit for this unusual opportunity to her education professor, a bitter German who had lost his position at the University of Texas in the wave of anti-German sentiment of World War I. He was so strict that he was unpopular with the students and “was a challenge” (“Biographical Resume” 6C) to Elithe. He suggested that she sell the article to a newspaper to earn the money to visit the experimental school in Alabama she wanted to write about. After a successful interview in which she presented her plan to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, the *News* sent her to Alabama to write a series of Sunday articles. This experience paved the way to careers in education and in

journalism that intervened before she again became a student. During 1938-1940, she earned a master's degree from the University of Texas while working as Curriculum Assistant in the Department of Educational Administration and as radio script-writer for the Texas State Network. Her association with J. Frank Dobie, which began when she took his course, "Life and Literature of the Southwest," was to have far-reaching effects on her career as a writer, but her education as a writer began in her years as a teacher, journalist, and script-writer.

### **Educator, Journalist, and Script Writer**

The next few years, 1928 to 1940, are profiled in her job resumés. In her first job after her graduation from North Texas Teachers State College, she taught English, drama, and journalism in Mineral Wells, Texas. At the same time she was employed by the *Coleman Democrat-Voice* as editor for news, features, headlines, and the editor's front page column. She was the "first female editor in the history of the *Coleman Democrat-Voice*" (Porterfield "She Lived a Life"). Bank robberies and oil booms enlivened the pages of this Coleman, Texas, newspaper.

From 1930 to 1932, she taught high school English and journalism in Crane, Texas, and at the same time researched and photographed feature stories on farm and ranch projects in McCulloch County for the *Brady Standard*. In 1931, she married Roy Folk Beal, an interior decorator. The couple had one son, James Benjamin Beal, born in 1932.

Letters to her parents record the newlyweds' residence in New York City during the summer of 1931. Although she made plans to return to teach at Crane to help with their debts while her husband continued to work in a furniture store in New York City, by August she had made some literary contacts to write home about:

Well, I saw my editor— got plenty of encouragement and advice but no sales. He said my story was a good newspaper article but not a magazine article. In their words, I don't have magazine "style." He complimented me, told me I was a good writer, etc., etc., etc., and told me they would be

glad to consider this story written up differently or other subjects which he told me about. I am encouraged, but as so many writers are I have no money in my pocket. He advised that I go back to Texas, continue with my teaching, and keep tackling this magazine writing as a sideline; finally I'll hit some sales when I have gotten into the style of writing and then I'll be O.K. He advised me that the magazine field was better for a woman than newspaper work, but that one had to have something to make a living with while one experimented and acquired the knack of magazine writing. I think I have made some good contacts, . . . If I don't get too lazy I think I can possibly do something worth while in the writing field.

The writing ability that her New York contact may have recognized is shown in her homesick plans for her homecoming to Texas in the same letter:

I want to sleep outside with you, eat cornbread and sweetmilk for supper, have ice cream, fried chicken, and watermelon two or three times, have a fish fry on the creek or the lake one night . . . I want to sleep between sheets, freshly washed but not ironed, that don't smell like a laundry, and I want to smell a breeze that doesn't carry a whiff of garbage. . . . I hope we have a thunderstorm and a rain—I'm that hungry for Mother Nature.

During 1934 while the three Beals lived in Englewood, New Jersey, Elithe arranged to meet a literary man from Texas. After her meeting with Stanley Walker, editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, he introduced her to Owen P. White, a writer for *Collier's*. Although she had nothing completed to show them, the men encouraged her to write. She returned to Texas with that in mind. White hired her to work for him in New York after she assisted him with an article on oil troubles in East Texas in 1934, but she said later in a resumé: "personal problems kept me in Texas."

If her undated essay, "What a Young Wife Has Learned," truly reflects her own disillusionment with her marriage to Beal, no dramatic reason such as "unfaithfulness,

physical violence, or abuse” caused her unhappiness. It was little things: “not using the ashtrays, not coming to meals when called, rushing when there’s no need or being slow when there is, forgetting to kiss you good-bye, or leaving toothpicks on the lavatory” that strained the relationship. The action that bothered her the most was when, “He threw a box of pins out of his shelf in the bathroom, a nice little box that I had placed there very carefully after separating the straight pins from the baby’s safety pins.” All her grievances would, she admitted, be thrown out by any judge in a divorce court. In the essay, she enumerates her own imperfections and vows to adopt “selfishness! Not the mean kind, the preservative kind.” For her own peace of mind, she intended to accept the man she had married with his good traits and his bad traits and to stop trying to change him. In spite of her best intentions, by 1936 the marriage ended in divorce.

In 1935 Elithe Beal returned to work as Austin correspondent, covering the legislature, for *Texas Weekly*, and for the next two years she was State Director of School Publicity. Publicizing the Texas Centennial coming up in 1936, Elithe had a wide variety of duties. She edited “Songs Texas Sings” and planned the “Centennial Bookshelf.” Traveling around the state with other officials, she attended meetings with “each of the twenty-four supervisory districts of the state.” Meetings attracted crowds of from 2000 to 10,000. At each meeting, school children from that area rehearsed the song they later sang for an NBC broadcast from the Cotton Bowl on June 13, 1936. That fall 250,000 children were brought to the exposition.

Between her work on the Texas Centennial and her arrival in Austin, Elithe promoted the Stamps Baxter Quartet, a popular gospel group, by broadcasting their performance from the rooftop of the Adolphus Hotel on Mother’s Day in 1937. In the build-up to the big day, more than twenty thousand letters and poems, written in tribute to Mother, were received. The best were printed in a booklet called “To Mother.”

Elithe taught in Iraan (pronounced, she said, “Ira-an”) for two years, 1937-1939. Designated a State Laboratory School by the State Department of Education because of all

the oil money that was going to this one school, Iraan had the means to support progressive education. In this unique system besides teaching speech, Elithe taught journalism and radio script writing—the first to be accredited in Texas. During this time, she was West Texas correspondent for the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*. During the summers of 1938 and 1939, Elithe began her work as Curriculum Assistant in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas, which became a full-time position in 1940.

During her tenure as teacher, she had persuaded stations in Fort Worth and San Antonio to produce and broadcast her students' radio dramas. Perhaps on the strength of this experience, Elithe began work as script-writer and acting director for Radio House at the University of Texas in 1940. She stayed until 1947, and for part of this time, she was the Austin correspondent for the business and financial section of the *Dallas Times Herald*. For these assignments she signed her articles L. E. Hamilton, a masculine-sounding byline. In addition to these positions, in 1944 she was associate editor of *Southwest Review*, a Southern Methodist University quarterly. In 1946 she wrote two education film scripts for the Commission on Motion Pictures in New Haven, Connecticut. "Now Is the Seedtime" presented Thomas Paine, and the "Man with a Mission" was Samuel Gompers.

In 1944, Kirkland prepared a series of radio broadcasts for the Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas. Number 1 featured Coleman County, Kirkland's home county. A letter of thanks for a record of the broadcast, written by a Mr. Gill on his Registered Polled Hereford letterhead, arrived soon. The record was to be used at the next meeting of the Polled Hereford Breed-Feeder Association in Coleman as well as at a Kiwanis Club meeting.

A 1944 Radio House booklet pictures all the staff including a smiling girl in a dark suit and hat beside a stone Mayan serpent head. The caption reads "Elithe Hamilton Beal, author of 'Guardians of Freedom' series, in her travels through Mexico and Central America, stops at the pyramids of Teotihuacan." Something consequential happened to Elithe on that trip to Palenque.

The writing team of Cynthia Salm and Dennis Tardan used Kirkland's notes in 1990 to write a brief account of "The Private War of Peck Woodside: Nazi Intrigue in the Jungles of Mexico." From this document and Kirkland's special report to Navy Intelligence and her notes, the adventure can be reconstructed.<sup>1</sup>

The experience was electrifying. First, Elithe was thrust into a swirl of foreign intrigue. Shortly before the US entered World War II, she met and interviewed key businessmen in Mexico with observable ties to Nazi Germany. She witnessed Peck Woodside's emotional reaction to her observations. Woodside, a romantic World War I American war hero running an airline in Mexico, asked her to report what she had observed to US Naval intelligence. Traveling by canoe, by mule, and by airplane, which landed on an island in the middle of a river, Elithe visited rubber plantations coveted by the Nazis and the ruins of Palenque in the jungles of Chiapas, where she was perhaps mesmerized by their antiquity, beauty, and mystery. The ruins seemed to convey a mystical message. Her powers of creativity were washed by the adrenaline rush of the convergence of these unique experiences.

Kirkland, the writer, returned to Palenque for inspiration again and again—in an early short story, "One Who Laughed," in *The Edge of Disrepute*, and in *On the Trellis of Memory*. As for the man of skill as hero in the wilderness like the real-life Peck Woodside, Kirkland recreated him in Range Templeton (*Divine Average*), the crack-shot, skilled horseman, and ruthless cattleman of the Brasada, and in Robert Potter (*Love Is a Wild Assault*), the charismatic, smooth-talking politician of the Caddo Lake region of the Republic of Texas. In John Sterling (*The Edge of Disrepute*), he began to assume the mantle of philosopher as well, and in Tio/Lord Tio/Lutio (*On the Trellis of Memory*), the transformation became complete—the hero as a man of deep philosophic understanding gathered from the ages.

Back in the US, Elithe continued to try to work in the male-dominated world. Besides signing her business-related newspaper articles with her initials and last name to

avoid the stigma of a feminine name, she received less pay than her male counterparts at Radio House. In a letter dated April 14, 1944, she requested a salary increase, noting that her salary was less than the pre-war salary of the man whose duties had been added to her job after he joined the military in 1942. She was doing two jobs for less than the wage for his job.

While her professional career flourished, her personal life blossomed as well. Her second husband, Dr. Roy Defoe Kirkland, an osteopathic surgeon, had a well-established practice and lived in Austin at 400 Academy, a house with a long history. When she married Dr. Kirkland in 1947, he had a daughter, Beverly Jean, who was about the same age as her fifteen-year-old son James Beal. This step-daughter later named her own daughter Shareen Elithe Allen. Elithe's son, James Benjamin Beal, became an aerospace engineer and advanced in the space program. He worked on space shuttle technology and as a writer and lecturer in his field. As Mrs. Kirkland, Elithe now had time for creative writing.

Although she left the business world in 1947 when she remarried, she did not retire from public life. She was instrumental in planning and carrying out "Dobie Day" at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, in recognition of J. Frank Dobie's contributions to Texas literature. She was script writer and producer of *A Shakespearean Youth Fantasy* for National Educational Television" in 1964 commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. A valued speaker for such venues as the Daughters of the American Revolution, East Texas State University, MENSA, and Western Writers of America during the Texas Sesquicentennial in 1986, she was invited to give speeches around the state with the "Texas Voices" program. A newspaper interviewer in 1986 noted that Kirkland had recently "opened the White Chapel Press in Wimberley." Her children's book *Leet's Christmas* was the first publication. In the same interview, Kirkland indicated her continuing vitality when she described her future plans: "I will probably publish historical sketches, short stories, poetry, and some of my research into

mind, consciousness, and neophysics” (Harris). For many years her interest in parapsychology had been her personal doctrine.

By this time, she was thinking of the impact of her writing as a whole. “My hope is to have done enduring literature. I write not just for myself, but for future generations. I really write for the future” (Parker). Her creative writing included not only novels, for which she is best known, but also speeches, songs, poems, musicals, short stories, and television scripts. Kirkland’s initial successful combination of history and romance in her novels mixed more and more with her mysticism as her career continued.

### **Historian**

Kirkland has been recognized for historical accuracy in her novels throughout her career. In 1953 The American Association of State and Local History presented Kirkland with its Award of Merit for *Divine Average*, “a significant demonstration of how painstaking research and respect for the integrity of historical fact can be used in the literary field to the mutual advantage of history and the art of fiction.” The History Award Medal was presented to Kirkland by The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, La Villita Chapter, in 1987.

As critics praised Kirkland for her historical research, she employed her skills at every opportunity. She gave an address on the dedication of the Texas Historical Commission Official Historical Medallion for her home in Austin. According to the medallion:

The Academy was constructed in 1889 for Myron D. Mather, President of Austin Water, Light & Power Company, who lived here until 1893. A fine derivative of the shingle style, the structure is said to be partly constructed of granite left from the 1888 completion of the capitol. It was briefly owned by Texas Supreme Court Justice Leroy G. Denman in 1897. As the Austin Military School in the decade after 1920, the house was called “The Academy.”

On the occasion of the dedication of the Texas Historic Marker on October 19, 1986, Dr. and Mrs. Kirkland had been living at Coleman Ranch for twelve years, but the quarter of a century they lived together at The Academy, as well as what she referred to as the “intrinsic power” of the historic house, made it special to them.

In her speech she linked the structure to “Old Ben Milam,” who had been the impresario in the original contract for the land with Coahuila and Mexico in January 1826. The first colonist owner purchased the land on St. Patrick’s Day 1835, the year in which Ben Milam lost his life in the process of saving San Antonio from General Cos (1-2). Like the historian she was, she took the listeners through the various families and functions of the old house. The “remainder of the granite” used in the construction of the capitol was not enough for the construction of the house and more pink stone was brought from “quarries near Burnet down the Colorado River to a point near the building site” (2). Following its service as administration building and library for a school, the long decline during the Depression led to “the bargain of the century,” when Dr. Kirkland bought the house in 1942.

Kirkland’s respect for history seems to have been a part of her from her youth. In a college paper, Kirkland had praised reading historical fiction. After meeting historical characters in a novel, she wrote, “we feel that we know them personally, and underneath their historical veneer we see that their relations with political and religious changes in history were governed by the same human emotions that are characteristic of human beings in our day and time” (3). As if she could foresee her future writing plan, she wrote that “often only the outline of the novel is true to history,” and that “we must have the history for the facts, but we must have the historical novel to impress these facts on our minds by keeping our interest and imagination alive” (4).

### **Novelist**

In her obituary, Porterfield wrote that Kirkland is “best known for her novels, particularly *Love Is a Wild Assault*, an international bestseller that saw five publications in

Europe alone, including German and Spanish editions.” However, before her success as a writer was certain, Kirkland’s feelings about the writing life were ambivalent. On a note card, perhaps for a speech—she listed some of the problems facing an author. Although the card is undated, it seems to refer to the time leading up to the publication of her first novel, *Divine Average*, in 1952. For an introduction, she proposed “The great English lesson,” which consisted of the rigors of “exacting publishers.” Others tormented the writer: “all eagle-eyed editors, copy and proof reader.” They asked probing questions: “Is this pretentious? Is this an anachronism? Should she call him ‘Mr.’ after twenty years?” Kirkland admitted, “I speak only for one publisher and one author: publisher, and exacting author with more tenacity than talent.” Finally she gives her method: “My recipe not easy to follow: get an idea, let it germinate for five or six years—deal with it in your spare time for five or six more—then five years of solid research and writing.” Under the heading, “Reality of characters in that time,” Kirkland wrote: “Editor endeared himself by commenting ‘most violent man I’ve ever known.’” She also noted a great compliment given her by a critic: “too convincing to be fictional” he wrote of Range Templeton, hero of *Divine Average*. She painted a picture of the agony of giving birth to a published novel:

Acceptance and contract [is] only first step—then that page by page, sentence by sentence, phrase analysis . . . also analysis for idea validity, historical veracity, and general structure and placement of parts of the unfolding story . . . adding here, cutting there, changing another place—as in a piece of painting or sculpture or musical composition—a better effect this way, a finer line of thought presented some other way, etc., etc., until the whole is an achievement.

Kirkland defended her reputation as a writer. In 1990 she sent an indignant letter to the editor of *Texas Monthly* because after a lengthy interview, she was only briefly mentioned in an article called “Texas’ Grand Dames.” In addition the article suggested that she had been inactive as a writer since 1959. She set the record straight.

Kirkland was always concerned with her art. She recalled that “her sense of speech timing was greatly improved through screenplay writing. ‘I found that after writing these for a number of years, I could get a dramatic episode completed in one page’” (Prime). In a 1960 letter to newspaperman Bill Warren, Kirkland refused to take part in a debate “Resolved: The a writer of poetry searches harder and comes up with a more meaningful word than does the writer of prose,” calling the question “light” and writing poetry “personal.” However, she then aligned herself with the affirmative in the rejected debate by her defense of the special word search and reward of the poet.

“It was Kirkland who got J. Frank Dobie to narrate his folk tales on the Texas State Network. They became friends as well as collaborators,” Porterfield wrote in reviewing her life. “Dobie was among the first of the mentors to push Kirkland into serious literature and help set her up with book editors.” Dr. Kirkland and her agent Evelyn Oppenheimer are the other most important mentors. Oppenheimer, according to Porterfield, “helped direct Kirkland’s talents into the rich field of historical romance and bestsellerdom.” However, his statement is misleading. In Oppenheimer’s book, *A Book Lover in Texas*, she explains that her assistance in Kirkland’s career came after the publication of her first two historical novels. Oppenheimer describes how Doubleday failed Kirkland:

I was appalled that Doubleday let the book go out of print after its 1959 publication, which was so successful that *Love Is a Wild Assault* became a collector’s item and was being bought at very high prices. Elithe and I discussed this and she asked me to become her agent and go to New York to get Doubleday to do something about the matter.

I went and woke them up and the result was a new reprint edition. In 1977 I sold paperback rights to Avon, and it went through three mass printings. Then Kirkland’s earlier and first novel, *Divine Average*, a powerful historical story of a special frontier on the Nueces River and the

Mexican border first published by Little, Brown in 1952, was reprinted by Avon in paperback in 1979. (104)

In an newspaper article, Oppenheimer wrote: “Once J. Frank Dobie said she should have had a Texas Institute prize awarded to her. He was right. But, as in the case of Katherine Anne Porter, nothing was done about it. Fortunately time and the public have done something about both cases” (“*Divine Average*”). Porter won a Pulitzer Prize in 1965, and Kirkland was inducted into the Texas Women’s Hall of Fame in 1984. Mary Binkerhoff reported in *The Dallas Morning News* in 1967, “Now inspired by four fanfare-accompanied European editions, Doubleday has reissued [*Love Is a Wild Assault*].” She appeared at the Second Texas Book and Author Dinner in Dallas in 1979 with three other authors: Thomas Thompson, *Blood and Money*; Bel Kaufman, *Up the Down Staircase*; and Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store*.

Southwest Texas State Teachers College invited Kirkland to “speak to a class about writing” in 1954. In reply, Kirkland wrote:

[M]y writing experience on this book has been much different than on DA, because it has a biographical framework for one thing, and then I find that I know a lot more about book-writing than I did. Of course, I should know more after the labor of the other, but I didn’t expect to “feel” that I was doing better writing—I thought I had done the very best I could do!

Creative writing still holds many mysteries for me. I am still awed that you can work and work and work: sweat over the typewriter, the dictionary, and a mass of source materials and reference pieces, pursuing the elusive “something” you want to express. Then you hold your head in your hands and think, “Lord, Lord, why did I start this? What made me think I was a writer?” But you work some more . . . and then as if you have finally drilled through stone to a water source, out pours the words as you want

them, and your refreshment and stimulation is worth all the effort. Ordeal and revelation, ordeal and revelation, seems to be my pattern.

As her friend Billy Porterfield pointed out, she displayed many of the same traits that made her heroines fascinating; “frontier sturdy and useful as the pioneer women who had been her mothers . . . bold and ambitious, and as imperious, as any of her proud protagonists (“She Lived a Life”).

In spite of her success as a historical novelist, another area of interest had been growing in her personal philosophy. In a 1959 letter to Walter Prescott Webb, Kirkland mentions a novel about Hervey Adams that she left unfinished when she “ran into Harriet,” and commented that her third book on the Texas Republic “would be entirely different from the other two structurally . . . something different in the novel form . . . not a big book.” This book changed somewhat and eventually was published in 1984 as *The Edge of Disrepute*. More ominously, she had already decided on “Number 4 . . . out ahead there is by far the greatest challenge of my writing career, too big and wonderful to talk about, except in the most general term, but oh, so thrilling to think about—a frontier for creative thought and artistry that I approach with much excitement and some misgiving.” This fourth book was *On the Trellis of Memory*, published in 1971. She had not yet met Jenny Lind Porter in 1959, but the idea for an “entirely different” book was already taking shape in her mind.

### **Parapsychologist and Futurist**

Kirkland’s interest in parapsychology, pervasive in her later works, sustained her personal philosophy throughout her life. In a 1951 letter to her mother, Kirkland suggested a family tie to her metaphysical ideas when after she shared her method of mind control to prevent the negative thoughts of others from affecting her and compared it to Christian Science, she wrote: “I know now more than ever what Grandfather Purcell was seeking—he had a fine mind, literary and musical and artistic, and his life was a seeking for proper expression. He has passed some of those things along to me and I feel a moral

obligation to justify them.” Control of the conscious mind, which allowed Kirkland with Porter to receive *On the Trellis of Memory*, also enabled Kirkland to feel that she had control of her own life as she revealed to her mother in this letter:

I want to teach you a “trick of mind” that I have learned that protects myself so to speak against sensitivities. You are, as I am, a great RECEIVER of other people’s thoughts and emotions and when they are Evil or Discordant thoughts, you are vitally effected, becoming depressed, sickened, discouraged. Now this is the trick: you must become a TRANSMITTER . . . keep projecting the thought “You are going to like me whether you usually like people or not—you’re going to do right by me without knowing why—you are going to try to please me without knowing why—you are going to feel my power and be changed where I am concerned.” . . . if your mind doesn’t seem to be transmitting, just tell yourself, “Be still and know that I am God,” and God will enter in and take you through.

A 1972 letter to her son shows that Kirkland was deeply involved in New Age thinking and workshops. In the letter, she tells that she and Jenny Lind Porter were to speak at their third and fourth awareness seminars soon. They had also taken an ad mentioning “*Trellis* and its authors” in *Psychology Today*. Among the New Age literature in Kirkland’s files is a typical brochure and letter inviting her to the Hawaiian Shaman Training to “acquire the skills of the mystic adventurer, view ordinary reality in non-ordinary ways, develop man—the secret behind miracles, to work with the powers of nature to heal the earth, and to become part of KIN, an international network of shamans.”

Kirkland’s papers include letters and booklets that she had studied and underlined from Manly P. Hall and The Philosophical Research Society. Other correspondence between Don Galloway, a preacher with Unity Church of Christianity in Baton Rouge, and Kirkland indicate that they “interacted” from 1977 until 1992. They had met in Baton

Rouge at a Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship conference, and, as she wrote to him, she became interested in using “your sensitivity as a medium” to help her “recover my pace and confidence.” Later, she reported that “the reading you gave by phone was especially rewarding and a number of references you made have already come to pass.” Kirkland indicated that the name Richardson, the color lavender, and “a Navy man” had become significant within a few days after the reading. Also among her papers is a series of letters over seven years (1962-1969) to a water-finding wizard who used a dowsing stick. Kirkland was looking for good water on her mother’s place, but it is not clear whether a good well was dug as a result of the “water witching.”

Kirkland wrote to Hawthorne Books in the early 70s, proposing to begin research on a biography of Clara Mundt, a nineteenth author whose works were in the hands of that publisher. According to Kirkland’s letter, Mundt had been well-known for relating “experiences of royal personages, great musicians, poets, etc., that are on the occult or ESP theme. Healing, hypnotism (nearly a whole chapter on Mesmer), divining, witchcraft, astrology, prophecy of the dying, [and] visions of the dead.” But the publishing company had changed names, they no longer had the records of her work, and they indicated that they were uninterested. According to an undated note, Kirkland believed that during Harriet’s lifetime (in *Love Is a Wild Assault*), Kirkland herself was “the European novelist Clara Mundt (L. Mulbach) . . . same philosophy and all, integrity in writing about the greats of Europe in historical romances.” She also thought her friends Tarplay, Marcia, and M. L. Nelson were “in that incarnation.” To the typed note Kirkland added in ink, “after Tarplay and Marcia called— so affected that I wept.”

Another indication of her interest in spirits or spirit communications among Kirkland’s papers at the Southwestern Writers Collection is a typed scroll, rolled on carved sticks. Addressed to Susan Muldow at Avon Books, it purports to be a message from Hervey Adams, through his amanuensis, Eli the Hamilton Kirkland. This facsimile scroll

containing Chapter 13 from *Unspoken Love*, precursor of *The Edge of Disrepute*, appears to be a 1979 attempt to interest Avon in publishing the book.

Kirkland's mystical interests appear in all her activities. In the 1986 speech she made at the dedication of the Historical Medallion on the house where she and Dr. Kirkland made their home, she described how her writing studio on the second floor and his offices, reception room, and laboratory on the first floor transformed it into "a Center of Healing and Creativity," and encouraged the present owners' fourteen-year-old daughter who wanted to be a writer to find the "power spots" in the house, saying that two of her novels had been written there (5). She recalled Dr. Kirkland's answer to some rowdy trick or treaters on Halloween who asked if he believed in ghosts, "Yes," [he replied,] "But not the scary kind of ghosts. . . . in my mind I see them, a group of little people, singing as they dance about'" (6).

By a mutual friend, Kirkland sent a copy of *Divine Average* and an inscription to Henry Cisneros in December 1987. "The mystical, the leader, and the origins of you will understand why this book has come to you at this time—and why it has 'lain in kegs' for this particular season. . . . as a Regional Epic that can proclaim its message in the racial drama which the 'Divine Average' builds for all mankind." Cisneros sent a thank you for the book and the inscription, which he "carefully affixed to the front."

In a 1988 address to the Wimberley Woman's Club Book Group, Kirkland related that "Wimberley, and in particular, Mount Baldy in Woodcreek, was located on the thirtieth north parallel which was believed by the ancients to be one of the most significant power spots on the earth. The Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, as well as many other interesting places, are located due east or west along the line that passes through Wimberley." The newspaper article continued by telling that Kirkland suggested that her listeners had probably experienced power points or "places where you felt you could do the most and develop the best regardless of lifestyle or goals" (Depperschmidt).

Her dependence on her own mystic philosophy grew over the years. In an undated note, after she apparently lost a checkbook, she is not troubled because she says she is being taken care of in every aspect of her life. With underlining and capitals for emphasis, she writes, “I am coded into the seedplot of the Family of YAT,” using the characters and terms from her mystic novel *On the Trellis of Memory*. In the same vein, she offers to assist a friend, who had dreamed of Dr. Kirkland, after his “transition,” “I can assist in the attainment of clarity for her with energy sent through visualization.” She ends with a statement that “*Trellis*,” meaning her novel, “is a symbol that it will come to pass. I feel the working, the timing, and it is satisfying—Patience, Order, Composure.”

In January of 1983 Kirkland penned “My Views on a Subject I Consider Vital.” In this one-page document she concedes the importance of a “science and religion brotherhood,” but states her belief that psychic energies can do more than “electronic wizardry.” In an “Addenda to Views” written seven years later, she comments on the idea that the 90s have been hailed as the time when women will take their places as leaders. She believes that they will prepare the way for MAGNA WOMAN and MAGNA MAN—a DUALITY. Ending with Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” Here Kirkland reiterated the philosophy of “The One Who Laughed,” conceived on her Palenque trip a half century before.

As she did so often in public addresses in her later life, she praised “WORD PHYSICS,” with its “five-fold pattern: COLOR, SHAPE, SOUND, ENERGY, AND MEANING.” Along with “skillful thinking” and “productive listening,” she foresaw the use of “computerized educational strategy.” These terms appear in a 1983 speech to the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English in February 1983, as well as in her response to her North Texas State University Distinguished Alumna Award in 1985, in which she recalled her graduation and that she had faced “an awesome world out there for this country girl from Coleman County, Texas, grasping a B.A. degree and a permanent teaching certificate in a hot left hand.”

In 1987 after her induction into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame, Kirkland expressed her thanks to the Governor and the Commission for Women, and "those of my circle who have been my personal power source for accomplishment." She greeted "my fellow passengers on the SPACESHIP EARTH, now teeter-tottering on the edge of the Milky Way, a minor galaxy in the Infinite Universe," and closed with this declaration: "I am a concerned futurist, but don't worry about me for the MAP OF TEXAS is emblazoned upon my soul! . . . and all of you people are my spirit-kin."

In opposition to mystical inclinations in her writing, her friend and agent Evelyn Oppenheimer had tried to influence Kirkland to continue writing historical novels like *Divine Average* and *Love Is a Wild Assault*. Oppenheimer wrote in her book, *A Book Lover In Texas*:

Elithe was author of two later books—*The Edge of Disrepute* and *On the Trellis of Memory*—written under the influence of her husband's interest in parapsychology, but, as I had warned her, their appeal was extremely limited. She also wrote much deeply spiritual poetry on a plateau of thought all her own, and her many musical plays held and continue to hold much promise for publication. (105)

Oppenheimer "wanted no part of *Trellis* and thought it would sabotage her career," according to Porterfield in an address at the presentation of Kirkland's papers to the Southwestern Writers Collection. He also revealed that Jenny Lind Porter, co-author with Kirkland of the esoteric novel *On the Trellis of Memory*, "put it all behind her." Porter's ephemeral interest in what the two authors called their "psychic research into prehistory" contrasted with Kirkland's deep and growing involvement with mystical philosophy and practice. Ann Durham Robinson, a friend from Radio House who was at the presentation, said, "I loved *Trellis*, but my twin could not read it."

In his article, "Texas Women's Hall of Fame Novelist Kirkland Dies at 84," Porterfield says that Kirkland's writing "suggested the skills of a painter and a musician,

driven by a subtle, if not-quite-hidden mystic.” Reporting that at eighty-four, she suddenly put aside a novel and “began putting things in order” as she chose to complete a musical drama, he added, “She had always been as practical as she was psychically prescient.”

While struggling with failing eyesight and colon cancer (Scott), Kirkland continued her writing projects up until the end. She died at her home in Wimberley on January 2, 1992, and her mystical creative energies permeated her funeral. The service included five poems from her novel *On the Trellis of Memory: A Psychic Journey into Prehistory*, read by her son, her daughter-in-law, and Nancy Austin, illustrator of “Leet’s Christmas,” and organ music from her most recent musical, *Precious Memories*. Walt Whitman’s “Apostroph,” source of the title of her first novel, *Divine Average*, appears in the printed program. Family was further represented in the music provided by a Purcell relative, and traditional religion was represented by the participation of Reverend Steve Johnson, First Baptist Church, as well as by the congregation’s singing “Amazing Grace” at the beginning and at the end. The eulogy, given by Porterfield, was followed by a “Remembrance” by Lee Thomas.

Although her belief in the mystical, merely an undercurrent in her first two novels, grew in her writing to become a tidal wave, Kirkland’s greatest strength, her ability to make history come alive in the pages of her novels, was honed during her apprenticeship with J. Frank Dobie.

## CHAPTER 2

### KIRKLAND AND DOBIE

#### Letters and Inscriptions

The friendship between Elithe Hamilton Kirkland and J. Frank Dobie can be followed in the inscriptions he wrote to her over the years in copies of his books and in his letters. Other sources include her letters, her manuscripts titled *Heather, for Luck* and *Straight Texas: a Series of Six Broadcasts*, and her comments during Dobie Day. In a March 1940 letter to her parents, Kirkland wrote:

I haven't been too certain how I'd get along in Mr. Dobie's classes—especially the advanced short story. He's so hard-boiled and rather set in his ways and the class was bigger than he wanted and he was trying to get some of them to drop it and making it especially difficult so that they'd want to drop. I made an A- on my first paper, and I didn't feel very secure about it, and then this week I got my second paper back and it was marked "A Excellent!" I was certainly elated over it; and he read it to the class. I was over in his office that same day, and he gave me one of his two-dollar books called "The Flavor of Texas" and he wrote on the inside "Presented to Elithe Beal in appreciation of her work to make Texans appreciate their own culture." . . . He is the first one of my writing teachers who at the same time is a well known writer.

Inside her copy of *On the Open Range* is the April 13, 1940, inscription: “Presented to my friend and student Elithe Beal with appreciation of the way she is dramatizing our old Texas stories.” Another inscription, written by Dobie while she was his student in the English 342: Life and Literature of the Southwest appears in the class project booklet, which included a poem by Elithe. The professor wrote: “Elithe Beal—I certainly have appreciated you in this class—as well as out of it.” Dobie was “positively enthusiastic” in his written comments about the piece Kirkland turned in to him in his creative writing class. It was three chapters of her unfinished novel *Middlebusters*. Within a few months, Kirkland wrote home, “Mr. Dobie had to go to San Antonio yesterday and had me hold one of his classes. I was very pleased that he called on me to do it.”

Referring to her work as a script-writer at Radio House in early 1941, Dobie wrote in *The Longhorns*: “Presented to my friend Elithe Beal with appreciation of the genuine contribution to Longhorn culture she is making in Texas.— And lots of good wishes.” In *John C. Duval: First Man of Texas Letters*, he wrote: “I’m mighty pleased with the apostle of Texas literature that Elithe Beal has been and is being.” Several markers in the Duval book indicate places that might have been used in radio scripts she wrote. Another inscription, in February of 1942, shows Dobie’s regard for her abilities as a script-writer for Radio House historical dramatizations: “in appreciation of her work to make Texans appreciate their own culture.”

In a letter from Cambridge in April of 1944, Dobie writes that her last letter made him “feel glowey inside,” an indication of warm feelings for her. He mentioned that he liked being closer to the war and would “hate to leave the drama just at the time the climax is approaching.” He also remarked that he “worked—boned—like a Freshman” to be able to lecture on the Constitution and the American party system, but the real reason he had been invited to England is clear when he confides, “OLD SANCHO and his brothers brought me real appreciation” at the Churchill Club in London where he had spoken recently. Dobie’s statement, “I have no inclination to run for governor,” apparently in

reply to Kirkland's question, is a reminder of his high standing in Texas—some expected him to run for its highest office.

Later, in 1992, Kirkland used his greeting: "I send you, for luck—they say it is lucky—a bit of heather I gathered in Scotland, where I relived Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson," for the title of a memoir of her experiences with Dobie and Radio House. She called it *Heather, for Luck*. In addition to what seems to be the heartfelt good wishes from a friend, the reference to Scott and Stevenson acknowledges their shared love of good writing.

Dobie seems a bit critical of his latest book *A Texan in England*. His 1945 inscription reads: "Dear Elithé Beal—I send you this not very gory bit of a writing man's 'life blood' because I cherish you and your friendship." Inside the pages of this book is a short review by Kirkland, which begins: "Austin, Texas April—Even as J. Frank ("Pancho") Dobie was invited to Cambridge to help the British students understand America better, so will Americans better understand their British cousins after reading Dobie's new book, *A Texan in England*." She goes on to mention "Dobie's anecdotal style" and retells his story of "the understating Englishman who asked 'Is that thunder?' and when told it was German bombs, said 'Good. I was afraid it was going to rain.'"

Back in Texas in January of 1945, Dobie wrote from Port Isabel that he was "missing the cedar pollen and other things," a reference to his infamous cedar fever and possibly to the administrative tumult at the University in the forties. He also compliments her "fine work."

One of the most significant inscriptions is in Kirkland's copy of *The Mustangs*, published in 1952, the same year her first novel appeared:

On Waller Creek

Austin, Texas

Dear Elithé Kirkland:

Some of this mustang lore has been common knowledge between us a long time. Some of these mustangs are running in *Divine Average*. You are not old, but we have been friends a good while associating together often in this writing business. All writers want their books to sell, and I am enormously pleased that you are giving a lot of people a chance to buy *The Mustangs*.

With affectionate good wishes,

Frank Dobie

Publication Day

Sept. 29, 1952

Kirkland was proud of her closeness with a great man of Texas letters. His further recognition of her efforts in creating Dobie Day, October 29, 1952, and the publicity surrounding it that increased demand for his new book, *The Mustangs*, appears in another copy of *The Mustangs*. This copy contains an Easter card to Mrs. Hamilton from “Dought & Doctor,” and is inscribed by Dobie:

Dear Mrs. Eva Hamilton [Elithe’s mother]—

Elithe, who is giving you this book, has given me the opportunity to write in it. Years ago she was a favorite pupil of mine. We collaborated on many radio programs when she was at Radio House; I came long ago to cherish her as a friend. Now she has accomplished “Dobie Day” at Southwestern University and through it pleased me as only a few experiences of my life have pleased me.

I am sure that she resembles her mother and I send you much respect and many good wishes—J. Frank Dobie

Dobie also sent Kirkland a copy of *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver*, illustrated with fifty drawings by Tom Lea, which he called “the most beautiful in form at least of any published under my name” in gratitude for “making Dobie Day at Southwestern University

such a delightful occasion for Bertha McKee Dobie and me. Everything was right and nothing was missing . . . .”

Over the years, Kirkland collected fourteen of the little Christmas books Bertha and Frank Dobie sent out each year. In the one for 1958, Dobie must have been feeling old when he wrote of a vivid woman, who, in a Mexican market, “one of the most wonderful markets in the world—sells an herb that has the same effect on depleted men as a big swig of the Fountain of Youth would have. I wish you’d bring me a pinch of it.”

He continued to think of Kirkland over the years. In 1962 Professor Dobie could have been thinking of former times when he wrote in a reprinted article about E. Douglas Branch: “For always cherished Elithe Kirkland—about another of my one-time pupils.” He must have been pleased when she apparently paid him a visit, and he added in pencil: “Elithe—I had this made out for you and joyous to hand it over Cheerio!”

Writing to Dobie at the time of Walter Prescott Webb’s 1963 death in an automobile accident, she affirmed that Dobie “would scorn to be called a mind-reader,” but, she continued, “you are beyond question a heart-reader.” In this “letter within a letter,” Kirkland presents a memoir of her acquaintance with Walter Prescott Webb, perhaps to show her mentor Dobie, her power to appreciate his great friend. Calling Webb her “Goal-Marker” because from time to time in her early career he nudged her in new directions with a light phrase or helped her appreciate the writer’s path. His comments about Owen P. White, for whom she was asking Webb research questions, “conveyed to me, without expressing any dislike of Mr. White or discrediting my mission, that Mr. White sometimes failed to put up a proper line fence between fact and fiction and did some shallow plowing in the historical areas.” He commented once “Each to his own cave” in response to a tentative suggestion of collaboration on a Radio House script, giving her a feeling of pride in “the furnishings and activity within my own cave of creativity.” Another time, when she wanted to share with him the praise of her work in a book editor’s letter, he seemed to be

able to see her exhilaration and said before she showed him the letter, “Well, Elithe, I see you’ve been kicking the stars around.”

Kirkland and Dobie felt mutual admiration for each other’s historical research. But in psychic research, Kirkland searched alone. In her letter to Dobie about Webb, she began by saying that she had heard Dobie “accuse womankind in general of an excess of credulity, and me in particular of an excess of fantasy.” Following Dobie’s death, Kirkland continued to visit and write to her mentor’s widow from time to time. Kirkland wrote to Bertha in December of 1969 with what she clearly thought would be words of comfort. She began by explaining her belief in reincarnation, “though I am no crusader.” After quoting Browning, Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson, she reported messages Jenny Lind Porter had received from Dobie to his wife. Kirkland reported Porter’s typical cryptic medium’s messages from the Great Beyond: “[H]e lives and is thinking of her and the marigolds” (added in ink: “‘maybuds’ from the song in *Cymbeline* ii3”), and “he is in a period of training” for those who don’t believe. She listed people he had met: Potter, Webb, Bedichek, John Henry [Faulk]’s mother, Littlefield, Garner, Rayburn, and Jester. Porter, as the receiver, posed questions about quince jelly and a lost spur, meaning a railroad spur, and quoted Dobie: I “sit in my chair and sit at the table with [Bertha].” Finally the message ended with Dobie saying: “Sure did like my funeral, all those wild flowers.”

Not surprisingly, Bertha Dobie found it difficult to answer Kirkland’s letter, relating her research with Porter into spirit communication. Mrs. Dobie replied: “Now I do not know how to continue. You may not know that I have believed in another life than this as little as Frank believed in it. . . . I differed from Frank in that I never became and am not now anti-religious.”

Dobie had written an essay in 1952 called, “This I Believe.” His belief in a Supreme Power “has no effect on my conduct so far as hope for reward or fear of punishment hereafter is concerned,” he wrote, not only dismissing familiar organized

religion, but heaven, hell, spirit communication, and reincarnation as well. Surely, Kirkland knew her old friend's philosophy, but she believed her psychic research had contacted his spirit and that his widow should be as thrilled as she.

Instead, Bertha Dobie recalled her McKee family's belief and how she had always hoped it had lasted for her parents throughout their lives, but she had lost her faith during World War I, "when Frank was away from me, in camps in America in France." Mrs. Dobie recalled her husband's funeral at Hogg Auditorium and the clumps of "little blue stem grass Frank had loved" and wild flowers two friends had brought to her that day, which she appreciated "as much as anything in my whole life experience." Mrs. Dobie closed with a gracious invitation for Kirkland and Porter to visit her "when the roses bloom in April."

Undeterred, Kirkland continued to write to Bertha Dobie. In a 1972 letter, after telling how much she wanted to republish *Divine Average* under the title *The Continental Brood*, Kirkland wrote:

A wonderful jacket could be developed from the faces of the races involved, and the story is beautifully balanced between the good and the bad—no race that doesn't have a "redeemer" for the villain that may also appear in that category—such as Miguel, one of the heroic main characters, and El Gavilán, the bandit.

Pouring out her hurt to Mrs. Dobie, Kirkland remembered how she "had suffered a misfortune at [the publisher's] hands" when the book was first published and her editor with most of his staff resigned. Although he "had it 'staked out' as a Literary Guild selection and possible development as a musical—all fell through and the book glided through the presses unattended and floated around on its [own]." Mrs. Dobie, in her husband's place, became Kirkland's confidante.

*Heather, for Luck*

Kirkland's unpublished book about J. Frank Dobie, a pieced quilt of letters and scripts joined by brief recollections, recreates the author's relationship with her mentor. Perhaps it was too personal to be commercial. The Texas Historical Association declined the Dobie/Radio House material because "it is too disjointed." *Texas Monthly* also declined to publish the book because such a "slim book" concerned them about "cost vs. possible sales."

Kirkland explains in the "Introduction" that the book is intended to be a recollection of Dobie based on

twenty-five years as student, project associate, *Straight Texas* radio network broadcasts, et al, his functioning as mentor to my first novel *Divine Average* from inception to acceptance by his Boston publisher . . . my arrangements for a Dobie Day at Southwestern University in October 1952 to celebrate the release of yet another Dobie classic *The Mustangs* and to pay homage to the scope of his rich and enduring legacy to Texas and American literature . . . also an account of a "Hollywood Mirage."

"The Voice," the second chapter's title, refers to Dobie. Although he began regular radio broadcasts in 1932, he remained cavalier about the time constraints of live broadcasting. In two chapters, Kirkland replays the havoc and tension caused by this charming disregard. Her repetition of this facet of Dobie may have been part of the reason for the dismissal of the manuscript as "disjointed." Dobie's on air infractions of the rules included his impromptu joining in on songs or other vocal sound effects or, more seriously, his rewriting on the air.

Kirkland reports how, during the broadcast of "Trail Thunder," Dobie becomes entranced with the broadcast after his part has been discharged, and when the noise of the storm and stampeding cattle begins, he joins in, whipping his imaginary mustang "with his hat, a hell-bent-for-leather yelling cowboy riding to circle the herd and rescue the lovers." She adds vivid supporting details from his ad-libs during the *Straight Texas* broadcasts,

which include everything from yelling as a cowboy during the stampede and singing with the professional singers, to his additions and deviations from his own approved script which cause panic among the sound engineers, music directors, and others responsible for bringing the program to a conclusion on the nose. On one occasion, the engineer “rode herd on Dobie with all the knobs at his command!” Another time, “sprinting back and forth from cast to chorus to control room, cutting a slice of music here, a wedge of words there,” the engineer manages to bring the show to a timely conclusion, “with only minor fractures and a plus of two seconds,” a must for a “professional production.”

In the third chapter, “Airborne,” Kirkland pays tribute to the creative force in J. Frank Dobie, which led to chaos on the air. The creative force, she wrote, “never offers rest or complete satisfaction with work accomplished, for the ultimate, the perfect word or phrase, is ever elusive. Mr. Dobie never gave up the chase.” Never content with the wording, Dobie changes the script once more as he speaks into the live microphone. Kirkland includes page after page of “approved scripts” for several broadcasts in the *Straight Texas* series with many changes marked in Dobie’s handwriting.

In another typescript called *Straight Texas: A Series of Six Broadcasts*, Kirkland again describes the tension of live radio broadcasting where every second is pre-arranged. The shows from Radio House are live network broadcasts. The studio is filled with a ten-member orchestra, an eight-member men’s choir, three soloists, a music director, an announcer, three sound effects men, seven actors, one director, and J. Frank Dobie.

She relives one such live radio broadcast. After Mr. Dobie reads two lines of script, he leans back, puffs on his pipe, leaving dead air, and says, “After reading this script, I don’t think it explains this story like it should,” and he proceeds to tell the story, adding four minutes that have to be condensed out of the script. Two characters are cut, a tenor loses his only chance to sing on the air, and the engineer in his sound-proof booth is laughing. Mr. Dobie finally finishes, “very pleased with himself.” From then on, Kirkland writes, “we recorded Mr. Dobie before the broadcast.”

Kirkland and Dobie worked closely on *Straight Texas* from March 11 through April 22, 1941. In the first episode, “Trail Thunder,” a choral reading of “The Ballad of Laska,” from the John A. Lomax collection, must have impressed Kirkland. She later used Laska, the girl’s name in the poem, as well as her daring riding, for a character in *Divine Average*. Besides songs from the Lomax collection such as, “Whoopee Ti Yi Yo,” “Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie,” and “Chisholm Trail,” the program featured “Stampede Mesa,” a story about cowboys and a nester, adapted from Dobie’s *On the Open Range*. After the nester causes their herd to stampede, killing animals and two night herders, the cowboys tie the nester to his blindfolded horse and back it off the bluff. Again, Kirkland used this brutal method of justice in *Divine Average* when the bandit El Gavilán is executed by the same method and his ten-year-old son is forced to watch. After the next two episodes, “Riders of the Stars” and “Mustangs and Cow Horses,” material from the fourth episode also filtered into Kirkland’s novel, but all the songs and tales helped fill her mind with old-time Texas.

“The Longhorns,” broadcast in the fourth week, employed songs from the Lomax collection that had previously been used along with new choices—“Cowboy Song” and “The Last Longhorn.” The script contained Bertha Hart Nance’s poem that proclaims, “Texas grew from hide and horn,” and stories of Shanghai Pierce’s longhorns, which he called “sea lions.” But, most important for Kirkland, were Dobie’s tales from his book *The Longhorns*: Sancho, the steer that returned from Wyoming to South Texas, where he loved to eat hot peppers, tamales, and sugar, and Table Cloth, another homing steer, whose story was expanded to twelve pages of script. The lead ox Little Star in Kirkland’s *Divine Average* and his challenger Highbones owe much to Sancho and Table Cloth. *Straight Texas* concluded after two more episodes called “In a Stagecoach” and “Buried Treasure.”

In a chapter called “Hollywood Mirage,” Kirkland and Dobie are contacted, or as she writes “faked out” by Robert Arch Green, a Hollywood agent, in the summer of 1953.

Green contacted Kirkland for a copy of “what you have done on the Seminole Bill script.” The story of the lost gold mine, known as Lost Nigger Mine because it was discovered by Bill Kelly, a Seminole Negro, was to be one in a series to be called *The Unfenced World*. Kirkland’s letter announcing the completion of the script included her excited reference to a new anecdote that Dobie had just discovered related to the mine with a character called Soloito Gonzales. In a telegram soon afterward, Green requested a special delivery copy of the Seminole Bill script, but he and the script were never heard from again.

### **Dobie Day**

In her chapter on “Dobie Day,” Kirkland describes the celebration that was held on October 29, 1952, at Southwestern University in Georgetown, where Frank and Bertha went to college, met, and fell in love. After her first contact with Southwestern about the celebration, Kirkland wrote her mother, “Had a wonderful day at Georgetown—this work on Dobie’s book is going to be excellent for mine too and gives me a big boost with the publisher. They’re giving my book another shot of publicity in November.”

To Tom Lea, the artist who illustrated Dobie’s book, *The Longhorns*, she wrote, “I’m having the time of my life ringing the bells and blowing the trumpets for Dobie. . . . It seems that my years of newspaper work, with some publicity experience thrown in, were never used to better advantage.” She encouraged Lea, who also illustrated Dobie’s *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver*, to attend Dobie Day, assuring him that the purpose of Dobie Day was “that Mr. Dobie enjoy every minute of it.” A month before the big day, Kirkland wrote her mother that Little, Brown was tying the two books—*The Mustangs* and *Divine Average*—together in their publicity and that “they are overwhelmed with enthusiasm for my publicity ideas. None of Mr. Dobie’s books except *Coronado’s Children* have had big sales—he has never lent himself too well to publicity—but he’s cooperating with my ideas and seems very happy and grateful about it.” Kirkland’s efforts to honor their writer impressed Little, Brown, Dobie’s publisher, so much that they had sent original art work, manuscripts, and related items for display in the library.

Driven from Austin by Kirkland and her husband on the big day, the Dobies were met in Georgetown by the Sheriff and his posse, arrested, and sentenced to drive across the Southwestern campus in a two-wheel gig drawn by a pacing mare. Kirkland wrote, “Everyone who knows Dobie is aware that he is perfectly at home in the saddle, but he is also an efficient driver.” After letting his wife out, Dobie let the mare run and “estimated that she could make almost a mile in three minutes on a good stretch of road.”

Many important literary figures participated in the various programs.<sup>2</sup> Kirkland spoke that day of Dobie as teacher. At the conclusion of the Dobie Day chapter she writes, “I had taken all his courses,” and credits Dobie, as her teacher, for her career as a novelist. “I would go into Austin to counsel with Mr. Dobie,” she recalls of the time she was completing her first novel. When she suffered a lack of self-confidence, she asked Dobie, “[S]hould I cut and run?” His prescription was, “Go home and read *War and Peace*.” She reports that after only twenty-nine pages, “there was a click in my mental motor and the shut-down never occurred again.”

In her final chapter of *Heather, for Luck* called “Purely Personal,” Kirkland quotes Dobie’s letter to her from Cambridge in which he enclosed “heather, for luck” as well as his “This I Believe” statement.

Kirkland remembers the warmth of visiting with Bertha Dobie at Waller Creek, the Dobies’ home, back when she was “still in the student stage,” waiting to confer with Dobie. Later when Kirkland had “matured in experience and achievement and was working more and more with Mr. Dobie, my relationship with Bertha became a gentle flow of genuine friendship extending through the years beyond his death.” She includes Bertha’s letter praising Kirkland’s letter within a letter—to Walter Prescott Webb after his death by way of Dobie. Mrs. Dobie had come across the letter a year after Dobie’s death, and she wrote: “The University should have a copy of this expression,” assuring Kirkland that if she sent it to The Dobie Room at the University of Texas, the letter would be greatly appreciated. However, missing from the book manuscript is Bertha Dobie’s skeptical

reaction to the letter Kirkland had written to her recounting the messages from Frank Dobie received by Jenny Lind Porter in seance with Kirkland.

Pleased by Bertha Dobie's endorsement of her letter of tribute to Webb, Kirkland created a 1988 introduction to her letter within a letter, in which she links the centennial of the Texas capitol with the birth year of both Webb and Dobie. Kirkland shares the letter, with "all of you who read it, [and] I offer symbolically, a sprig of white heather for luck."

### **Dobie's Influence in Kirkland's Works**

Kirkland wrote to a friend years later that "both Mr. and Mrs. Dobie thought I had done special research and discovered [the original folk songs in *Divine Average*]." She was always proud of any approbation from her mentor J. Frank Dobie, and her tribute to his inspiration as her teacher is his influence on her writing. From historic cattle drives to capturing mustangs and longhorns and using lead steers, Kirkland's book shows her indebtedness to Dobie's writings.

It takes many fine components to create a novelist. Kirkland developed from her roots in family stories of pioneer Texas, through her rural, pastoral growing up experiences and her educational opportunities, into her branching out as a journalist, publicist, and script-writer, to her maturity as a novelist. Satisfied readers of the novels of Elithe Hamilton Kirkland, as well as her teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend, J. Frank Dobie, all appreciate the way she dramatized "our old Texas stories," especially in her first two novels *Divine Average* and *Love Is a Wild Assault*.

## CHAPTER 3

### KIRKLAND'S NOVELS

#### The Trilogy

Although Elithe Hamilton Kirkland wrote many kinds of literature, she is best known for her novels. Three of her novels, classified by Ernestine Sewell together as a regional epic as well as a thematic trilogy (118), span the era of the Texas Republic. Although recognized as a trilogy, there is no sharing of characters and the books vary in genre. The first novel, *Divine Average*, is a well-made historical novel. The second book, *Love Is a Wild Assault*, is an internationally acclaimed historical biography. The third novel, *The Edge of Disrepute*, is a period romance. In each of these chosen literary forms, Kirkland's "meticulous research coupled with her talent for romanticizing" (119) served her well. A fourth novel, *On the Trellis of Memory*, written with poet Jenny Lind Porter creates a new genre that might be called psychic romance.

*Divine Average*, a historical novel, accurately presents historical artifacts, events, and characters—the Colt Paterson, the Council House Fight, the Battle of Plum Creek, the Somervell Expedition, and Dr. Weideman—that affect Kirkland's fictional characters.

As a biographical novel, the gemstone of *Love Is a Wild Assault* is the life story of real people—Harriet Ann More Page (Potter) Ames and Robert E. Potter. To show off the jewel, Kirkland created a fictional mounting to hold it—the story of Harriet's granddaughter Tricky.

*The Edge of Disrepute* is a costume romance novel. As Ernestine Sewell pointed out in her article: “One could hazard a guess that Kirkland used this book as a clearing-house for the deep well of her mind, drawing out the accumulated interests and weaving them nicely into the threads of Sarah Belle and John’s love story” (122). *The Edge of Disrepute* is, in comparison with the first two novels, a light-weight romance composed of the bits and pieces of the author’s various interests—the layers of racial classifications in mid-nineteenth century New Orleans, Mayan archaeological sites in Chiapas that she had visited, bits of Texas history including the Somervell Expedition, the world of the mysterious such as voodoo (spelled voudou in the novel), insanity, visions, and reincarnation.

In spite of their various genres, several basic similarities link the three independent novels of the trilogy. The most obvious link is place and time. All three books have important scenes in Texas and New Orleans, and the time period of greatest importance in each book is the 1830s to the 1850s. Several other parallels contribute to making the books into a trilogy: 1) the presence of a strong female lead, who follows her own conscience rather than the conventional mores of her time, and each is a woman without a mother, 2) the significance of characters of wisdom or philosophy in disclosing each novel’s major themes, 3) the use of a memoir to organize the story, 4) the presentation of characters of racial diversity, and the incorporation of incidents and characters from 5) Texas history and 6) folklore.

### **Strong Heroine, a Woman Without a Mother**

In a letter to her publisher Bill Shearer, the author wrote, “the three books would be a trilogy of women—Luvisa, Harriet, and Sarah Belle.” Although the women are not portrayed as tragic heroines, a tragic flaw in each of the main characters contributes to her downfall or inhibits her success for a time. Each main character is a strong woman. The flaw in each serves to make her more believable and more engaging.

Luvisa in *Divine Average* never tells her husband that her mother was Spanish or that, out of courtesy to a relative of her dead mother, she signed a legal document that enabled her distant Spanish cousin to keep his claim to the very land below the Nueces that she knew her husband wanted to possess. Her husband turns his back on her at the end because of her racial background that he feels contributed to her disloyalty in signing the document.

In *Love Is a Wild Assault*, Harriet's flaw, misplaced love or failure to appraise the man she loves correctly, is similar to Luvisa's. Loyalty to each of her first two husbands brings Harriet emotional, physical, and social distress. At one point her trust in her first husband, a gambler and an untrustworthy man, almost leads to starvation for herself and her two children. Later, her trust in her second husband Robert Potter, another unworthy man, results in her public rejection as his wife and the loss of property she had helped him tame in the Texas wilderness.

Instead of misplaced loyalty, Sarah Belle, in *The Edge of Disrespect*, fails in her loyalty to her first love. Thinking he drowned when his ship is lost, she gives in to her parents' wishes and marries a man she does not love. Sarah Belle regrets her disloyalty and causes her husband to leave her and take up a wilderness life to escape his own disappointment in her. Because of her guilty feelings, she sets a unique kind of penance for herself. Her self-imposed mission to rescue men suffering from love lost eventually is rewarded when she marries the one who had been her love in another lifetime.

It is interesting to note that Kirkland, who declared her closeness to her own mother, created heroines who had no mother. Kirkland's 1949 poem "Mother"<sup>10</sup> shows her awareness of the importance of a mother's guidance.

A woman without a mother's guidance must be self-reliant. In *Divine Average*, Luvisa's mother had been mutilated and killed by Indians when Luvisa was almost too young to remember her. However, Luvisa receives a legacy from her mother. She and her daughter Laska find their Spanish heritage in the chest of Luvisa's mother's clothing. In

*Love Is a Wild Assault*, Harriet's step-mother is more interested in her own children and jealous of her attractive step-daughter, leading Harriet to seek marriage with Solomon Page as an escape to a home of her own, but her mother's dying words to eight-year-old Harriet, "I leave you in God's hands," provide strength for the daughter in her times of need. In *The Edge of Disrepute*, Sarah Belle's failed marriage to Defender Locke and the disrepute of her mission among love-lost men had divided her from both her parents.

### **Themes**

Major themes are revealed in each novel by a philosopher or character of wisdom. Sometimes more than one character takes the role. Dr. Wiedeman, a physician seeking knowledge of the Americas for the Tsar of Russia, is the main philosopher in *Divine Average*, and Harriet, as an old woman, becomes the wise one in *Love Is a Wild Assault*. Hudson, a cultured *gens le couleur libres*, Marie Laveau, a mulatto voodoo queen, and Yapah, a Mayan priest, represent wisdom of various cultures in *The Edge of Disrespect*.

### **Organization**

A similar organization in all three novels relies on a memoir or written account to move the plot along. *Divine Average* begins as "Luvisa Templeton's Account." Dying of consumption, she is dictating the story of her life as Range Templeton's wife to their good friend Silver Bryson. After eight pages, the omniscient author takes over the story, but from time to time, Luvisa's dictated account surfaces so that she tells the story in her own words in Chapters 7, 12, and 16. Bryson finishes the story after Luvisa's death with the final chapter in his words.

*Love Is a Wild Assault* begins as eighty-three-year-old Harriet Ann Moore (Potter) Ames begins to write the story of her life to be read by her eight-year-old granddaughter when she becomes a grown woman. An all-knowing author tells the present—1890 in Harriet's son's New Orleans home—until Harriet begins her memoir. Harriet's words from her real account are used occasionally, and throughout the book Kirkland has matched Harriet's tone. Harriet's words are interrupted by brief scenes of her life at the time of the

writing, and the book ends with a third person telling of the granddaughter's discovery of Harriet's account and its influence on her courtship.

Although a memoir was originally part of *The Edge of Disrespect*, we do not read it. Kirkland abandoned her original plan of writing each chapter of the novel as Sarah Belle's account of one of her rescues. Instead, the story is mainly third person with letters and journal entries along the way. When Sarah Belle leaves New Orleans and her House of Recovery where she had attempted to rescue men suffering from lost love, she gives "My Conscience Book," the record of her cases, to her friend and partner Hudson with instructions to publish it when he thinks the time is right.

### **The Problem Of Race**

The issue of race relations, remains significant in both *Divine Average* and *On the Edge of Disrespect*, but it receives less emphasis in *Love Is a Wild Assault*. *Divine Average* points toward a future with no racial prejudice because the races will be blended into one "divine average" and brotherly love will prevail. However, racial hatred is rampant in the novel. Range Templeton epitomizes Anglo hatred for the Mexican enemy of the recent, bloody Texas Revolution, the raiding Indian, and the inferior Negro slave. Miguel Sándivar represents the new Mexican race, product of Spanish and Indian cultures but belonging to neither, and his father represents the defeated Spanish aristocrat. The Indian is given various roles. Besides the vicious undifferentiated Comanches who destroyed Luvisa's parents and Jeannie Dodson, Kirkland introduces distinct individuals such as Tomás, the mustanger from San José Mission, and Mudo, the silent Tarahumare scout. Negro characters appear in the novel as slaves, fresh off the boat from Africa; as free, wage-earning cowboys; and as a free man of property owning slaves himself.

In *Love Is a Wild Assault*, Harriet experiences friendship more than once with a woman of color. Early in Harriet's first marriage, a man who wants to win her from her husband sends gifts of food, flowers, wine, and a loyal Negro serving woman. Although Harriet sends the woman away, a strong bond of feeling exists between them. Later,

during her life with Potter on the shore of Caddo Lake, Harriet is again given the services of two female slaves. While one maintains a distance between them, the other is responsible for the accidental but horrible death by scalding of Harriet's beloved child, Lakeann. Relations with Indians pose a problem for Harriet. Often alone on her wilderness property, she manages to deal fairly and firmly with Indians over matters of stolen stock and to develop friendships with some. Others, including Potter, solve the problem of a run-away slave or of a group of Indians that might have been guilty of a crime by shooting them.

The variety of positions available to free Negroes in New Orleans in the 1840s provides interest in *The Edge of Disrepute*. Hudson is an educated businessman; Marie Laveau is a mulatto hair dresser and voodoo queen; Suzanne is the beautiful octoroon mistress of a rich Frenchman; and Celeste, employed as a seamstress in a private home, is prohibited from marrying the man she loves because he is a slave. The intricate layering of races in New Orleans society provides the backdrop for the first half of the novel and becomes important to understanding the myth of "The One Who Laughed" in the final chapter: No one can be free if anyone is not free.

### **History**

Another connection among these books is Kirkland's use of incidents and characters from Texas history. In *Divine Average*, Kirkland's characters live through the real events of 1838-1858 as well as the invented incidents of their fictional lives. Range Templeton is successful in his first Indian fight because he has just been given a Colt Paterson five-shooter with two cylinders. He is able to replace the spent cylinder while riding at full speed and discharge all ten of the bullets with killing effect. Luvisa's grandfather, Firebush Olson, is fatally wounded in the Battle of Plum Creek although it takes three years for him to die. Representative of the thirty-five historical characters that appear in the novel, Captain John Coffee Hays leads the hero into battle with Indians, and

after General Somervell leads him into Mexico, Hervey Adams, a favorite resource of Kirkland's, returns to tell the story back in San Antonio.

Because *Love Is a Wild Assault* is a biographical novel, almost all of the characters are real. Some of the famous historical characters who appear besides Harriet and her second husband Colonel Robert Potter of the Texas Navy include Dr. Anson Jones, who treated Harriet for yellow fever in New Orleans and met her again when she arrived in Brazoria, Sam Houston, David Burnet, T. J. Rusk, and Old Rose, "The Lion of the Lakes."

Although few real historical events and characters are utilized in *The Edge of Disrepute*, the Colt Paterson five-shooter makes its appearance again as does Hervey A. Adams, who sends a letter placing Sarah Belle's estranged husband in Texas as part of the Somervell Expedition. Real antiquarians are discussed by the main characters, and one of them, John L. Stephens, is an off-stage friend and advisor of the hero, John Sterling.

### **Folklore**

Folklore as well as history provides a rich background in Kirkland's novels. *Divine Average*, influenced by J. Frank Dobie's tales of longhorns and mustangs, presents La Brema, a cow of destiny, and Little Star, a lead ox of character, and skillful mustangers, as well as the folktale of the vain mockingbird. In *Love Is a Wild Assault*, Kirkland's main character was famous in the folklore of her time as "Potter's Paramour," and tales were also circulated about her as the "Bravest Woman in Texas." Folklore enriches *The Edge of Disrespect* through details related to New Orleans voodoo and Kirkland's "The One Who Laughed," an original tale presented as Mayan folklore.

### **The Fourth Novel**

In addition to her "trilogy of women," Kirkland with Jenny Lind Porter published *On the Trellis of Memory: A Psychic Journey into Pre-history* in 1971. Their ideas about the importance of human accumulation of higher spiritual knowledge over the ages and speculation about the method of transferring this knowledge that impelled the authors to

record this novel were approached more conventionally by Kirkland alone in *Divine Average* and *Love Is a Wild Assault*. To a greater extent the mystical also animates *The Edge of Disrespect*.

Just as in the novels of the trilogy, Kirkland's fourth novel is based on a strong heroine, but Icanthe is presented to the reader in four incarnations, each one a woman of wisdom and courage. Also like the heroines of Kirkland's other novels, Icanthe has no mother, and like Kirkland's other novels, the memoir is significant. Icanthe's mother died giving birth to her, but she left her daughter a ruby that enhances memory and a key to a cupboard in the head of her bed that contains a book of memories that aids the daughter in discovering her soul design. The book is an account of Icanthe's past identities and her relationships with others who will remain important to her in all her lives. Finally, like the other books, words of a philosopher play an important role in this novel, and Icanthe, who is destined to lead her country, is the greatest of many philosophers.

Unlike the other Kirkland novels, there are no connections with the history of the Republic of Texas and no problems of race. Kirkland and Porter explain in the first chapter that they were merely recorders who listened and received the story of Icanthe into their consciousness. Their novel illuminates a spiritual utopia.

In the next four chapters of this thesis, I will consider each of Kirkland's four novels. Chapters 4, 5, and 6, devoted to the trilogy: the themes, the organization, the problem of race, and the incorporation of history and folklore, along with the critical reaction to each, followed by Chapter 7, an investigation of her fourth novel, constitute an attempt to understand clearly Kirkland's major theme—the march toward perfection.

## CHAPTER 4

### *DIVINE AVERAGE*

In *Divine Average* Luvisa Templeton tells the story of her twenty-year marriage to Range Templeton, a man obsessed with acquiring a huge tract of land between the Nueces and Rio Grande—land claimed by both Texas and Mexico in the aftermath of the Texas Revolution. Cattle drives to New Orleans and to California increase Templeton's landholdings. Battles with Indians and Mexicans increase his racial hatred until his discovery of his wife's Spanish blood and of his children's romantic involvements with Mexicans totally destroys him.

#### **The March Toward Perfection**

The most important theme of Kirkland's first novel *Divine Average* is illuminated by the title, which comes from Walt Whitman's poem "Apostroph," printed before the dedication page:

O Master! O fils!  
O brood continental!  
O flowers of the prairies!  
O space boundless! . . .  
O race of the future! O women!  
O fathers! O you men of passion and the storm!

O native power only! O beauty!  
 O yourself! O God! O divine average! . . .  
 O to promulgate our own! O to build for that which builds  
 for all mankind! . . .

Other possible titles taken from the poem<sup>3</sup> were listed by the author in her notes, but any of the titles she considered make clear the main idea of the novel—belief in God’s plan to blend the races and eliminate man’s flaws to achieve the perfection of mankind.

Reviewer Lorraine Baker hammered home the theme, as if it needed to be clarified, by calling her article about *Divine Average*: “Whom the Gods Would Destroy They First Make Prejudiced.” Throughout the novel, several characters explain the term “divine average” in conversation or in thought. In her review, Lisle Bell saw that the main point of the novel “reflects the wisdom expressed by one of the characters, old Dr. Weideman.”

Delivering a half-breed baby by Cesarean, Dr. Weideman comments on “New life from the womb” as the “expression of natural law. . . . It is life itself rooted in a plan still far removed from us, where the mind cannot reach and the spirit gropes about in semidarkness—a plan for the achievement of the divine average somewhere down the eons of time” (43).

Later Dr. Weideman, the philosopher, makes a distinction between the American mulatto and the Mexican:

[T]he Negro came to this side of the world unwillingly and as a slave . . . the Spaniard came as an adventurer and conqueror. The Negro mixed with the Anglo-Saxon, producing only more slaves; but when the Spaniard mixed with the Indian whose culture, though different, was deep-rooted and complex, a new nation and almost a new race was produced—a race of independent character, the Mexican, with its own newly acquired Republic of Mexico. (135)

He understands that attainment of the divine average must be measured in thousands or tens of thousands of years but predicts free black men and the once-despised Mexican walking with pride in white business and social circles within a hundred years. He even comments prophetically to the main character Templeton, “[You] may hold a grandchild on your knee with Mexican blood coursing buoyantly through his veins” (136).

Other characters reflect the theme of racial fusion. Emilio Sándivar, a pure-blooded Creole or Spaniard born in the New World, looks upon his children by his Indian wife as inferior mestizos. Sándivar sees only the degradation of his proud family lines, not “the creation of the brood continental, the blending of all races into the race of the future—a part of the inevitable movement through the grand arches of time toward the attainment of the divine average” (56).

Luvisa Templeton, daughter of a Spanish mother and an Anglo father, begins her account of her life with her belief in the “divine purpose of the life span . . . the gradual accumulation of goodness in the consciousness of the human race until pain and ignorance and greed are all crowded out, and somewhere down the passages of time the way cleared for more joyous living on earth” (4). Luvisa thinks that her love for Range Templeton, a man so different from her in his greed for land and his racial prejudice, must be the “enforcement of some natural law through God’s intent, in the blending of natures so diverse by an attraction so compelling” (139). The perfection of their twins seems to be “the very best of them both . . . the assurance of a divine quality through which a man and woman can someday realize the intended fullness of joy to be found in this world through the blessedness of harmonious living [when] greed and hate and violence are replaced by brotherly love, reverence for God, and appreciation of the world’s natural beauty” (248-249). She recognizes this natural law of blending in the birth of the boy McDuff (Indian/Anglo) and Miguel Sándivar (Indian/Spanish), but does not mention her own Spanish/Anglo heritage as “part of that achievement generations hence, when the

brotherhood of man will have progressed from idealistic doctrine to simple reality” (139). Later, thinking of her husband Range Templeton and her cousin Miguel Sándivar, Luvisa concludes that they are alike in their desire to make their dreams of land come true, but that otherwise their differences are so great that they could only be “bred out” (245).

After the half-breed boy Duffy dies saving Luke Templeton from being dragged to death by his pony, Templeton remembers Dr. Weideman’s defense of his saving the misbegotten boy and imagines that the doctor would remind him that his own son would be dead if the half-breed had been allowed to die as Templeton and his father-in-law had thought proper. The doctor would say, “[W]e cannot afford to reject the hope and triumph inherent with the act of being born, the plan still far removed from our understanding for achieving the divine average somewhere down the eons of time” (298).

Silver Bryson, a Southern gentleman driven from his home because of the suicide of his beloved Châli after her discovery of her Negro heritage, faces a conflict of honor over whether to drink with Chenet, a black plantation owner who himself owns slaves. “He’d be damned if he’d drink with a Negro, especially a mixed one, which species he especially despised” (186). The perceptive Chenet declines to join his white guests in the coffee and brandy, freeing Bryson to drink.

Following Luvisa’s death, Bryson adds a final chapter to her account of her life that she had dictated to him in the final weeks of her consumptive decline. He remembers her as one “who was able to sustain through all adversity an unfaltering faith in the divine origin and goal of man and a holy conviction that the time must come when man’s inhumanity to man will altogether cease” (367), and he remembers that she had him write the words of Dr. Weideman: “Attainment of the divine average, I have decided, must be measured in thousands or tens of thousands of years” (368).

Bryson reports the climax of Templeton’s racial hate. Intending to execute a violent end to his son’s marriage to a Mexican woman, Templeton is stopped, gun in hand, by the cry of a baby, his grandchild. Dr. Weideman’s prophecy is fulfilled. Templeton,

grandfather to a child with Mexican blood in its veins, made his own bitter contribution to the divine average. Bryson is moved to compassion “for all—both the innocent and the self-committed—who must be tortured on the rack of race prejudice and conflict” (374).

The author made her case for the divine average even stronger with some changes she made after her undated “Summary” was written. In her summary, she intended to have Templeton hire the Mexican bandit Gavilán to lead a raid on the Sádivars, but in the final version Templeton himself attacks both the robber and the peaceful Mexican family living on the lands he wants for himself. In both versions, he finally loses his daughter to the son of the outlaw he had brutally killed years before and his son to Martina, daughter of the Sádivars he had tried to annihilate. In the earlier summary, when Luvisa replies to her husband’s threat that he is going to hunt down his children and kill them rather than have their blood mixed with the Mexicans, that he might as well start by killing her since her mother, who died at her birth, was Spanish, Templeton is devastated. In the final version, he realizes her Spanish origins when he discovers her signature on the document that gives to the Sádivars, her distant cousins, ownership of the land he covets. He never thought it strange that she did not mention her mother since she was an orphan, and he never considered that she was anything but white—her Olson grandparents were Swedish. In the summary, Luvisa’s father died at the Battle of San Jacinto, but in the final version both parents were killed and mutilated by Indians providing motivation for her Grandfather Olson’s intense hatred of Indians, a hatred that he passes on to Templeton. As in the final version, “Filled with the blackest Mexican hate” (Summary 11), Templeton is averted from his plan of murder to prevent his blood’s being mixed with the hated Sádivar blood by the pre-dawn cry of his hungry grandson, of the “brood continental,” another reference to Whitman’s poem, quoted at the beginning.

There is an interesting parallel between this final scene and the scene in the diner in Edna Ferber’s *Giant*, that was published soon after *Divine Average*. As an acknowledged grandfather to offspring with Mexican blood, Ferber’s Texas hero sees injustice when the

owner of the diner in which he and his family are eating refuses to serve an old Mexican man. Ferber's hero gives the bigot a beating. Kirkland's hero is the bigot, but he rejects murder. Reviewer Luise Putcamp, Jr., of the *Daily Times Herald*, predicted that Kirkland's first novel set in Texas would not do as well as the up-coming Texas novel *Giant* by Edna Ferber. Nearly half a century later, A. C. Green placed another of Kirkland's books, *Love Is a Wild Assault*, on his list of the 50+ *Best Books on Texas*, leaving out *Giant*, as too mean-spirited to rate inclusion.

Besides his role as spokesman for the main theme of race relations, Dr. Weideman represents a minor, although related, attitude—the advantages of unconventional ideas. In a 1956 letter to John Henry Faulk, Kirkland was outraged at comedian Dave Garroway for ridiculing hypnosis and the Bridey Murphy sensation of reincarnation in a skit on TV. “[M]y interest and investigations in hypnosis began when I wrote that small hypnosis scene for Dr. Weideman in *Divine Average*,” Kirkland explained. In that scene, the doctor uses a cut-glass paperweight to hypnotize a pregnant woman who had been brutalized by Indians. It brings her peace and relief from pain, but the others who witness the scene are suspicious. In defense of his actions, the doctor says of hypnotism: “Strangely enough, some primitive tribes now know more of its power than those of us who pursue progress” (40-41).

### **Organization**

Kirkland's device of having Luvisa dictate a death-bed account of her life with Templeton to Bryson, their good friend of all those years, allows the author to create a first-person story with the advantages of comments from an outside observer when Bryson completes the story after Luvisa's death. Although the majority of the story is written in third person to allow the omniscient author to supply information that is not experienced first hand by Luvisa, by beginning with the dictation of the account to Bryson and returning to the scene of their recording of her story every four to six chapters Kirkland maintains the illusion of a first-person chronicle.

### The Problem of Race

Kirkland provides a basis for her major theme of racial blending, which is similar to the doctor's use of hypnotism in that it is an unconventional idea, when she discloses the general basis of the racial hate between Range Templeton and Miguel Sándivar, but she also allows that hate to evolve as it is augmented by their personal experiences. Early in his Texas experiences, Templeton is offered beans seasoned with chilitipiquin peppers, and the agony of their heat causes him such embarrassment that he silently "cursed Mexicans!" (100). An episode that could have been comic is used to intensify Templeton's hatred of Mexicans. When they first meet at the spring that both Miguel and Range covet for their own, Range laughs at the way Miguel has decked his horse with flowers. Miguel feels "fury at the laughter" (120). Too proud to ask for some of the food Miguel is cooking over a campfire, "Range felt a mounting resentment at the Mexican boy's advantages . . . his hunger intensified his feeling of ill will" (122). Miguel, camped at the springs, possesses the land that Range wants. Because neither can speak the other's language, their differences are magnified, their desires uncommunicated, and their prejudice grows into a desire to destroy.

The hate between the two men increases from societal as well as personal causes. Kirkland's fiction elucidates the tensions between the Mexican and the Anglo at this time in a more accessible way than the sociological approach of Thomas Hall or David Montejano although the novel and the historical sociology make the same points. In *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880*, Hall describes the consolidation of the American conquest of the Southwest through merchants, especially in their trading with the US military presence. In the novel when she and the children return to San Antonio for safety during the war with Mexico, Luvisa discovers that "The Mexican War had transformed it into an important military base—brought it vigor, hope, and trade" (286). The presence of the United States military was a great economic advantage to frontier Texans and a blow to Texas Mexicans. In *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, Montejano also considers the

effects of Anglo annexation and incorporation of the land from below the Nueces to the two hundred-mile-long Mexican border—the Rio Grande. One of Montejano’s major points—that Mexicans in Texas faced special hardships during these turbulent times—appears later in the novel after Texas has joined the Union: “The confused loyalties of these Texas Mexicans whose lands had been under the dominion of four national governments within one generation and their vulnerability to savage pillaging of both Indian and Texan were matters that [Templeton] felt were being rather fortunately fumbled through the inexperience and restrictions of the soldiers and agents” (301-302).

Kirkland explains in her afterword, “A Book Was Made,” that to create her vision of “the borderland of continental significance, the dividing line between Latin and Anglo-American cultures” she “explored vast areas of recorded fact . . . legend, folk story, and ballad . . . artifacts of that period” (376). While her theme of the “continental significance” of racial acceptance and blending is presented against a backdrop of historical incident such as the Council House Fight and artifact such as the Colt Paterson revolver, she also melds regional legend and folklore with original ballads to create a full-bodied experience of life in the Republic of Texas.

### **History**

Brief notes made by Kirkland, perhaps for speeches, listed some of the historical aspects of *Divine Average* as “The Research.” She indicated that what she had done was to use two kinds of historical items: “History as known and the oddities.” In addition to these notes, several markers in Kirkland’s personal copy of *Divine Average* suggest places in the novel she had referred to for a presentation on her novel. Combining her notes and the marked passages presents an overview of some of the historical content she considered significant.

“First cowboys-Opelousas Trail” was the first item in her notes. The novel presents the derivation of the term “cow boy” along with their justification for taking cattle from Mexicans:

The first mounted men to go into the abandoned country to drive cattle out had been detachments sent out by General Rush to supply the soldiers of Texas who were suffering for meat. The cattle-hunting trips were so successful that some of the soldiers when discharged made a business of collecting these cattle and selling them to the western settlers whose herds had disappeared during the invasion. . . . Sometimes they would come upon gentle cattle on a range not yet abandoned by the Mexican owners, and the “cowboys” seldom hesitated to include these cattle in their drives even if it meant conflict with the owners . . . it was generally agreed that such raids were justified since the Mexicans had caused such suffering and damage during the conflict; then too, Filisola’s army as it left Texas had taken all cattle found on its line of retreat. [Also t]he Alamo and Goliad massacres were fresh memories. (134-135)

Kirkland marked several pages in her copy of *Divine Average* that traced the route of Templeton’s 1839 cattle drive from San Patricio to New Orleans—the Opelousas Trail. The fact that cattle were driven from deep in Texas to New Orleans so long before the familiar trail drives of the Post Civil War period is one of Kirkland’s historical “oddities.” The series of towns passed and rivers crossed is brought to life by a map on the endpapers. From a crossing on the Nueces near San Patricio, they drove their herds to Goliad, where they crossed the San Antonio River (179). After crossing the Colorado and the Brazos, they passed Houston, crossed the Neches and the Sabine and entered Louisiana. They crossed the Calcasieu before heading for Martinville, bypassing New Iberia because of illness there, and then pushed on to Franklin and Thibodauxville, the last town before New Orleans (201).

Second on her list of historical items in her first novel was “The five shooter,” predecessor of the famous six-shooter. Kirkland had shown interest in historic firearms at North Texas State University in an undergraduate essay. Worded as if a tour guide was

taking the reader around the university museum, Kirkland described the guns—a Sharpes rifle, a Henry rifle, a pistol lost by Jesse James and plowed up years later. Also on exhibit was an Indian fight relic—an Indian arrow head embedded in a human backbone along with a notice that the victim lived twenty years after being wounded. Her interest in period firearms was still active years later as she wrote her novels.

Kirkland recognized the Colt Paterson 1836, or Texas Paterson, as a great improvement over the single shot guns that preceded it and wanted to use it in her novel, but she did careful research first. In answer to her question about how the early Paterson was broken down into three pieces, Mr. Henry, of Colt's Manufacturing Company, replied in a 1947 letter that the barrel, the cylinder, and the frame were taken apart for reloading. He continued his explanation:

In addition, the soldier carries a supply of powder, usually in a powder flask along with a supply of lead balls and percussion caps. Sometimes the caps were carried in a magazine taper and the powder in a flask which would load all five chambers with the proper amount of powder in one pull of the lever.

This would actually result in the need to manipulate five pieces of equipment as well as five balls in reloading—impossible from a galloping horse. Kirkland did not leave her hero in such a predicament; however, the letter reports that “[s]pare, loaded cylinders could be carried for this model, but the arm still had to be broken down in order to replace the empty cylinder for the charged one.”

Kirkland introduces this remarkable weapon and shows its historical importance in Chapters V and VI. Just before his first encounter with Indians, Templeton shows the weapon to his new friend Silver Bryson and describes it as a pistol, invented by Samuel Colt, that shoots five times from a revolving cylinder. Bryson recognizes its potential immediately and explains:

An Indian adversary carries forty or fifty arrows. We carry at the most only three shots, each in a separate weapon bulky and unwieldy—two heavy pistols and a rifle—all requiring that fatal extra minute for reloading. And during that meticulous and time-consuming task of measuring and pouring powder, ramming ball and priming, the Indian rides three hundred yards and shoots twenty arrows. (88)

The Colt five-shooter's efficiency is demonstrated when Templeton with his Colt Paterson and Bryson with his two single-shot pistols kill six Indians. In another running fight, Templeton empties all five chambers at the Indians that are pursuing him. As Templeton lets his mount "pick his own way he tried to replace the empty cylinder of his gun with a loaded one. As the cylinder snapped into place, . . . he let the gun drop into his big jacket pocket" (114). Separated from his companions and from his saddle because of a cut girth, that night Templeton is on his own in the wild Brasada. An attack by a javelina startles him so that he empties all five chambers into the fierce animal. The advantage of having more than one shot is clear.

In her comments at the end of *Divine Average*, titled "A Book Was Made," Kirkland credited "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas," by Harold Schoen as her source for "such a character as Victor Chenet." This is the source for her next two items "Swapping cattle for slaves" and "Free Negroes owning slaves." The marker she placed in her copy of *Divine Average* at page 184 is labeled "Chenet," and another marker at page 202 is labeled "Trading for Slaves."

Victor Chenet is a light-skinned free Negro of education and financial means—a *gens le couleur libre*, like Hudson of New Orleans in Kirkland's novel, *The Edge of Disrepute*. Chenet, a slave-owner who runs a Texas plantation, welcomes the Texas cattlemen on their way to New Orleans and asks them to bring him twenty-five slaves from Louisiana in exchange for his fine herd of five-year-old steers that they can then sell in New Orleans. In spite of initial reluctance to trade in slaves, Templeton does bring Chenet

illegal slaves fresh off the boat from Africa. They are illegal because importing new slaves had been against the law for thirty years (208).

Another well-known historical incident is the decimation of the captured Texan force, The Mier Expedition, by General Ampudia in Mexico when 159 white beans and seventeen black ones were placed in a pitcher to be drawn by the captured men. Those who drew the black beans were executed. Kirkland's marker reads "Beans." As the author points out, there are many versions of the bean-drawing, but she made an error in writing: "Big Foot Wallace notices that the black beans are poured in on top of the white ones and his big hand rummaging at the bottom of the pitcher brings up a white bean" (272). According to his own version of the events, Wallace reported that the first man to draw, an officer, was the one to notice and to say to the men near him, "Dig deep, boys," after he drew a white bean from the bottom. It was Wallace who, in "The Adventures of Big-Foot Wallace," noticed the black beans seemed to be larger, and so he dropped the larger of two beans "like a hot potato, and drew out the one left" (59).

Some of the incidents Kirkland marked in her copy of *Divine Average* are fictionalized constructions reflecting the reality of the times. Kirkland presents the cowboy "Finius Jones," who kills a Mexican and steals his cattle herd so that the Templeton trail drive can get started and get him back home to Alabama (176). Guilt for his action changes Finius Jones into "Da Man on da Mule," a wandering preacher. Riding a mule and calling himself "Neighbor," Jones tries to atone for the murder he committed by becoming a true neighbor, one who helps his fellow man (308-310).

One of Kirkland's page markers labeled "Modernizing Women" refers to Laska's riding and capturing mustangs better than a man and her old-fashioned mother's acquiescence to her daughter's wearing pants, "for her own safety" (318-319). Laska used the flamboyant method of the Indian Tomás to capture mustangs. Riding with the other mustangers beside a herd of wild horses, Laska "picked a favorite before they reached the pen, crowded swiftly to its side on Stinger, and carrying a short horsehair rope slipped

easily from her horse onto the mustang, looped the halter properly, placed it over head and nose, and later returned to camp with the horse subdued and in good condition” (323).

Another important historical aspect of the novel is the many real characters that appear. Kirkland made this list of historical characters:

Sam Houston	Gen. Adrain Woll
Santa Anna	Capt. Dawson
Agustin de Iturbide	Gen. Alexander Somervell
Deaf Smith	Hervey Adams
Alcalde Don Bacilio	Capt. Bogart
Benavides	Col. Wm. Fisher
Pres. Bustamante	Big Foot Wallace
Gen. Rush	Pres. Tyler
Filisola	Pres. Polk
Capt. John Coffee Hays	Gov. Henderson
Pres. Van Buren	Pres. Jones
Capt. Matthew Caldwell	Gen. Taylor
Gen. Felix Huston	Gov. Pease
Col. Ed Burleson	Mathilde Lockhart
Capt. Antonio Perez	Mrs. Maverick
Ben McCulloch	Mrs. Higginbothom
Pres. Lamar	and
Gen. Vasquez	Dr. Weideman

Dr. Weideman, a vividly drawn character in the novel and a true eccentric in real life, might not be recognized by every reader as an actual historical figure. At the end of *Divine Average*, Kirkland gives credits to many of her sources. One was Mary Adams Maverick’s *Memoirs*. In her book, Maverick reported that on the afternoon of the Council House Fight she was at Mrs. Higginbothom’s house:

While I was there, Dr. Weideman came up to her grated window, and placed a severed Indian head upon the sill. The good doctor bowed courteously and saying, “With your permission, Madam,” disappeared. Soon after he returned with another bloody head, when he explained to us

that he had viewed all the dead Indians, and selected these two heads, male and female, for the skulls, and also had selected two entire skeletons. He said: “I have been long exceedingly anxious to secure such specimens—and now, ladies, I must hurry and get a cart to take them to my house.” (38)

Maverick continued the story, saying that he “put them into a large soap boiler on the bank of the ‘acequia,’ or ditch, which ran in front of his premises. During the night of the 20th, he emptied the boiler, containing water and flesh from the bones, into the ditch.” Since there was a city ordinance against fouling the ditch used for drinking water, “there arose a great hue and cry,” and they called him “diablo,” as Kirkland has them do in *Divine Average*. Dr. Weideman was arrested, tried, and assuring the townspeople that they would not be harmed because all had “run off with the water long before day—paid his fine and went off laughing” (39). When they were reassembled, “He set the skeletons up in his garden” (40). Kirkland’s version of Dr. Wiedeman’s specimens follows the historic account almost word-for-word (258).

Maverick continued her description of Dr. Weideman:

Dr. Weideman, a Russian, was a very learned man of perhaps thirty-five years of age, was a surgeon and M.D., spoke many living tongues and had traveled very extensively. In former years, he had buried a lovely young wife and son, and becoming restless, had sought and secured employment under the Russian Government. In fact the Emperor of Russia had sent him to Texas to find and report anything and everything, vegetable and animal grown in Texas—and he had selected a worthy man, for Dr.

Weideman was a devotee to science. (40)

Even his Russian background and the lost wife and child play a role in the character of Dr. Weideman in the novel (31, 269). Dr. Weideman’s death in *Divine Average* (287) is taken directly from the historical account. “In 1843 or ‘44, he was drowned in attempting to cross Peach Creek, near Gonzales when the water was very high—his horse and himself

and one other man were carried by the rapid current and drowned, while other of the party barely escaped” (*Memoirs* 40).

Maverick also reports a friendship between Dr. Weideman and a red-headed Colonel Henry Karnes, called “Red Captain” or “Capitan Colorado” by the Indians, who admired his head of “fire” (41). Although Colonel Karnes, whose name does not appear on Kirkland’s list of historical characters, makes a brief appearance in the novel (256), Kirkland’s fictitious “Firebush” Olson, Luvisa’s grandfather, with his red hair and beard could have been this Colonel Karnes’s nicknamesake.

“Penning the Indians” was one of Kirkland’s listed oddities, and she had placed a marker between pages 156-157, labeled “plans for penning the Indians.” The author describes the preparation of a pen made of poles set close together into a two-foot ditch and the long wings of brush leading to it from a water hole, intended for funneling a herd of wild horses into the pen. Kirkland then allows Templeton to show his brutality when he says in reply to a warning from his men of an approaching band of Indians, “Why don’t we pen ’em?” The horror of mounted men running down other men as they are herded into a pen intended for wild horses, roping them to break their necks, or shooting them typifies the violence of the period. Kirkland gives Walter Prescott Webb’s books as her source for “Indian depredations” (377), but it is not clear whether historical sources record this brutality against Indians or the tale of Mudo.

“Mudo: Perfectly incredible! No one will believe this!” is the last item in Kirkland’s speech notes. She is correct: it is difficult to believe that the Indian Mudo tore out his own tongue rather than risk revealing the location of his tribe’s mine under interrogation by a shaman, whose powers Mudo thought could make him speak.

Although they are listed on an informal notecard as “Historical oddities,” the last two items seem to be folklore rather than fact, and Kirkland’s skillful use of folklore adds much to the feeling of authenticity in her novels of early Texas.

### **Folklore**

Dobie's works influenced the author's approach to her novels. In the summary that she wrote before the final version of this novel was completed, she used three Dobie quotes, including this one on the cowboy:

Up to the time of the establishment of the Republic of Texas, in 1836, the word "cow boy" was unknown in the sense that the American language has long since made common. Then bold, adventurous and not at all squeamish-stomached Texians began raiding Mexican-held ranges. The raiders were nearly all young men, mostly out of that nondescript, un-uniformed, undisciplined, self-willed, ready-to-die aggregation game-spirited recruits from the States and from home-defending settlers making up the Texas army. (*Longhorns* 27)

J. Frank Dobie's influence colors some of the most engaging characters and episodes in *Divine Average*. Besides the mustangs they shared, originals for Kirkland's "cow critters" appear in Dobie's *The Longhorns*. The Sándivars' cow La Brema is reminiscent of the homing critter Sancho. In *The Longhorns* Sancho or "Pet," an orphaned black and white bull calf, becomes attached to the rancher's wife, who feeds him shucks, tamales, peppers, and sugar. After being sold to the Shiner brothers and trailed to Wyoming, Sancho returns to Frio County within six months. He is allowed to stay and enjoy tamales and chili peppers he likes so much (259-266). Fifteen-year-old Miguel, in *Divine Average*, follows his family's cow on her periodic journey from drought-stricken Mexico into Texas where she stays near a spring eating the lush grass. He thinks of the place as a gift from the cow, especially when she gives birth to twins, one of them white. His family settles there, naming it Regalo de la Vaca—gift of the cow.

Ole Blue and Table Cloth, famous lead steers in Dobie's *The Longhorns*, must have been the inspiration for Little Star, C. Cassidy's pet lead ox in *Divine Average*. Born on the Nueces, Ole Blue was a mulberry-colored steer who, in *The Longhorns*, with a bell around his neck, leads herds for John Chisholm into New Mexico and for Charlie

Goodnight to Colorado (268-275). Dobie also tells of Table Cloth, a wily, “blue, white and yellow checkered” steer that had avoided branding and castration until he was over a year old or going up the trail until he was ten. After leading several herds, he successfully fights a bear and is finally allowed to live out his life in freedom (285-288). In *Divine Average*, Little Star also wears a bell, and as his owner walks beside him, occasionally scratching the beast’s head between his horns, the docile animal leads Templeton’s first herd from San Patricio to New Orleans. Highbones, who challenges Little Star’s leadership position, also becomes a memorable animal character.

Little Star and his challenger Highbones in *Divine Average* are perhaps indebted for their vivid adventures to Dobie’s tale of Brindle’s fight with Golondrino. Because these two are bulls, not steers, their battle is epic (*Longhorns* 140-145). The conflict between the two steers in *Divine Average* is comic. Highbones, a lanky, bug-eyed steer, thinks of himself as leader of a group of animals brought in to the larger trail herd. Crossing the Sabine, Little Star and several others bog down. After a motivational dose of whisky and the encouragement of the crack of a whip from his master, Little Star begins to pull out of the mud. Highbones chooses this time to challenge Little Star for position as lead steer. At this point, Tomás, a skillful mustanger, captures the attention of Highbones and leads him away in a comic parody of a bull fight.

On a card between pages 86 and 87 in her inscribed copy of Dobie’s *The Longhorns*, Kirkland wrote: “1 negro-sixty head cattle (\$600 probably) Exchange horses for cows, have Range in this—Highbones” and on the bottom of the card “maverick hunt.” In *Divine Average*, Templeton trades slaves to a black slave-holder for cattle, fulfilling the terms noted on the card.

From *The Mustangs*, Dobie’s accounts of daring mustangers inspired Kirkland’s Tomás, and Kirkland’s copy of the Texas Folk-Lore Society’s *Mustangs and Cow Horses*, “Nicking the Mustang,” edited by Dobie, is marked. She wanted to use this bit of historic mustang capturing technique in *Divine Average*, but it was considered too violent:

[S]end a ball—and in later days a bullet—just through the top of the animal’s neck, at the root of the mane, a little in front of the shoulder. Here a nerve center—connected with the spinal cord and the brain—may be so shocked as to stun or temporarily paralyze the horse, causing it to drop to the ground senseless for a minute or two, in which brief time could be securely roped and tied down. (Nolen 44)

Range Templeton chooses the name Rawhide Range for his land. Dobie devoted Chapter 13 in *The Longhorns* to the remarkable usefulness of rawhide. Besides the importance of its strength in tall tales, rawhide was used as torture devices or in everyday farm and home items. Indians staked victims with rawhide that stretched them unmercifully as it dried, and Pancho Villa tied wet rawhide around his victim’s head so that its natural shrinking would cause excruciating pain. “Mexican iron” found hundreds of uses: whangs, long strips of rawhide to repair wagon wheels; ox shoes; buckets; chairs; chaps and toe tenders; lariats; saws; hats; sleds; coffins; and as coin for trade. Rawhide was an apt name for Templeton’s wilderness home.

Luvisa’s dream of being driven into the pen along with the wild horses clutching the half-breed baby McDuff seems so real that she consults Dr. Weidner. Unlike Dobie’s story “The Dream That Saved Wilbarger” (*Tales* 34-41), which resulted in the scalped Wilbarger’s rescue, Luvisa’s dream does not lead to a rescue, but it does alert Luvisa to signs of her husband’s brutality. As a student of Dobie and as his colleague at Radio House, Kirkland had acquired quite a repository of folklore, and various samples found their way into her novels.

Kirkland appeared on the program of the 1953 Texas Folklore Society meeting. Her notes for her speech to the Society indicate that she referred to several examples of folklore from *Divine Average* including Miguel’s sacred white calf, Carlota’s belief that a bird in the house means death, and the mockingbird story.

An important aspect of folklore is beliefs about animals. Animal characters touch the lives of human characters in the novel incorporating the idea of man as part of nature. L. N. Wright, after hearing the author present a review of her book, commented that the story of La Brema was for him “the most enchanting part of the book.” According to Kirkland’s summary, the story of La Brema is based on the legend of the founding of Los Ojuelos, a small border community in Webb County. “La Brema—cow of destiny,” takes on mystic power as the means to the Sándivars’ discovery of their land, El Regalo de la Vaca—the gift of the cow.

Most readers respond favorably to the animal characters in Kirkland’s novel. However, Walter Prescott Webb wrote to the author that his credulity was strained by La Brema and Little Star. “They just didn’t grow that gentle on the Nueces at that time.” The time of the first trail drive in the novel was 1839, but Dobie’s lead animals were from forty years later.

In her notes the author made a list of the animal characters. First is “Indian Toego—a hero’s horse, brainy blueblood, copper chestnut,” namesake of the Kirklands’ registered American Saddle Horse, a chestnut stallion with a star and white left front pastern and both hind ankles, born 4/27/42. Next she lists three other horses: “Nightmare—devilish black,” Dr. Weideman’s horse; “Stinger—a fiery maiden’s fiery mustang,” Laska’s companion; and “Lustre—a golden dream of a horse to fit a boy’s dream,” Miguel Sándivar’s horse. “Daño—the wise crow,” pet of the half-breed boy who saves Luke’s life, was allowed in the house in spite of his foster mother’s fear of this omen of death. The crow becomes Laska’s special friend partly because its antics provide the perfect way for her to provoke her father.

The vaqueros tell the story of “El Zenzontle—the vain mockingbird.” The tale has a message for Templeton, a man of pride and greed, but it is lost on him. In the folktale the mockingbird’s pride in his singing makes him feel that the flowers bloom and spring arrives in response to his song. In spite of his wife’s warning that he sings only “If God

wills it,” his pride leads to his downfall. After being attacked by a hawk, the mockingbird cries “O God, it is you who cause the flowers to bloom and the birds to sing, not I!” (85), and a white dove repairs his broken wings with three white feathers from her own wings, which the mockingbird still wears today as a reminder of his pride. Templeton himself was struck down from the pinnacle of his racial pride when the Mexican bandit El Gavilán, the Hawk, claimed his daughter, and Marina Sádivar married his son.

Themes presented in her novel, Kirkland’s organization of the content, her historical accuracy, and her skillful use of folklore combine to make *Divine Average* “more than just a Western.”

### Critical Reaction

Kirkland felt pride mixed with frustration about her novel during the process of rewriting and publishing. In a letter to her mother in 1951, she wrote, “If the manuscript is in the hands of the copy editors that means no more cutting and I’ll have my reduced story on Finius Jones, my Highbones description, and the ‘bullfight in the bog’ scene left intact. I was so afraid they were going to demand that I cut this. All the arguments I wrote must have taken effect.” Even while she enjoyed the success of *Divine Average*, in a 1953 letter to John Henry Faulk, Kirkland outlined other frustrations with the publication of her first book. Not only had she been disappointed with the dust jacket, she felt abandoned when her contact at Little, Brown suddenly left. “[M]y contact with the company was Angus Cameron, the editor in chief, who had made my acquaintance through Mr. Dobie and who considered *Divine Average* his discovery and a good one—he’s the only editor who ever saw it; . . . it was a big, big blow to me when he resigned.” She explained that he was a “liberal,” who “blew up and resigned when the board tried to ‘fence him in’ as to political affiliations.”

Kirkland wrote Faulk that she had forty songs, including those already in the book, and that Cameron, at Little, Brown, had plans to “contact Rodgers and Hammerstein” about creating a musical version of *Divine Average*. After Cameron’s departure from the

publishing company, she began writing letters herself about making *Divine Average* into a musical. In her notes she listed “Features,” which seem to be selling points in her attempt to interest someone in making her novel into a film. She listed the “origins of cow boy, the ‘beauties of Brasada,’” where the longhorns thrived, the “New Orleans drive,” the “slave-cattle swap,” the “woman rider—Laska, Luke & Laska—Rawhide twins, [and] Mudo—the Tarahumara,” the Indian who tore out his own tongue rather than risk betraying the location of his tribe’s mines. Among the selling points was the fact that the novel already contains the lyrics for songs.

She went straight to the top of the field, writing letters for twenty years about setting her lyrics to music. She wrote to Mitch Miller (10/31/55), to Leigh Harline (10/55; 11/56), to Ira Cole (1/4/57), and to Richard Rodgers (2/13/77). She continued to hope for a musical film version of her first novel. As late as 1989, she sent a copy of *Divine Average* to Willie Nelson with a note “because it is under option for a television film and I [am] nurturing the idea that you somehow might be involved in it.” In rough drafts of the letter she commented on her former home, The Academy, which appeared in the background of a wedding scene in his movie, *Red-Headed Stranger*. She called her book to him “a gift from my creative body of words to your creative body of song,” and mentioned that she had more lyrics than those in the book. In another draft of her note to Nelson, she wrote, “you have touched my heart and calmed my spirit countless times with the matchless quality of your haunting harmony.”

Among her papers there is a “Screen Treatment,” which seems to be a rewrite of the first few chapters of the book with “Fade In” and “Fade Out” added but without dialog. “An Outline for Motion Picture” is a curious description of some of the characters, much of it in verse. Finally there are two scripts of the scene between Laska and her father in which he slaps her. It is not clear whether they are intended for radio or film.

Other frustrations for Kirkland had to do with marketing decisions—design of a poster advertising the novel and the dust jacket. In a letter to a poster illustrator who had

not read the book, she asked for storm clouds with the title flung out of them. She encouraged him to read at least the first sixty-five pages to get an idea of the characters he was going to draw. In a letter to her friend John Henry Faulk, Kirkland confided:

Now a few words about *Divine Average* and the dust jacket. There you've touched a sore spot. On the day I received a proof of it sent on request. I had not been consulted or even given a vague idea of what it was to be like, I had just had a tooth pulled and felt like the end of the world anyway. . . . I blew my top—the tears flowed and the denunciations rang out!

She reported that the art editor's letter said, "We all think the artist did a remarkably fine painting and we hope you like it," but Kirkland called it "dull, commercial art," and complained "that until I saw the jacket, I thought the publisher shared with me the hope that I had written something more than just a Western." The comic book cowboy and pioneer woman on the dust jacket suggest a vintage movie poster advertising Saturday Westerns.

Negative criticism of her novel ranged from mild requests, by an otherwise adoring reader, for correction of some technicality to scathing remarks by newspaper reviews. Kirkland's agent Evelyn Oppenheimer wrote on the envelope of one fan letter, "Elithe—I can't resist relaying this one!" Mr. Allen, a man who had spend fifty years with livestock—"cows, horses, dogs, cats, deer, bear, elk, squirrels, etc.," pointed out the error on page 124, where the author, in describing a breech birth, calls it "according to nature's plan." The stockman explained that it is "very unnatural and dangerous" for a calf, or any warm-blooded animal, to be born "back feet first" as the author describes it. Kirkland replied to Mr. Allen that as a ranch woman she meant to say "according to nature's demand which is to empty the womb no matter what the position," but that it was a mistake that was never caught.

Sometimes negative comments sell a book better than praise. Lewis Nordyke's negative review in the *New York Times* relied on two familiar jokes to make the reviewer's

point that Templeton is a stock character. In the first story, a cattle baron who was accused of land-grabbing replied, “I don’t want all the land in Texas; jist that that jines mine.” It is true that Templeton, the hero in *Divine Average*, is obsessed with acquiring land, as were many who came to the Texas Republic. In the second story, a Texas Ranger captain said, “God made big men and little men, and Sam Colt—he made an equalizer.” It is also true that Templeton makes efficient use of the five-shot Colt Paterson in his first fight with Indians, as did many other early Texas settlers.

The racial theme drew fire from some critics. Kirkland surely knew that the blending of the races, the major theme of her novel, would not be accepted by many readers. Early in her career, she sent a short story to her friend, Bryant Presley, editor at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. After reading the story, he cautioned her in a letter about using “infatuation of a white girl for a Negro, and the sexual consummation of that infatuation. To a large body of our people the idea is revolting.” His admission that the idea had dramatic value and suggestion that she make the girl “an Indian half-breed” highlights the prevailing attitudes—a half-breed Indian in a sexual relationship with a Negro would still be dramatic, or controversial, but to place a white girl in the same situation would not be tolerated by the reading public. Kirkland may have remembered Presley’s warning. Although Bryson’s lost love Châli was a mulatto, no Negro/Anglo “averaging” occurs in *Divine Average*.

Sure enough, many found the idea of a “divine average,” or a new race made of many races, unpalatable. Reviewer Frank Goodwyn rejected what he termed Dr. Weideman’s “Hegelian ideal” interpretation of “divine average,” in favor of his own interpretation. To Goodwyn the “divine average” of Whitman’s poem means that the “average man, here and now, building and promulgating his own, is divine.” Suspicion arises that the idea of mixed race as the ultimate good did not suit Goodwyn. The closest he could come to endorsing the idea of “divine average” was to praise any life “broadened by intelligence and enriched by tolerance.”

Similarly, the romance of the novel caused some criticism. Lon Tinkle said, by way of censure, “To be blunt at the risk of discourtesy: women will love it.” He refers to Kirkland’s “sermon” and wishes “her characters were a little less the puppets of her extraordinary feeling for pat coincidence.”

In spite of these negative comments, or perhaps because of them, those who wanted to read for themselves the shocking theme of mixed race as “divine average” may have bought the book after reading Goodwyn’s review, and women, who were not put-off by Tinkle’s superior male attitude that women would like something in the way of a “sermon” that was full of “pat coincidences,” may have bought the book, too. The author herself reveled in the review that attempted to degrade her writing ability by saying that the hate within Range Templeton “could not have been fiction.”

Elithe Hamilton Kirkland’s first novel, published in 1952, was widely acclaimed. J. Frank Dobie, in the *Austin American* called *Divine Average* “the best historical novel Texas has so far produced.” Other reviewers compared it to *Gone with the Wind* and praised the book as “an examination of prejudice’s power to destroy . . . documented in solid scholarly research” (Sewell 119). L. N. Wright, in the *San Marcos Record*, commented after the author had presented a review of her book to the English Club, “Most critics have overlooked what to me is the finest thing in the book, Mrs. Kirkland’s obvious sympathy for the racial minorities, particularly the Mexicans.”

Walter Prescott Webb wrote to the author, “Though I am no expert on the novel, I do know when I like a story, when one picks me up and disturbs my sleep. Yours did all of these things.” He observed that the Chenet affair, in which a free Negro owns slaves, and the Mexican racial conflict would be too strong for a movie, or that it would “knock the audience out of their seats—and maybe, unfortunately, clean out of the theater.” Judging the historical part of the novel to be its “gold,” Webb found the love story “inferior,” and, in agreement with Lon Tinkle, he accused the love story of being “mid-Victorian in its idealized emotions and posturings.” However, this may be a compliment—the setting was

mid-Victorian, and as Webb pointed out, the love story “represents better than Mr. Tinkle realizes the ideals of that day.”

The hero was well-received. Lon Tinkle was not completely complimentary, but he liked the name Range Templeton, calling it an “inspired name, by the way, as good as Rhett Butler,” and he also declared that “[r]etribution sets in for [Templeton] in the best-contrived revenge since the Count of Monte Cristo.” Jim Carroll, reviewing *Divine Average* in *Texas Preview*, pointed out the historical accuracy of the main character:

Range Templeton’s story could well be based, with literary license, on the careers of three noted early Texas, Maj. John H. Wood, John Welder, the elder, and Capt. Richard King. Like Maj. Wood, he just missed the battle of San Jacinto and got his start joining the “Texians” in their continuing fight against enemies of the Republic. Like John Welder, he married into an old Spanish family and set up a hierarchy. Like Capt. King, he became absolute master of a vast section of the “Brush Country,” a ranch so large as to be an empire in itself.

In a letter to her mother, Kirkland gushed over a review by W. D. Bedell in the *Houston Post* which said the hatred of Range Templeton in the book was “too convincing to be entirely fictional.” To her mother, she explained that this review was sure to sell more copies of her book in Houston. Realizing that the reviewer believed Templeton to be someone the author really knew, she was thrilled that her fiction had been mistaken for fact.

Kirkland’s skill in making history come alive in *Divine Average* inspired friends from the Texas State Historical Association to approach her with a sixty-year-old manuscript. From Harriet Ames’s account of her life with the notorious Col. Robert Potter, Kirkland fashioned her best known novel.

## CHAPTER 5

### *LOVE IS A WILD ASSAULT*

The life of Harriet Ann Moore Page Potter Ames made her a *cause célèbre* in the Republic of Texas. In 1836 after being abandoned with her two young children by her gambler husband Solomon Page, who left them to join Sam Houston's forces, Harriet accepted the protection of Robert Potter, Secretary of the Texas Navy, a man with a violent past in North Carolina where he had maimed two men. She lived with him for six years on the shores of Caddo Lake while he pursued a successful political career in the state legislature. Upon his return from Austin in 1842, Harriet witnessed his killing by William P. Rose, a political enemy. Believing that she had married Potter by a bond signed by three witnesses at their wilderness home, Harriet was devastated that his will left most of his property to two women friends in Austin and referred to her as Mrs. Page.

Scandal commands attention. The true story of Robert Potter captivated his own era as well as ours. Kirkland told in a 1956 letter to John Henry Faulk that Charles Dickens wrote of the Potter-Rose affair in his *American Notes* in 1842 and that when an American visitor told Thomas Carlyle the story, he paced and "rubbed his hands in glee at the heroic violence of the tale." In a letter that same year to her editor, Lee Barker, after telling of the Carlyle interest in the story of Potter, she reported that a "fiction writer took advantage of this and wrote a fantastic tale in which Potter, disguised as "Captain Carlyle" was the main character. Riddle of the *Houston Post-Sun*, noted that Harriet's scandal was

probably “second only to speculation as to why Sam Houston’s first wife left him after three months of marriage.”

Kirkland, busily writing a second novel in 1953, was led to Harriet by Dr. George W. Salmon of Houston, a member of the Texas State Historical Association, and its director, Dr. H. Bailey Carroll, because of her skill in using Texas history in her first novel, *Divine Average*. In her review of Kirkland’s second novel, Loyce Ramsey commented:

Mrs. Kirkland is a member of the Texas Institute of Letters (by virtue of *Divine Average*) and the Texas State Historical Association through which she was guided to Harriet’s significant documentation. Much of Mrs. Kirkland’s research into the tempestuous Robert Potter story, clued in by Harriet’s account, led her along legal trails of scandal and intrigue that culminated in months of study in the archives of the Supreme Court of Texas. Associate Justice James R. Norvell, writing in the current issue of the *Southwest Law Review* on the historic legal battle involving Harriet’s property and reputation, quotes from *Love Is a Wild Assault*, pointing out that Mrs. Kirkland has given the most valid interpretation to date on controversial Rob Potter—questionable servant to the Congresses of both the United States and the Republic of Texas.

Kirkland first called the book *Lakeann*, Potter’s pet name for his wife Harriet that they also gave to their daughter. This version included only Harriet’s six years with Potter—from Brazoria County, through Shelby County, to Caddo Lake in Red River County in Northeast Texas.

### **The March Toward Perfection**

Kirkland had shown her interest in the idea that man’s continued struggle toward perfection encompasses unconventional ideas and actions and the importance of

parapsychology in her first novel *Divine Average*. These ideas also appear in *Love is a Wild Assault*.

Because Harriet's unconventional life would have embarrassed her children, it was not discussed within the family. However, her grandchild Tricky could see through to the honesty of her grandmother's life, especially with the aid of the account written especially for her. Dr. Salmon, who corresponded often with Kirkland about progress on the novel, wrote to her in November 1953 that "[i]t has taken several generations to appreciate Harriet." He thought that a speech by Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* fit Harriet as well as Scarlett O'Hara. Talking to Scarlett about being different, Rhett says:

"Make up your mind to this. If you are different, you are isolated, not only from your own age but from your parents' generation and from your children's generation too. They'll never understand you and they'll be shocked no matter what you do. But your grandparents would probably be proud of you and say 'There's a chip off the old block,' and your grandchildren will sigh enviously and say: 'What an old rip Grandma must have been!' and they'll try to be like you. . . . So you'll have to wait for approval from your grandchildren." (680)

In the novel before Harriet begins writing her account of her life from 1829 to 1842, she considers her values—men loved, children, possessions, and code. An important part of Harriet's code is also a part of the author's code: the belief that "when all is finished, the love force will somehow bring perfection out of it all, and the final equation will be good" (21). Tricky is the good that has come out of all Harriet's experiences.

The author's belief in the value of unconventional ideas appears again in *Love Is a Wild Assault*. Kirkland's interest in parapsychology harmonizes with Harriet's telling of her story with dreams, premonitions, affinities, precognitions, and visions. A "shared premonition of destinies interlocked" (318) passes between Harriet and Charles Ames the first time they meet, when he takes her stillborn child and buries it. At their last meeting

before Potter is killed, Harriet and Ames, who had aided her many times and who is to become her last husband, feel an affinity—“far beyond physical attraction” (399). On the day of Rose’s attack on Potter, Harriet is blessed with precognition—she knows they will attack as soon as possible and that the son, who promised to bring Rose in because of Potter’s arrest warrant on Rose and to warn Potter if he could not, will arrive with his father, gun in hand (409). In her despair after Potter’s death and her punishment of the evil Indian grave robber Bruton, Harriet has a vision of her mother, who died when she was ten, saying again, “I leave you in God’s hands” (431).

In a short piece written apparently for herself among her papers in the Southwestern Writers Collection, Kirkland has the spirit of Harriet tell of coming to Kirkland at night to encourage her to complete the research—including how to milk a cow—and the book. She also predicts its critical acclaim and the famous people Kirkland will meet because of it. Nature is included in the mystical scene when Harriet comments that the cat and dog can see her as a spirit. Harriet speaks of being “sky-minded” and advises Kirkland to “turn to ancestral memories” as she begins to write, quoting “I work at my design” from Kirkland’s later book *On the Trellis of Memory*, which she called “research into psychic prehistory.” Comparing the beginning of the novel to the beginnings of *Anna Karenina* and *The Return of the Native*, Harriet ends with a passage about her own strength—faith in God, courage as “the bravest woman in the Republic of Texas,” love of nature, and her statement, “How glad I am that my novelist looked into my heart so deeply.”

With her mystical turn of mind and her belief in reincarnation, Kirkland must have enjoyed such letters as the one she received from a fan, who signed only her first name. “Mary” noted the similarity in names between Harriet’s granddaughter Tricky Purcelle and Kirkland’s grandfather Purcell: “I wonder if about five generations back, there is a link between Harriet Potter and Elithe Hamilton Kirkland? Is the name Purcell-Purcelle the same or just a coincidence?”

To focus on the sensational part of Harriet's long life, Kirkland devised a mounting and jewel organizational design.

### **Organization**

Kirkland placed the gemstone of Harriet's true story in a mounting of fiction. The mounting is the story of Harriet's desire to teach the lessons of her long life and her early matrimonial mistakes to her granddaughter Tricky. Armed with this knowledge in the final chapters of the novel, the young girl is equipped to choose her husband wisely and for life.

The fictionalized relationship between Harriet and her eight-year-old granddaughter and Harriet's discovery, in Chapter 1, that the scandal of her life fifty years before is still alive and may harm her granddaughter, causes her to write the true version of the events for her to read when she reaches marriageable age. From then on the main story of Harriet's first two marriages is interrupted periodically by six scenes of Harriet with her granddaughter, her servant, or her son E.Y.

Thinking of this fictionalized framework, Kirkland referred to *Love Is a Wild Assault* as a "romantic chronicle." Because "it is an elaboration beyond strict biography, but not fiction, she wrote in 1956 to John Henry Faulk that she did not want it to be called a "biographical novel."

In 1979 Kirkland replied to a fan's letter by writing, "I appreciate your interest in my book *Love Is a Wild Assault*. As far as the ending of the book, it was intended that it remain the reader's choice as to whom Tricky married...I hope you are happy with the one you selected." To another fan in 1985, she wrote, "Tricky is not a documented person" and "Do not know what happened to Joe." She clarified her purpose as a writer dealing with real characters:

The writer of a biographical historical novel has a solemn commitment to make the framework of the story on solid history and no improvisations, no changes in dates or alteration of events. As for the main character, the

author fleshes out the skeleton in a manner to present a GREATER TRUTH than is possible through straight factual account.

Finally she explained why Harriet's long marriage to Ames is not chronicled in the book: "My novel did not concern her life with Ames—that would have been another book."

The true story of Harriet Ann Moore Page Potter Ames is a many-faceted gem. The author took the historical stone, cut it, polished it, and presented it to her readers in the mounting of her fictional story of Harriet's granddaughter. Kirkland's book closely follows Harriet's first person account, written when she was in her eighties. It covers her life from her marriage to Solomon Page in 1829 to the killing of her second husband Robert Potter in 1842 and her attempts to bring the killers to justice before the publication of Potter's bombshell of a will.

In a 1953 letter to Dr. Salmon, Kirkland wrote:

I expect to be able to write this book much more rapidly than *Divine Average* (See 'A Book Was Made' page 376) principally because I have done so much research on that period of Texas history, still there are many, many things to be checked and worked out in detail. The autobiography, although very exciting and stirring, is lacking much in time, place, and names, that one doesn't dare leave to the imagination when dealing with actual characters—the imagination can be allowed scope on emotions and some elaboration on events but must be curbed in dealing with the main body of facts. In *Divine Average* . . . Dr. Weideman is the only major character lifted bodily from history's pages.

### **The Problem of Race**

Kirkland's racial concerns led her to dramatize how both Indians and African-Americans faced hardships on the frontier. Kirkland obtained information about the Caddo Indians from the state library of Oklahoma, Indian City USA, and the Smithsonian Institution (13). Before she begins her account when Harriet considers her code of living,

Kirkland's Harriet uses the term "sky-minded," which she concedes "must be the Indian influence." The actual Harriet, unlike many Texas settlers, valued some of the Indians she met. Kirkland portrays Harriet's respect for Prowling Bear, Tall Flower, her daughter Clear Water, and all of their myths. Harriet went on to say that she had always identified herself with nature, felt a part of the vastness, the mystery, the wonder" (21).

When Kirkland's Harriet asked Mr. Wells to bring his wife to visit, he revealed the division of races when he replied, "I'm afraid my woman wouldn't be proper company for you, ma'am. She's a Mex-Indian—that is, her pa was a Mexican and her ma a Caddo" (264).

However, to most Texans the only good Indian was a dead Indian. When Potter and five other men come upon a group of Indians, Potter kills Harriet's friend Prowling Bear, and others kill his son and five other Indians. Potter and another man are wounded and two white men are killed. In a newspaper account at the time, the writer laments "the blood of innocent and unoffending men," which Harriet understands to refer to the two white men killed because it "wasn't likely that any newspaper in Texas would refer to Indians as "unoffending men" (354).

Free Negroes are not the same as other free men although Jethro, Col. Potter's servant, is paid and is free to leave, which he does when he learns of Potter's shocking North Carolina past.

Kirkland stresses how several slaves shared Harriet's experiences. She receives the services of Meeta, a quadroon and possibly the daughter of Mr. Howard, as part of his attempted seduction. Delia, owned by a legal client of Potter's, serves Harriet for several years. With her French accent and New Orleans background, Delia displays self-control in the presence of whites, but she is very emotional when on her own. She never mentions the child she has to leave behind when she first comes to Mulberry Shore, and in the end she runs off without that child. Potter acquires Hannah, an elderly slave, in payment of a

legal debt and later buys her half-grown grandchildren, George and Mary. In his will Potter leaves his slaves to various beneficiaries.

In Kirkland's novel, the incidents of the renegade slaves near Brazoria and of the runaway slave who comes to Mulberry Shore clarify the relationship between the races at the time. Brazoria residents join the Runaway Scrape by mistake. When they realize that what they thought was Mexican gunfire was really the sound of burning cane from fires set by slaves, they are just as concerned for their safety. They fear either slaves on the rampage or a Mexican army. Although Harriet later escapes attack by an escaped slave when she startles him by demanding that he remove his hat in a gentleman's house, she insists that Mr. Wells not try to capture him to obtain the reward. Before long the slave is killed by a man who tried to send the slave back to his owner (267-274).

### **History**

In the Foreword, Kirkland described the sources she consulted in writing *Love Is a Wild Assault*:

In the Texas State and University libraries and archives, I examined multiple books, newspapers, census reports, court records, personal records and documents, political papers and broadsides, theses, and other scholarly reports on the personalities of the period.

In the clerk's office of the Supreme Court of Texas, I studied the largest single source of data for the framework of my novel: a 400-page transcript (in longhand) of the proceedings in a case involving Harriet (her property and her reputation) that had been in and out of East Texas courts for twenty years. (13)

Kirkland indicated in a 1959 letter to Samuel E. Asbury that she had used the Asbury Papers that are held in the State and University archives.

With all these sources at hand, the most important was Harriet's own account. Kirkland used some passages exactly as Harriet wrote them in the edited version of

Harriet's story from Nell Hall's 1941 East Texas State Teachers College thesis, "The History of Harriet A. Ames During the Early Days of Texas." In an undated summary of the novel, Kirkland wrote that it is "based on Harriet's unpublished personal chronicle written in 1893 when she was eighty-three years old." She gives the dates of "Harriet's romantic entanglements with Robert Potter from 1836 to 1842." To show the quality of Harriet's writing, she indicated several places in the novel that are taken directly from Harriet's words.

One example from Harriet's account used in the novel were Harriet's harsh words to Solomon Page when he left her and their two small children without food in the Texas wilderness to join the Texas Army: "If you go off and leave us here to starve,' I cried, 'I hope the first bullet that is fired pierces your heart, and just leaves you time enough to think of the wife and children you left to die of starvation in this wilderness'" (Hall 27). In the novel, Kirkland's Harriet uses these same words, "If you go off and leave us here to starve, I hope the first bullet that's fired, pierces your heart'" (*Assault* 107).

Harriet's words in the novel hardly differ from Harriet's description in her account of his gravesite: "There was a beautiful knoll on the hill in front of the house where a clump of trees grew. My husband had often said that when he died he would like to be buried there" (Hall 74). In the novel, Kirkland's Harriet describes the site:

On a beautiful knoll in front of the house, where a clump of stately trees lifted lofty branches above the surrounding grove, we laid Rob in his grave. I recalled that he had said to me time and again, with strange insistence, "When I die, I would like to be buried on that spot of elevated beauty" (*Assault* 423).

Several documents from Robert Potter aided in Kirkland's research for the book. A photocopy of his "Address to the People of Granville County"—an eighty-six-page booklet that Kirkland located in the library of the University of North Carolina—gives his side of the unsavory events leading to his departure for Texas and a new beginning. Some

passages from that document are quoted verbatim. Other quoted Potter documents include a deed and his will, written days before his death. In the deed and the will, Potter denied his marriage to Harriet by referring to her as Mrs. Page as well as depriving her of much of their property, which he gave to two other married women in Austin. Other items in Potter's will assisted the author in recreating life at Mulberry Shore. For example, slaves are named and bequeathed to various new owners and several horses are listed by name among Potter's stock, including two used in the book—Sukey Blueskin and Shakespeare.

Other legal documents vital to the research for the book show that Harriet married Solomon Page on February 14, 1829. Years after the events of the scandal, Harriet and her third husband filed suit to hold on to Harriet's land at Mulberry Shore. This testimony sometimes confirms what Harriet wrote in her account and other times it differs, leaving the author to choose the "truth."

Kirkland knew the value of creating suspense. On Kirkland's typescript of the depositions she noted her plan to create suspense in the book: "In the story have people know of his scandal in NC and thus arouse interest far ahead . . . the heinous crime reference, etc., but she never gets a breath of it until the neighbor tells her." Kirkland created suspense by dropping hints about Potter's unsavory past. Within minutes of Harriet's meeting the dashing Col. Potter and being taken up to ride behind him on his prancing horse, he appears to defend her from a mysterious smithy who makes suggestive comments, including a reference to knives and Potter's being a cutter (175-177). Still under Potter's protection on the *Pocket*, Harriet is interviewed by one of the gossiping ladies on board. Mrs. Measure is curious about whether Harriet is actually Potter's paramour, but she also asks ominously if Harriet knows about his past. Harriet boldly but mistakenly, answers, "I know enough" (201). Two pages later Jethro, the colonel's loyal free Negro servant tells Harriet he must leave because, "da mark o' Satan on 'im sho'! . . . Ah heered men on dis ship talkin'—know the colonel-general way back—dey say—wicked words" (203). A message, quoting Biblical passages referring to "A man living under a

eunuch's curse" (119-220), given to Potter in Harriet's hearing causes Potter to go wild. Finally Mrs. Slidel tells Harriet the whole terrible story of how Potter had castrated two men he believed had sex with his wife (278-282). When she confronts Potter, he hands her a copy of his "Address to the People of Granville," which gives his version of the events. According to Potter, his wife and the men—one a cousin of his wife and the other a preacher who had been ministering to her spiritual needs—confessed to having illicit sexual relations. He defends his decision to punish them by castration as more civilized than the accepted method of killing the adulterer. He further states that other male relatives of his wife and a doctor heard all three confessions and observed that his method of punishment had not endangered the lives of the two men.

In an undated summary, Kirkland gave first importance to historical events beyond the personal stories of the main characters in the novel:

- The Caddo Indians and related tribes have an interesting part in this story; these were the 'tejas' or friendly Indians from which the state of Texas gets its name.
- Another bit of historical background adding color to the story is the Regulator-Moderator War of East Texas—an outlaw war that almost developed into a revolution against the Republic of Texas. Colonel Potter was a "moderator," and Old Rose was a "regulator."
- "The Runaway Scrape" in the title of Part II refers to the fleeing of the Anglo-American settlers before the Mexican army, after the defeat at the Alamo and before the victory at San Jacinto.

Chosen to write Harriet's story because of her excellent use of accurate history in her novel *Divine Average*, Kirkland certainly lived up to her reputation with the facets of history she polished in *Love Is a Wild Assault*. Preacher Cloud, who arranges her rescue from Austin Bayou, tells her of the first battle of the Texas Revolution on October 2, 1835, at Gonzales (138), setting the stage for the next act of her drama—war. Living in Brazoria

with her sister-in-law, Harriet learns of Old Ben Milam's defeat of Mexican Gen. Cos in San Antonio (150). March 2, 1836, Texas Independence Day plays out as the origin of animosity between Robert Potter, who wanted to adjourn to aid Travis at the Alamo, and Sam Houston, who shouted "'folly and treason' and plead for creation of a sound government on the spot" (156). Mr. and Mrs. Gibson from Gonzales, force their daughter Amy, Harriet's sister-in-law, to flee with them from the "Meskins spreadin' out to cover the land like a plague" (158). Reciting the twelve plagues of Egypt, Gibson reports the massacre at the Alamo. He then runs off Harriet's stock to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy and rushes with his family to safety. Harriet and her children, dressed for social calls, are caught up in the panic of the Runaway Scrape themselves a few days later.

The novel affirms that these were raw and dangerous times, and in *the New York Herald Tribune*, Caroline Tunstall praised the novel with the comment: "The charm of the period lies in its combination of frontier lawlessness and hardship with early Victorian gentility." Indians, ruffians, panthers—gentlemen paid high-flown compliments, and "ladies were refined, cultured, even on occasion modish." In the novel as in real life, Harriet's stylish dress when she is caught up in the Runaway Scrape contributes to her infamous six-year adventure—the events that catapult her into notoriety. When Col. Potter and other officials of the new Texas government meet the Brazorian group and escort them to Galveston, Harriet, in her bedraggled finery, catches the colonel's eye. A friend of her father, Col. Hall, introduces them and Potter offers her his "protection" (172).

On the strength of his six years service in the United States Navy, beginning when he was sixteen, Potter was named Secretary of the Texas Navy soon after his arrival in Texas. Few Texans even knew of the existence of the pitifully small Texas Navy. Col. Potter describes his forces to Harriet:

Of the four schooners purchased and armed, the *Liberty* and the *Invincible* have already been harassing coastal shipping meant to strengthen and supply Santa Anna's forces. The *Brutus* and the *Independence* have just

arrived in Texas waters, and I hope to find them in the harbor ready for action. The Republic doesn't own the *Flash*, but it is armed and crewed to function as a part of the Navy if we need it. (183)

Another historical event given significance is an obscure battle called the Grass Fight where Texans attacked a Mexican force they believed to be carrying gold to pay their troops. However, they carried bags of grass to feed their horses. Potter tells Harriet that her husband Solomon Page had been killed in the Grass Fight. Suspicious of his desire to win Harriet for himself, the reader is doubtful. Readers who know their Texas history experience a feeling of satisfaction. They know Potter is lying. Soon after word of the victory at San Jacinto thrills those waiting in Galveston Bay, Solomon Page arrives to claim his wife, who thought he had died in the Grass Fight. He tells Harriet that Potter should have chosen a different battle because no Texans were killed in the Grass Fight. He admits that he had been “left at the camp near Harrisburg to guard the baggage trains and to look after the ones too weak and sick to fight” (209-210) and had missed the Battle of San Jacinto and the glory.

Kirkland followed the information in Harriet's story except when it differed from her testimony in the depositions taken when she sued to keep her East Texas land. For example, Harriet did not say in either her written account or in her deposition that Potter told her Solomon Page had been killed. She did not even say she thought that he was dead in her account. However, the deposition states: “Mrs. Ames: Soon after the Battle of San Jacinto, she was aboard the *Packet*, under Col. Potter's protection, and that Solomon Page was dead—in San Antonio or the Grass Fight.” Of course, when Kirkland has Potter lie to Harriet, telling her that her husband had been killed in battle, it fits the man's character.

Another bit of Texas history, the Neutral Strip or the East Texas Badlands, plays an important role in the story. With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Spain renewed its claim to lands east of the Sabine. Jefferson believed that the border was the Rio Grande, but by 1805 the American General Wilkerson on the Arroyo Hondo to the east and the Spanish

General on the Sabine to the west created a neutral zone, “a frontier headquarters for organized crime” (257).

Nearby in Shelby County, criminals disguised as honest settlers elected fellow outlaws to office to release the guilty and persecute the innocent. This led to lynch law in which the “honest minority, to circumvent the lawless law, resorted to personal vengeance for depredations” (343-344). After the war, Potter’s failed attempt to save Cage, a man accused of the murder of a companion who was killed by Indians and of being part of the criminal gangs from Shelby County, helps him get elected to the Texas legislature. The people who hear his eloquent plea for a lawful trial for Cage later vote for Potter even though Cage was hanged by the mob (342-346).

The Potter-Rose feud concludes the tale of the wild Colonel Potter. Rose, known as the “Lion of the Lake,” is a powerful regulator, or lynch law practitioner. He also questions Potter’s right to the prime land he has claimed as the head of a family. Potter and others, with a Presidential warrant, go to his place to arrest Rose after his lynch-law killing of the sheriff. They fail to find him, and Rose retaliates by getting a warrant to arrest Potter for trespassing on his land, but, instead of trying to arrest him, Rose has him killed. (418)

Harriet’s attempts to bring Potter’s ten murderers to justice are derailed when Potter’s will—referring to her as Mrs. Page—is published. (447)

In an early summary of *Love Is a Wild Assault*, Kirkland noted the importance of historical characters to Harriet’s story:

Colonel Robert Potter came to Texas from North Carolina on the eve of the Texas Revolution and brought to the frontier a singular reputation for both statesmanship and crime, having served terms in the Assembly of his native state, in the United States Congress, and in Hillsborough Prison. In Texas, he had a distinguished political career: his signature on the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Texas Constitution, the first Secretary

of the Navy, Commander of the Port of Galveston during the Revolution, and twice elected Senator to the Congress of the Republic.

He was a political enemy of Sam Houston—accused the General of “luxuriating in a breech-clout, spreeing on head-bust” among the very Indians who were depredating the frontier! He was famous for his oratory, his poetry, his temper, and some statesmanship—his character was treacherous and unstable, and wherever he went the dark cloud of his North Carolina crime hung over him—a crime that brought into use the horrible word “potterize” to name the felony of his diabolical invention.

*The Texas Almanac* reveals that Potter County in the Panhandle is named for this rascal.

Readers who recognized ancestors often wrote to Kirkland. A descendant of Harriet’s half sister, wrote to point out that there were two Dr. Francis Moores in early Texas and that Harriet’s father came after the first Dr. Moore. Another fan, Dorothy Hatfield, wrote, “I was impressed with the historical parts as my own great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Berry Duncan, was in the Runaway Scrape. In fact, she had her baby, Amanda Duncan, on the San Jacinto Battleground. My great-great grandfather, Benjamin fixed her a dugout in the cane brakes and she had her baby. . . .steel under velvet.” She had also discovered an ancestor who was “the first divorcee in Green De Witt’s colony!”

When descendants of Harriet came forward in 1959, they added to the impact of this amazing true story. Two articles that identified local relatives of Harriet and others in her story appeared in the *San Angelo Standard-Times* on the same day soon after the publication of *Love Is a Wild Assault*:

Mrs. Orland Sims, Hotel Cactus, is the great-granddaughter of Robert and Harriet Potter, whose strange relationship the novel seeks to unravel. . . . Mrs. Sims has little family knowledge of the characters and events that form the backbone of [this novel]. Because she and her mother

were both orphaned at early ages few word-of-mouth family stories have passed to her.

However, she has a copy of the original memoir written by Harriet Potter that has become the general outline for Mrs. Kirkland's book.

Written about 1890 and hidden in a feather mattress, the memoir was lost for many years. After its discovery it was kept under seal at the University of Texas library for several decades because the feuds that prompted the writings still simmered.

Bob Scott, a friend of Mrs. Sims, believes on the basis of family stories that his grandfather was the man (identified by Mrs. Kirkland as J. W. Scott) who killed Potter.

Another friend of Mrs. Sims is Fannie Ratchford of Paint Rock—a descendant of Rose.

Some of the real characters in Harriet's original might be mistaken for inventions—Mr. Merrick, the widower whose dream sends him to the aid of Harriet and her hungry children; Mrs. Abit, who thinks of Harriet and her children alone in the wilderness and sends Mr. Cloud, the preacher who arranges to send wagons to rescue them; Mr. Wells, a neighbor present when the escaped slave arrives at Harriet's cabin intent on killing her and stealing her weapons; and Mr. Norton, whose drunken alarm sends Harriet and all of Brazoria earlier than necessary on the Runaway Scrape. Harriet's story does not mention the colorful ex-pirate called I. Reckon, but he fits in with the frontier characters as if he too were real. With a wealth of historical characters to use in the book, Kirkland created very few fictional characters in *Love Is a Wild Assault*.

### **Folklore**

Harriet's reputation contributed to the folklore of early Texas. Not only was Harriet known as "the Bravest Woman in Texas and Kishi-woman," but also as "Potter's Paramour." As with most folktales, there were several versions. In some renditions she

was a sultry Mexican, and other times she was described as a beautiful New Orleans quadroon.

Harriet's reputation as "the Bravest Woman in Texas" and "Kishi-woman," which meant panther-woman begins with her experiences on Austin Bayou, where she shows her real courage in keeping herself and her two children from starving to death by eating parsley haws. They attract a sort of mascot panther that she names Big Tom in an attempt to soothe the children's fears. Harriet's adventures with Big Tom are preceded by the warning that panthers eat babies given by a lady friend in New Orleans when she hears that Harriet is going to Texas. According to the tales, the huge cat often lounged with his back against the door of their cabin purring with contentment. Big Tom kills a water moccasin that is about to strike Harriet while she is drawing water from the creek. As Harriet is being taken out of the wilderness by wagon, she shoos the panther away and begs her rescuer not to shoot the animal. Later when Harriet refuses to be shamed by a woman who boldly asks her if she is Potter's paramour, the woman asks what makes her so brave, and Harriet answers, "Panther milk" (201) leaving the woman "outflanked" and laughing.

Tall tales are easy to create around such a character as Harriet, often left without a man—whether Page or Potter—to protect her home in the wilderness. Her dealings with Indians prove her bravery. River Wolf approaches her cabin as the group of Indian boys with him head toward her melon patch, but she calmly stops them (265). Prowling Bear appears at her door after the disappearance of her horses. She reports to him that some "bad boys" from his tribe had stolen her horses and asks him to intercede and make them bring them back. The horses are returned. (336-340).

Harriet punishes the outcast Grave Bruton who stole from Indian graves and sold the items. When he makes advances toward her soon after her husband's death, Harriet turns a rifle on him, disarms him, and forces him into his canoe filled with baskets of items he has stolen from Indian graves. With her gun still leveled at him, she tells him to drop a basket over the side into the lake in each of the four directions in apology. Then she tells

him to face Colonel Potter's grave and kneel in the canoe, "Bow your head in apology for insult—in respect for the dead—and don't raise it until I tell you or I'll shoot you through the head" (430).

A symbol of the diversity of Texas at the time is the vivid character called Snake Seecher, who speaks English, French, Spanish, and various Indian languages—all at the same time. "In speech and ancestry he was a mixture that only the Texas wilderness could have provided. He described himself as 'some kinds of white man and many kinds of Indian'" (369). This example of "the divine average," is a man of peace, who lives by tanning snakeskins and creating useful items. As he travels the Republic with his mules and dogs, he spreads the word about the brave Harriet. When he finally meets Harriet, he says to her, "In my mind, you were pine-tall, Brave Woman, and now my eyes behold you only flower-high. . . . You are lake and forest woman . . . you are kishi-woman . . . the Bravest Woman in Texas" (387-388).

Aware of the value of folktales in the recreation of a time and place, Kirkland sprinkles Harriet's story with Indian myths. Harriet tells her granddaughter the Caddo tale of "The Perfect One" (47-50). Kirkland had written several letters about the Caddo name for "The Perfect One" and received several replies, but a letter from the Indian Capital of the Nation explained that here is no word in the Indian language for "perfect," but "good man or person" would be *ha ah hot shoo we dah*. Kirkland used Ha-ah-hot-shoo-we-dah in the myth as the name of the Indian character who was punished for his pride. He was so proud of his perfection that he makes fun of the flaws of others. While teasing a friend during a race, he misses a step and meets an early death. After hearing the tale, Harriet's young granddaughter recognizes herself and vows to give others credit when they deserve it and to overlook the flaws of others.

Harriet recalls how Charles Ames often told her children Joe Boy and Lakeann Indian tales. Each Caddo tale presents a just punishment for bad treatment of dogs, for being a slowpoke, or for being a greedy eater (321-322). The child who mistreats a dog

becomes a dog and goes to dog heaven to be mistreated in the same way. The slowpoke cannot jump a stream and falls in to become a fish. The greedy eater become a raccoon in a persimmon tree, eating everything he sees.

The Caddo Earth Mother Ina is mentioned twice. After Charles Ames explains the Indian's scared mother, Harriet, long changed from a city dweller to one who loves the wilderness, growing plants, and tending animals, comments, "I can understand very well this consciousness of being spiritually nurtured by the earth. It is not a feeling confined to Indians. I have had it too" (335). Later, Charles advises Harriet to listen to the counsel of Ina, the Mother Earth, and Harriet responds, "I felt a part of the earth under me, of the sky, of the water, of all things, and I was supremely happy" (398).

Finally incidental bits of folklore add spice to the story. In his "Address to the People of Granville," Potter referred to the "blood call" (291) of cattle. He likens it to the reaction of people to the shedding of human blood, but reasons that in the case of the men he "punished," they deserved it, and it was better that killing them, an action often taken by wronged husbands. In the final chapter folklore takes the form of a fairy tale. The story about Tricky and Her Three Suitors follows the pattern of a fairy tale complete with the fairy godmother figure and a bit of magic; in this case, Tricky's grandmother and her gift of the magic feather mattress with the secret compartment containing the wisdom of the grandmother's account of her own mistakes in the quest for true love. After cautioning against the gambler, with his sensitive hands, and the politician, with his bewitching voice, the granddaughter must surely choose wisely: the frontiersman. Tricky's choice we are sure will be Peter Sky, of the US Division of Forestry in Colorado, not Gideon Gates, the gambler with his great expectations of Gates Gardens or Fame Kingston, the actor. However, Tricky writes letters to each of the three, accepting one unidentified proposal.

### **Critical Response**

Kirkland was thrilled with the joy of creating *Love Is a Wild Assault*; however, she was not as euphoric about the publishing process. In a 1954 letter to her mother, Kirkland

wrote joyously, “My book grows stronger and stronger as I approach the end, darling. I am virtually inspired!” On the other hand, a series of letters between Kirkland and her editor Stanley Salmen from 1953 to 1955 follows the many arduous rewriting assignments Salmen gave to the author of *Love Is a Wild Assault*. After Salmen left Little, Brown, Cammann Newberry, the managing editor, “an admirer” became her working partner.

However, things did not work out between the author and the publishing house. In December 1955 Little, Brown returned to Kirkland “all rights whatsoever in *Divine Average*” as well as the two manuscripts of *Love Is a Wild Assault*, severing all ties. Newberry wrote to her, “Now you have a new challenge of proving us here at Little, Brown completely wrong about *Wild Assault*. All power to you!”

Although she had already published one book, the path to publication of her second book continued to be difficult. She approached Editor Lee Barker at Doubleday in June of 1956 by writing, “Frank Wardlaw, University of Texas Press, has advised me of your interest in *Wild Assault*, and I am glad to send it to you for reading.” Six months later, on January 17, 1956, she received word from Herbert Weinstock that the readers had not selected her book for publication. The blunt critique stated that it was long, but was “not a rich book.” Readers complained that “events have the meaningless accidentality of life rather than the inevitability of art.” The readers found it “at times fancifully romantic, at others relying too heavily on actual public documents,” and that the “wild Col. Potter is but blandly presented.” Criticizing the “soupy tone,” the readers also deprecated the prose which, they said, “alternates between the drably homely and the overwritten.” In her answer on February 6, 1956, Kirkland ignored most of the criticism but defended her attempted “adaptation of [Harriet’s] style which I considered a splendid example of the parlance of the period.”

George Salmon, who in partnership with H. Bailey Carroll asked Kirkland to write the book, said after reading a 1954 manuscript: “As a matter of holding my attention I tended to divide the tale into two parts—divided at the Sabine. After the Sabine I was

breathless.” His preference may be explained in part by his background. He had grown up in East Texas and that part of the book was what he naturally found most absorbing.

Questions about natural facts showed some skepticism among readers. George Salmon corresponded often with the author and asked many of the questions that later readers would ask themselves. He asked Kirkland to verify the facts about eating haws—what are they, can a person live on them as long as Harriet said, do they grow in that area, are they ripe at that time of year? He also questioned the panther killing the snake.

In a different area, Salmon worried about the possibility of a suit for slander from any descendants, the “silly” emphasis on dreams characteristic of the last century, and the use of flashback in the first chapter. Kirkland responded to some of his worries. She said that the editor asked for large cuts—all the dreams but those in the first chapter, the history of Dr. Long, and other history—but her assurance that Bertha Dobie had approved the haws is not very definite. Haws are no more substantial as the little family’s only source of food for fourteen days when they appear in Kirkland’s book than they are in Harriet’s original account. Just what are parsley haws, the readers wants to know. Articles on the parsley hawthorn in *Texas Trees* and in *Edible and Useful Plants of Texas and the Southwest* explain that this tree produces white blossoms in the spring and small, red, edible fruit, attractive to birds and mammals—in September and October.

Barker wrote in the summer of 1956 that “the characters should be sharpened” and “the plot would be strengthened by cutting.” He called it “long and tedious.” As a result over a long period of rewriting, many historical scenes were omitted from the novel. Kirkland noted these cut sections as she filed them. For example, the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the fall of the Alamo were excised between sister-in-law Amy’s saying that Harriet is unsafe without a man and Amy’s father yelling “Git yer gear!” in the final version. The scene at Washington on the Brazos was especially important to the story of Potter. In the scene that Kirkland wrote, Potter, “feverishly excited, impetuous and demanding, moves the Convention adjourn and members rush to the aid of Travis.

Sam Houston opposes such action as madness—folly—treason. . . .The Houston-Potter enmity is established.”

Kirkland noted that page 256, paragraph 6, to 258, paragraph 1, became a condensation for five vignettes of events taking place in Harriet’s “private paradise” at Potter’s camp before her arrival. These five stories—cut from the novel—told of a Franciscan monk, a French trader, a Spanish soldier, a Tejas Indian, and the woman Alsheena. Other cuts included the epilogue. Dr. Salmon planned for five years to write an epilogue to Harriet’s story. Kirkland herself actually wrote the rather lengthy epilogue, but it was not used.

Once it was published, negative criticism of *Love Is a Wild Assault* was slight, centering on the title and Kirkland’s sermonizing. The title itself has caused trouble for Kirkland’s most popular book. From her friend Janita Thomas’s young daughter, Kirkland received a letter and a drawing calling the book “Love Is As Wild As Salt,” a reference to the mistake in the title in a newspaper announcement of a book signing. An admirer once wrote to Kirkland relating her daughter’s experience when she asked a salesgirl at a book store for a copy of *Love Is a Wild Assault*. The salesgirl blushed and suggested that she try an adult store down the street! Others misunderstood or disliked the title. “In spite of the absurd title, some details that do not seem relevant, and its excessive length,” Riddle, writing for the *Houston Post-Sun*, admired the novel, but wished “that it had come out under some other title. This sounds like something from the pornography section of a bus station bookstand. *Love Is a Wild Assault* isn’t like that at all.”

Other reviewers complained about the sermonizing by the author. Massarano, whose *San Angelo-Times* review had introduced with relish the various local descendants of Harriet and others in her story, ended her review with a criticism:

Mrs. Kirkland makes something of a moral of the story, deducing that two disastrous affairs gave Harriet the wisdom at last to know true love. She makes the concept explicit by introducing Harriet’s

granddaughter who chooses among three suitors on the basis of the wisdom bequeathed her in Granny's memoirs. All this is unnecessary. There are enough potent concepts inherent in the bald facts of the history to obviate moralizing.

In spite of these annoyances, Kirkland's literary success was sweet. When Kirkland's editor Ed Aswell at Doubleday died, Lee Barker wrote to offer to become her editor. Even though he had "turned down the non-fiction version" in 1956, he called the rewritten version "a fine novel." Remembering her displeasure with the dust jacket of her first novel, *Divine Average*, Kirkland must have written with a feeling of deep satisfaction to Evelyn Oppenheimer, her literary agent, that she was well pleased with "the Avon edition of *Love Is*—I could not be more satisfied with the treatment . . . the way the Lone Star flag and Harriet's gown flows over onto the spine is beautiful."

The popularity of *Love Is a Wild Assault* was immediate and long-lasting. In *50+ Best Books on Texas*, published in 1998, A. C. Green he writes, "The book was passionately written because the true story was passionately lived" (66). In her book *A Book Lover in Texas*, Oppenheimer, who later became Kirkland's agent, wrote of how she "read and most enthusiastically reviewed the great historical novel *Love Is a Wild Assault*, by Elithe Hamilton Kirkland" (103).

Kirkland had prepared a twenty-six-page "dramatic reading" interview for the Texas State Historical Association in April of 1955. After introducing the novel, Kirkland told the audience that Harriet had become so real that she often talked to her. She wrote Salmon in May 1955 of her recent appearance before the Texas Historical Association. "I used a young lady named Bette Roberts from the drama department . . . in proper costume and looks" to interview as Harriet. Harriet's costume was designed by Lucy Barton, author of the definitive book on historical costume. It was still there in 1959 when they reprieved the skit, in a fifteen-page version—a really efficient summary. A six-page version was presented later to *Woman's World*.

After the novel appeared, the distinguished historian Samuel E. Asbury approved of how Kirkland had “raised up Harriet Ames,” and suggested several other Texas historical characters for future novels. General Paul Wakefield of the Texas Heritage Foundation sent Barker at Doubleday a telegram confirming an award to be given to Elithe Hamilton Kirkland, saying, “I salute Doubleday for the magnificent handling of so great a historical novel.” Because the novel renewed interest in the case, James R. Norvell, Associate Justice Supreme Court of Texas, addressed the Northeast Texas Bar Association and the Austin Rotary about the Lewis vs. Ames case and wrote an article reviewing it in *The Texas Bar Journal* and *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. Kirkland collected two dozen thank you’s from Texas Lutheran College English students for her excellence as a writer of *Love Is a Wild Assault*, which they had studied under Dr. Jenny Lind Porter.

San Angelo reviewer Massarano praised Kirkland’s flowing prose, bold, inventive detail and style, and especially her “brilliant job of research.” Reviewer Mary Jane Lewis of the *Austin American-Statesman* pointed out the labor involved—three years [actually it was at least six years, from 1953 to 1959], 80,000 miles and five drafts—in Kirkland’s creation of the popular book *Love Is a Wild Assault*.

Within five years of the original publication, international success fueled a new interest in the novel. Publishers in Europe discovered the book on their own and sought the rights for foreign publication. In 1964 a beautifully-bound German book club version sold 12,500 copies. Soon a Swiss book club published another German edition. Then a Barcelona publishing house published a Spanish edition.

In an unusual turn of events, these German and Spanish editions helped persuade Doubleday that interest in the book had not waned. In April 1967 Bill Warren announced in the *Austin American-Statesman* that Doubleday had republished it. By the following month, *Love Is a Wild Assault* was listed as the third best selling book in Dallas after Kazan’s *The Arrangement* and Wilder’s *The Eighth Day*.

Kirkland's agent Oppenheimer had arranged a reprint and subsequent paperback publications as she explained in *Book Lover in Texas*:

I was appalled that Doubleday let the book go out of print after its 1959 publication, which was so successful that *Love Is a Wild Assault* became a collector's item and was being bought at very high prices. Elithe and I discussed this and she asked me to become her agent and go to New York to get Doubleday to do something about the matter.

I went and woke them up and the result was a new reprint edition. In 1977 I sold paperback rights to Avon, and it went through three mass printings. Then Kirkland's earlier and first novel *Divine Average*, a powerful historical story of a special frontier on the Nueces River and the Mexican border first published by Little, Brown in 1952, was reprinted by Avon in paperback in 1979.

When all those editions were gone and popular demand continued, a Texas publisher, Shearer of Fredericksburg, reprinted both books in hardback in 1984, and then *Love Is a Wild Assault* in trade paperback in 1991. (104-105)

Interest in the novel has continued over the years. Oppenheimer calls Kirkland "a fine and rare poetic stylist in novel writing," and further points out that *Love Is a Wild Assault* "continues to be the best-selling historical novel over the longest period of time ever to come out of Texas" (105).

A movie production, proof of popular success, continued as a longtime goal of the author and her readers. Even before the novel had been published, General Paul Wakefield, a friend of Kirkland's, wrote letters to heads of movie studios—Paramount, Republic, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, praising Kirkland and her novel. Frank Lloyd at Republic encouraged Kirkland in November 1955 to pursue publication of her work as a novel because there was "too much for motion pictures." A. C. Lyles at Paramount replied

on March 2, 1956, that he was not interested because his most recent movie, *Raintree County*, “is also a period picture.” King Vidor, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, sent no reply.

In May of 1959 in the *Houston Post-Sun*, Don Riddle praised the novel, “written in good taste . . . [with] accurate description of the topography, the vegetarian, the houses, the clothes, the social customs of the Texas Gulf Coast and Northeastern Texas at the time of the revolution.” He expected it to become a movie.

In November 1960, Kirkland had returned from Hollywood, and in a letter to Marjorie Alkek, she wrote, “I am very hopeful about all prospects.” She was hopeful of a musical and mentioned “getting it just right eventually” regarding the music which “has been written” for the theme song for *Love Is a Wild Assault*.

In 1967, following its republication, Bill Warren of the *Austin American-Statesman* called *Love Is a Wild Assault* “a corking good tale . . . told in a corking good manner.” He declared that Elizabeth Taylor would have to play the part of Harriet. He also reported that everyone was puzzled when “nothing happened” to produce a movie.

In a 1982 letter to Marie Cheatham, who played Stephanie Wyatt on television’s *Search for Tomorrow*, Kirkland’s husband wondered how she was “doing with *Love Is a Wild Assault*,” and told of the Kirklands’ recent trip to Jefferson, suggesting that she might visit the area to “get first hand impressions.” Dr. Kirkland congratulated her on selecting “a wonderful book, location and time,” mentioned its inclusion in A. C. Green’s *The 50 Best Books on Texas*, and ended by saying it would “make a terrific vehicle for an actress of your caliber.”

Screen adaptation of two segments of the novel—“The Drama of Mr. Howard” and “We’re Going to Texas”—were prepared in the early 1990s by Cynthia Salm and Dennis Tardan.

Kirkland’s agent Oppenheimer noted in her book, *A Book Lover in Texas*, that “motion picture and television rights were optioned several times on *Love is a Wild Assault*, but it never get into production for various reasons” (105). Both *Love Is a Wild*

*Assault* and *Divine Average* were “again under option” in 1995, according to Oppenheimer. One day, perhaps, the public will be treated to film or video versions of these two novels.

Kirkland’s critical acclaim was due not only to her skillful handling of a fascinating true story from an exciting historical time, but also to the way she employed certain images and motifs add depth to the telling of the tale. Hands play an important role in novel. At the age of ten, Harriet’s mother died saying, “I leave you in God’s hands” (21). Harriet returns to this comforting phrase several times. After learning that Solomon Page is alive, Harriet tells Potter she cannot go with him and will return to her grandmother in Kentucky, saying, “we’re in God’s hands” (217). Potter explodes and shouts that destiny is in a man’s own hands—ironic in view of the shocking action his hands had performed.

Harriet meets her first husband, Solomon Page, when he comes to her father Dr. Moore because of an injury to his hands. When he goes out each day to gamble, Page wears fresh, soft gloves to protect his hands. He tears up all his gloves in a fury of despair (41), but then begs Harriet to provide a pair because of his superstition that gloves will bring him luck. (45) Harriet describes his hands as restless and beautiful.

Robert Potter’s voice was his most outstanding and mesmerizing trait; however, deeply in love, Harriet comments innocently on his hands, “I love your hands. . . .you use them like someone on the stage—like an accomplished actor. And they’re nimble, skillful, like a surgeon’s hands, or a musician’s” (218). Ironically, he had used his hands as a surgeon’s hands when he “punished” the two men in North Carolina. Less dramatically, her terms actor and musician also fit Potter. As a politician and in his relation with Harriet, he was an actor, playing a part, untruthful. The characterization he accepts is musician. He tells her he had once been a musician and later plays the violin for her and at a political barbecue. The night before Harriet and Potter visit the Slidels, Harriet caresses and kisses his hands as he sleeps. “But,” she comments, “this was to be the only night in which I ever paid him the lover’s homage of reverence of the shape and worth of his hands” (276).

The next day Mrs. Slidel tells Harriet the story surrounding his castration of the two men in North Carolina.

Her true love Charles Ames has the skillful hands of a carpenter. Knowing how he restrains his love for her, never speaking of it, she says to him, “So much goodness in your hands, Charles,—as plain as the honesty in your eyes” (399).

Another motif appears in the numerous dreams which serve as predictors or clarifiers of events throughout the book. At the end of Chapter 3, Meeta appears to Harriet in a dream. Her disheveled appearance and the news of Howard’s killing suggest that Meeta may have been the one who killed Howard, stole his money, and burned his papers—releasing Page from ruin.

Mr. Merrick experiences three dreams before he finally checks the situation at his cabin and saves Harriet and her two children from starvation. The first dream showed three skeletons sitting at the table in the cabin; the second showed wild beasts at the door of the cabin; and the third presented a dark-eyed girl who came and embraced him thanking him for coming to help just as Harriet did when he finally arrived.

Harriet is able to deal with the runaway slave who appears at Mulberry Shore because the night before she had a nightmare in which he attacked her with an ax and cut off her hands. Because of the dream, she asks Mr. Wells to stay, and his appearance at the crucial moment, after she demands that the slave remove his hat, keeps the Negro from attacking Harriet as he later tells his killer he had planned.

Nature in an important motif. Big Tom, the panther, represents nature in its power and glory. In spite of her fear, Harriet takes the huge cat into her family by telling stories about him. In turn the magnificent creature is drawn to the little human family, purring by the front door, watching Harriet draw water or attempt to fish, and following them when they leave the wilderness. Taken less literally and more figuratively, Big Tom suggests Harriet’s acceptance of the world of nature—both the beautiful and the fearful.

Harriet compares the East Texas area where she lives with Potter to “the Garden of Eden,” and Potter teases Harriet about her strong feeling for nature when he says, “I am wedded to a naturalist” (254). Harriet and Potter spend an afternoon and a night on an island in Ferry Lake. As if it is their own Garden of Eden, they observe all of the wonders of their natural world and of their physical love from a treetop platform (310-311). Charles initiates Harriet into the universe of “Ina, the Mother Earth [who] understands, all, Brave Woman. Behold her. Listen to her. Take counsel from her. She has wisdom for you. You are her favored child” (398).

Kirkland makes an effective image of the game of chance as a symbol of the game of life. Solomon Page sees gambling as “indulgence in condensed living. There can be all the despair of loss, all the glory of gain in one evening. . . . The essence—without the tiresome deviations and delays that must go into everyday plodding toward good or bad fortune” (45).

Aware of the impact of Harriet’s story combined with Kirkland’s skillful writing, the author and her close friends were anxious for Lon Tinkle to publish his review of the book. When he wrote about the book in the summer of 1959, Tinkle was not very complimentary. He wrote: “If one fails to give this remarkable story one’s full emotional adhesion, this is perhaps because Mrs. Kirkland exploits so fully her gifts for artifice and design that unconsciously she endows her characters with these same traits, which seem to us excessively literary for early-day Texas.” Was Tinkle thinking of the two main characters? It is true that Robert Potter, in life and in the book, was full of “artifice and design,” and an associate justice of the Texas Supreme Court stated that Kirkland had given “the most valid interpretation to date on controversial Bob Potter.” Most of us would readily accept the artifice or design in Harriet’s own words explaining her decision to write her account:

It has seemed to me that my life was spared these many years in order that I might write this history and let the truth be known about much

that has been falsified and misrepresented. . . . My pen fails me when I attempt to paint those past scenes in their true colors. But this outline may give the reader some idea of what it was like to live in a wild country in those early days, and to lead such an eventful life as mine.

Fascination with early days and eventful lives continued in her next novel, one that Kirkland considered the final in a trilogy, but history was overwhelmed by Kirkland's other milieu—mystical romance.

## CHAPTER 6

### *THE EDGE OF DISREPUTE*

In *The Edge of Disrepute*, published in 1984, Kirkland presents Sarah Belle Locke, the third in her trilogy of strong women from the decade of the Texas Republic. New Orleans, important in the two earlier novels, is the home of Sarah Belle, an unconventional woman, who in the 1840s sets herself up in a comfortable house with loyal, free servants and a free Negro colleague to rescue men who have suffered a lost love. Because she had inflicted pain on two men who loved her, Sarah Belle became a special kind of “woman of the streets,” going out in a carriage to scout for desolate men to bring to her House of Recovery. In this way she meets many interesting characters with intriguing stories: Sutton Lahart, a musician whose lover cut his hand with a broken wine glass leaving him unable to play; Emile, whose octoroon mistress put a spell on him, with the help of Marie Laveau, to destroy his manhood and his sanity on the night of his wedding to another; and William Moellhausen, a young man beaten by his new wife’s father who then took his daughter away. One of the men she tries to rescue is John Sterling, destined to be her true love. With him she sails into an adventure with pirates and on to their ultimate destination—the mysterious ruins of Palenque.

#### **The March Toward Perfection**

Belief in the unconventional as witnessed in dreams, the influence of nature on humans, visions, the effect of past incarnations on present lives and the importance of

recording these events, the psychic basis of voodoo, and the value of freedom for all women and men in the march toward human perfection is the basis of Kirkland's tapestry of themes in *The Edge of Disrepute*.

Kirkland's belief in the power of dreams, suggested in *Divine Average* and *Love Is a Wild Assault*, appears with greater emphasis in *The Edge of Disrepute*. Her characters are often warned or guided by dreams. Sarah Belle's study of the adventures of John Stephens in Palenque and her recent discussion with Marie Laveau of the octoroon balls combine to create a nightmare vision. Sometimes discarded octoroon mistresses "truly discarded the body by poison, in the canal, or in other methods more ingenious" (89). In her nightmare Sarah Belle sees a beautiful bejeweled young woman walking the stone pathways of the Palenque ruins toward what she knows will be sacrifice at the altar and the well, but she is unable to call out her warning.

An act of nature, a violent storm, brings a baby squirrel to Emile. His love for the tiny creature helps bring about his mental cure. Another storm and the wild animals that crowd into the darkened temple threatening Sarah Belle propel Emile to act to save her from danger, restoring him to full mental health.

At the climax of the story, Sarah Belle has the vision that Marie Laveau had predicted. While she explores a temple, a tropical storm suddenly strikes. Dangerous wild creatures—a jaguar, monkeys, and snakes—"the symbol of the voodoo god himself" crowd into the darkened temple. Emile, who has been out of his mind and in her care for months, arrives like a hallucination or a spirit form to lift her carefully and take her safely out of the temple. Because Emile's slave Maury had been stuck down by a fallen tree when the storm hit, Emile awoke from his mental morass and rescued his rescuer Sarah Belle. At this point all of the main characters' problems are solved: now that his master is restored to health, Maury is entirely free and his wife Celeste is happy, Emile is "sound of mind again with adjustments to make, certainly 'manhood' intact after his performance in the Temple of Records (Marie in harmony with her conscience and her god)" (350-351). John and

Sarah Belle, secure in their mutual love, are judged ready to hear the story that the Mayan guide and priest Yapah has been saving for them.

The author believes that the past touches the present, that links exist between times and between souls reappearing from time to time in different human identities. Several characters have an affinity for past cultures or personalities. In his youth John Sterling became an explorer because of his admiration for Sir Walter Raleigh, who searched for Inca gold in El Dorado. In the wilderness Sterling was captured by Indians. He fell in love and married a blonde princess, but his joy turned to horror when he noticed that his beloved child had the odd ears of another man. In New Orleans Sarah Belle senses his grief over this lost love and invites him to her House of Recovery, which leads eventually to their rediscovery of each other and of love. Hudson, Sarah's educated free Negro coachman and assistant in her good works, also finds ancient cultures fascinating. When Sarah Belle wonders about the Egyptian style of Cypress Grove Cemetery in New Orleans, Hudson recalls how a relative of his had learned all he could about the Ancient Egyptians, dressed for Mardi Gras in Egyptian style, constructed an Egyptian tomb for his wife and himself, and after mummifying her body and visiting it over several months, was discovered like a marble Egyptian mummy himself, "the face divinely happy!" (57). Later Hudson and Sarah disguise themselves by wearing ancient Greek himatians as Zantea and Zeuxis (a Greek artist Elithe Hamilton had also mentioned in writing her high school class prophecy) to leave a party undetected. Later, in a letter, he refers to her by her Greek name, hinting that they may have known each other in another incarnation in the ancient world.

Other examples of reincarnation are often suggested in the novel. On the journey to Palenque, Sarah Belle gives a ring to Paloma, a girl she has just met. Their sudden strong friendship suggests a connection from a former life. Yapah, the Mayan priest, tells Sterling that Palenque is like "a home-that-was to him" (339). Perhaps he lived there in another life. When Yapah meets Sarah in the jungle near Palenque, he addresses her as Damascra

or “sacred lady,” suggestive of the sacrificial maiden in the myth he later tells about “The One Who Laughed.” Yapah tells of the young nun he loved who stayed true to her vows. His lasting devotion to his memory of her again suggests that they had loved in another life but accepted that their stations in this incarnation made their union impossible. When Yapah accompanies John and Sarah to a secluded mountain camp site and leaves them alone in that special spot to allow a kind of five-day matrimonial, he seems to look upon them as the reincarnation of the earlier lovers of the myth.

Kirkland feels that books as well as people have a destiny. Just before her departure for Mexico with John Sterling, Sarah Belle gives her written account of all the men she has tried to rescue from bitter love affairs, “My Conscience Book,” to her colleague Hudson saying she no longer wants to publish it. The book is kept in a “jeweled box” showing the author’s feeling for the importance of literature. Hudson says that he is not inclined to publish it either, but that “as a book it may have a life that I dare not deny. Some books are like that, created out of Destiny’s favored mixes and mortars” (232).

Kirkland’s novel shows the power of unconventional beliefs in a different psychic vein with Marie Laveau, the legendary voodoo queen. Sarah Belle comments on voodoo practitioners, “They are accomplished also in the manipulations of mental states and emotions” (36), and that their “spells lose their potency unless you accept their intended authenticity with a possessive fear” (37). To cast a spell a gris-gris is placed at the door of the target. The little red bag contains Cayenne pepper, powdered brick, yellow ochre, a chicken gizzard, and a buzzard feather. Marie Laveau’s interference in Emile and Suzanne’s love story leads him to an insane asylum. Marie’s feeling of guilt that she has used her powers to go against love, leaving Emile impotent and insane, motivates her to ask Sarah to go with John Sterling to Palenque and to take Emile with her. With her psychic powers, Marie can foresee Emile’s cure and Sarah and John’s deep love. Marie Laveau accurately predicts that if Sarah Belle takes Emile with her on the trip, she will see the voodoo god and thank Marie for telling her to take him along. To put love back on the

right course will relieve Marie of her guilt. At the climax of the novel, all Marie's predictions are fulfilled when Emile saves Sarah Belle.

The idea that good can come from unconventional sources echoes throughout the novel. The Indians in the jungle recognize that Emile is not in his right mind. The kindness they show is different from the reaction back in New Orleans where Emile was locked up in an asylum. Showing great reverence for such a conditional, they line up to touch his pet squirrel Jasper and make the sign of the cross. "They think that his spirit moves in and out to converse with the gods. To touch him or something belonging to him could bring longer life and more sons" (339).

Kirkland's novels embrace the idea that dreams, nature, visions, and unconventional beliefs such as voodoo assist man in his march toward perfection; however, more than any of her other novels, *The Edge of Disrepute*, adds an important goal on that march: freedom. Feminine lack of freedom prepares the way for a major point in the novel—that freedom is essential for mankind's attainment of perfection and that all men must be free for freedom to be real. Sarah Belle observes a father beating the man his daughter has chosen for her husband in front of the Negro church where they had come to be married without his consent and yelling at her, "sneaking off to a colored place, ridin' horseback like a shameless woman" (65). The woman is powerless before her father's control of her life.

The feminist view is expressed by John as well as Sarah Belle. In a discussion of the Salic law of succession for Spanish monarchs since 1713, based on a fifth century Germanic rule to deprive women of land or power, John points out that it is "barbaric" (237). John praises the present queen of Spain and the authorities who allowed her accession for their ability to see that a woman should have the right to rule.

Although Sarah Belle, a typical woman when it comes to stylish clothes and hair and to emotional attachment to her home, is not a crusader for women's rights, but she is an observer. On the brink of the trip that would bring Sarah Belle to the remains an ancient

civilization in the company of her true love, she experiences a typically feminine reaction—a pang of sadness at leaving her home—her nest. She visits “every room and the cherished possessions she had gathered around her,” and her servants break down in tears at her departure as Sarah feels the “tightness in her throat that would make a shambles of speech” (233). On the other hand, Sarah Belle is usually not typically female as her chosen mission, *The House of Recovery*, demonstrates. She “takes umbrage” at small things, such as, the fact that ladies in New Orleans have to pick up their mail at the less accessible location where foreign language letters are received instead of at the main post office. She feels that she had been “put aside . . . shuttled into my feminine niche” (58).

Similarly, emancipation from feminine fashion is a frequent desire of Kirkland’s characters. As she and Celeste prepare for their jungle trip, Sarah Belle suggests that they eliminate “corsets, long drawers and stacks of petticoats” (226) in favor of loose trousers under removable skirts.

Sarah Belle feels embarrassed when she is carried in a hamaca by Indians hardly taller than she and “so thin.” Her womanly self-respect causes her to object: “I don’t like being carried in this manner. It’s degrading when I am able to walk and to ride a horse” (329).

When Marie Laveau says to Sarah Belle, “Such as you are free, I am part-free,” Sarah Belle corrects the mulatto, saying, “I’m a woman, Marie. I’m a part-free too” (87). Then she continues, and her words connect the idea of the lack of feminine freedom with the lack of freedom even for white males because of social conventions:

And the free themselves are not free. They wear the bonds of their order.

They move within the locked-in strata of their caste. In the dueling code alone, one of the most elite and cherished young men of French Creole family, with the purest of credentials within the Colonial aristocracy, must fight a duel on the slightest offense to his honor—whether or not he has a personal honor worth defending. (87)

The question of how one achieves freedom in spite of the strictures of society is not easy to answer.

The most significant addition to Kirkland's major theme of man's struggle toward perfection in this novel is freedom. The final chapter in the novel contains a short story, written decades earlier, that had never been accepted on its own for publication. When her agent refused to offer "The One Who Laughed" to be published because of its "political significance," Kirkland wrote to *Harper's* in May of 1947, assuring them that "no political significance was intended. I suppose, however, when anyone on the University of Texas staff uses the word 'freedom' these days, it is politically significant." She was referring to the political climate at the University of Texas in the late forties. The idea for her story, she pointed out, "originated out of an experience at the Palenque ruins when I made a trip there for the University's Latin-American Institute in 1941 and so antedates the suppression-movement in these parts." Whatever actually happened at the ruins in 1941 affected Kirkland's writing for life.

Early in the novel John Sterling, an archaeological explorer, explains his desire to answer his question: "Was the accumulated wisdom of the times being abused and perverted?" (21, 331) bringing about the end of the ancient Palenque civilization. (This question is also a central theme in Kirkland's novel of psychic pre-history, *On the Trellis of Memory*.) Even before she makes the journey to Palenque, Sarah Belle wonders if it is in ruins "because a civilization had built these fabled kingdoms with slave labor, hierarchies of class distinction that invited decadence?" She thinks of her own world "with its slave-based economy" and wonders, "What payment would be required of it at the toll-gates of Destiny?" (179). Her friend Hudson encourages her to go with her new love, saying, "[Y]ou, too, deserve freedom—from your self-enslavement" (233). He recognizes that her work to save men who have lost love is an enslavement or a penance she has placed on herself.

When John and Sarah Belle arrive in Palenque, they “marry” in an unconventional five-day seclusion from the rest of their party. Upon their return, Sarah Belle receives a letter from her estranged husband that releases her from their marriage in which he wrote “we accepted the mold of conformity to decadence” (361). He calls their marriage decadent because he knew that Sarah Belle did not love him, but believed her first love was dead and respected her parents’ desire that she wed a suitable man. Defender Locke, now known as “Kash-tash-ha, Choctaw,” advises his former wife to “Assert your freedom, Woman of the Past” (361). Sarah Belle also receives a message and gift from her friend Hudson Recoire—a beautiful lyre on which she plays accompaniment for her love song that declares that love is free of time and space:

Ah, let me feel the reach of love

. . .

And know the very thought of love

Can breach the walls of time and space

And deify the human race. (365)

Not long before Yapah tells the myth of “The One Who Laughed,” John is troubled by a dream that he was “on the edge of a precipice and it was crumbling under me” (361), a situation faced by the hero in the myth who was saved from the precipice by the Virgin of the Well. At their arrival, Yapah reports that “the stars are in harmony” for John and Sarah Belle’s visit to Palenque. He tells Sarah Belle and John the myth because after seeing the laughing face carved in the temple, she asked, “Why among so many did only one face laugh?” (366).

Yapah’s myth explicates the theme of freedom. In a society made up of wise men/priests and slaves, there is no freedom. One priest’s son is different—the product of forbidden love between the wise man and a slave girl. Reflecting the message of Kirkland’s first novel *Divine Average*, the son is the blending of the best in the priest and the slave, representing nature’s struggle toward perfection. The priest’s son is given

freedom for one year, and at this point, his laughter represents joy in his freedom. He learns to love nature, to sing, to work for the pleasure of doing the job, to create great art, to catch and cook fish. The slaves think his love of observing nature is laziness, they ignore his singing and look to their overseers to determine whether the young man's art is good or not. They recoil in horror that he has dared to eat fish, a food for the gods only. Although she saves him from jumping or falling over the precipice, when he falls in love with the virgin who is intended to be a sacrifice to the gods, she drugs him and the priests hide her. Finally when the young man preaches that there is only one God, he is declared mad and placed in a cage. His father frees him, and before he and the girl disappear, he carves an image of himself laughing and two inscriptions. At this point, his laughter no longer represents the joy of freedom.

The great Palenque civilization was destroyed because the wisdom of the young man was ignored when The One Who Laughed in his joy of physical and intellectual freedom was caged and slavery continued. Released from his cage, he carved an image of himself: "mouth wide open, the head thrown back—it could have been a clown or a madman, maybe under torture, wildly grotesque" (352), a man overwhelmed by this knowledge:

No man is wholly free so long as any man is a slave.

Mind caged in ignorance will destroy the race. (377)

Freedom emerges as an essential in Kirkland's overarching theme of the human march toward perfection.

### **Organization**

After the success of her first novel, Kirkland continued writing a novel based on the writings of Hervey Adams. Kirkland's interest in Adams has a long history. As far back as November of 1950 she wrote her mother about a talk she had given on the Adams book "in the little hall in the Old General Cos home to a crowd of teachers, professors, business men, doctors, lawyers, etc., all with a sincere and active interest in Texas history."

Kirkland was pleased by their enthusiastic reception: “They all clamored for a printing of the diary and a book on Adams’s life . . . a council member of the State Historical Association said . . . too good for the *Southwestern Quarterly*— that it should have more and bigger play.” In July of the following year she wrote her son Jim, “I expect to start a book on THE TEXAS ADAMS before awfully long.”

Adams appeared in *Divine Average* and in *Love Is a Wild Assault*. Adams, an interesting frontier character who kept records of his adventures, was descended from the same family that produced two American presidents. He came to Texas in 1837, went with Somervell to Mexico in 1942-43, and fought with Sibley’s Brigade for the Confederacy. Kirkland dedicated the book “to my Cousin Ophelia Gilmore, the Grand-daughter of Hervey A. Adams.” Gilmore had collected and shared her grandfather’s papers with Kirkland. The novel based on his life was called *Unspoken Love* because as a young man he had waited too long to tell the girl he loved of his love, and he lost her.

In her novel of Adams’s life, Kirkland created Sarah Belle, who eventually took over and became the heroine of her novel called *The Edge of Disrepute*. On a piece of typing paper stuck into the pages of the Adams manuscript, Kirkland had typed “Unspoken Love in two parts I. The Flute Song of a Nomad II. A Woman’s Conscience Book.” Other notes indicate that Kirkland had intended to have chapters from “My Conscience Book” create the second part of the novel. Each chapter was to tell of one of Sarah Belle’s rescues.<sup>4</sup>

In the final version of the novel a few of these titles are easily recognized. “Bloody Fingers,” an early version of the story of the musician Sutton Lahart’s wounded hand, eventually appeared in the published novel. “The Buggy Whip,” would be the story of William Moellhausen, who was beaten by his wife’s father, but actually “The Buggy Whip” and “Stillborn” were combined—the situation from the first and the Moellhausen name from the second. “The Ugly Prince” is an evil merchant, perhaps an early version of Justin Lahart, the merchant prince and polished gentleman. “Self-Sale” suggests the story

of Suzanne's selling herself into slavery to be present as the servant of her lover Emile's bride on the wedding night, but the original chapter was a different tale. The title "Web of Passion" is used in the final version by John Sterling for his written account of his love of Guafano and her betrayal.

Similarities between *Unspoken Love* and *The Edge of Disrepute* disclose their relationship as original and final versions of the novel. Page 22 of the manuscript of *Unspoken Love* contains the first two paragraphs of *The Edge of Disrepute*. In the published novel, Hervey Adams is replaced by John Sterling, and Adams appears only as a correspondent from the wilderness of Texas where Sarah Belle sought to learn of her husband Defender Locke's fate. However, in the original manuscript Adams plays a flute when Sarah Belle rescues him from his depression of lost love, but in the completed novel, Sterling plays a jade whistle from the mysterious Orinoco River region. Sarah Belle tells Adams in the original and Sterling in the final version of her love for Orlando and her marriage to Defender Locke and the unhappy results. Adams accepts her memoir, "My Conscience Book," in *Unspoken Love*, but in the same scene in *The Edge of Disrepute* when she tries to give her manuscript to John Sterling, he refuses it.

In 1962 Barker at Doubleday suggested that their Civil War expert check the Hervey Adams manuscripts for accuracy. In the same letter he commented on Kirkland's decision to drop the Adams novel in favor of publishing his letters and her recently completed play based on his adventures, *Hear the Flute*. However, the Adams novel was not really abandoned. Reworked, it became Sarah Belle's novel and was published twenty years later, in 1984.

### **The Problem of Race**

The author carefully explains in the introduction to *The Edge of Disrepute* the levels of racial social acceptance—relative freedom. Three races, in various degrees of combination, created a variety of stations in life. At the bottom of the social strata, the African might be a slave builder of levees, a free manual labor wage-earner, or an educated,

talented, wealthy *gens le couleur libres*. At the top of the heap, stood the Latin Creole, or descendant of colonial stock, and below him the French or Spanish immigrant. In between, the American had begun to make a place for himself since General Jackson saved New Orleans from the British in 1812. Between 1836 and 1852, Americans, along with German and Irish immigrants formed an ethnic third of the city.

The author's characters are drawn from each layer of this ethnic mix. Because marriage is not legal between a slave and a freeborn, there are two more victims of Emile's tragedy. Maury, his slave, is sent to the insane asylum with his master Emile, and Celeste, the free Negro woman he had hoped to marry when his master gave him his freedom after his marriage, is left alone and hopeless (153).

Marie Laveau, a free octoroon, works as a ladies' hairdresser. Hudson Recoire represents the polished *gens le couleur libres*. Justin Lahart, the successful merchant, and his talented brother Sutton spring from an old established French family. John Sterling and Sarah Belle Locke each have arrived recently from the United States.

As in *Divine Average*, various characters present the idea of the blending of the races as the ultimate answer to racial prejudice. The blurring of racial identity is emphasized in the mulatto (half black), the quadroon (one-fourth black) and the octoroon (one-eighth black). When Sarah Belle brings up the problem of the spell that has been cast on him, Sutton Lahart calls her "the so-white witch" (34). She interprets this as his suspicion that she is really a mulatto, passing for white. Later Sarah Belle discovers that she is the double of Suzanne, the octoroon mistress of another of her rescued men, Emile. Because of his unstable mental state, Sarah fears that if he thinks she is his mistress, it will cause him greater anguish. To avoid the possibility, since Suzanne looked white and dressed in the latest fashion, dark-haired Sarah begins to dress as an octoroon in bright colors, darker make-up, and a head covering, blurring the idea of race.

Defender Locke leaves his wife Sarah Belle forever, and in another example of the blending of the races, he adopts the name and ways of an Indian tribe and finds peace with a Choctaw wife.

### History

Facing pirates in the Gulf of Mexico, John Sterling is “thankful that being a resident of New Jersey, his collection of Colt Paterson revolvers, manufactured at the arms company in Paterson, had furnished him with a choice of weapons for this expedition. He selected three pistols and two carbines, all with loading levers and five chambers in the cylinder” (241). These newly developed firearms, that had played an important part in Kirkland’s *Divine Average*, again add historic authenticity to the story.

The historical character Hervey Adams, whose journals and letters often served Kirkland as sources, writes a letter to Sarah Belle placing her estranged husband, Defender Locke, a man with a blue eye and a brown eye, in the Republic of Texas in the winter of 1842-43. Adams was with two groups of starving Texans returning from a failed excursion into Mexico under General Somervell. When someone in the other group “got a scrawny deer,” Adams went to beg for a share for his group. Reduced almost to madness with hunger, Adams was shocked when one of the men threw the deer head at his feet. Before rushing off to share this prize with his comrades, he noticed the man’s eyes—“One eye was brown and fierce with hunger and anger—the other was blue and seemed to hold a guarded kindness” (176).

In Hervey Adams’s actual journal of the Somervell Expedition, he wrote of a similar event on December 31, 1842. Adams recorded that two groups of men were returning from their failed invasion of Mexico. While his group was trying to appease their hunger by eating rawhide, the other group was more fortunate:

Two men of their party had been out all day on the hunt and came in just as our fire was burned to coals with a fine deer hung on a pole. I was delegated to beg them for a portion for ourselves. After trying a long time

and using every argument one of the men cut off the head with a little of the neck, skin and all and threw it to me. I took it with many thanks. We rolled it into the coals, hide, hair and all, just as it was and it was the sweetest morsel that five men ever tasted. This was all we had to eat for three days. (76).

Kirkland's version of this incident eliminates Adams's dangling participle and contains even more vivid descriptions of the men's hunger. Kirkland's Adams describes one starving man "sucking on the heart of the kill" (176). But all she added to the historical account was the blue eye and the brown eye of the man who gave Adams the deer head—to identify him as Defender Locke, Sarah Belle's husband.

Adams is not the only historical character that influences the story. When they first meet, John and Sarah Belle discover that they have both enjoyed John L. Stephens's books, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán*, published in 1841, and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, published in 1843. As she enters the jungle, Sarah Belle remembers Stephens's account of his regret after killing a large ape (331-332). John and Sarah Belle also discuss other early archaeologists—Dupaix, who visited the ruins about 1825 and Captain Antonio Del Rio, who was sent there by the Guatemalan government in 1787 (20).

### **Folklore**

The story is colored not only by historical incidents and characters but also by characters patterned after tall tales from the frontier, New Orleans folklore concerning the highly romanticized octoroon balls, as well as the already discussed voodoo in New Orleans and the Mayan myth that embodies the theme of the novel so well.

Resembling a character from a tall tale, George Fisher, Keeper of Spanish Records, State Translator, and colorful Texan, helps William Moellhausen search for Defender Locke. Questioning Moellhausen in his lawyerly way, Fisher makes deductions about the whereabouts of Locke that are quite accurate. His success is not based on psychic powers

but on knowledge of men who leave civilization for the frontier. Unable to undertake the search himself, he introduces Moellhausen to José de Claración (183-187). On the trail of Locke, Claración enlists the aid of another folkloric character, an interpreter—Shumanhaya, or Many Tongues—before searching among the Indians for the man, who “Like Sam Houston, betrayed by his wife . . . lost himself among the Cherokees” (198). He discovers that Locke was with the Somervell Expedition before finally tracking him down. Like the hero Houston, Locke finds peace with the Indians, in his case the Choctaws not the Cherokees (208).

The unique reservoir of traditional New Orleans embellishes the story. Beautiful young octoroon and quadroon girls, “reared in strictest chastity, as educated and preserved in innocence as their convent-bred counterparts” (88), were presented at special balls attended by the rich sons of white New Orleans. The protector, selected at the ball, continued to provide for his mistress and any children they had even after he ceased visiting the home he provided for her to marry a “wife of appropriate status” (88). Suzanne and Emile began as such a couple, but she used voodoo to make him useless to his bride.

Kirkland’s skillful use of history and folklore again served her well in the creation of *The Edge of Disrepute*.

### **Critical Response**

The final chapter of *The Edge of Disrepute* has a critical history of its own. Years before she found a perfect use for “The One Who Laughed,” Kirkland sent the manuscript to Dobie, telling him that her agent Jeanne Hale had returned it as “a charming story and one that would be almost impossible to sell” for two reasons: “having someone else tell the story is one strike against it” and the other strike was “the allegory or political significance in the tale.” Dobie replied that concerning the old guide’s tale, “Your agent has the timidity and lack of imagination common to most of the editors with whom she deals. If prejudices and ignorances go on thriving in this country, it may become a penitentiary offense to utter

aloud or print the word freedom, except in connection with capitalistic enterprise.” Furthermore, he advised, “Instead of characterizing your own story, let it be told without comment.” Her mentor cautioned her against wordiness: “Several of your sentence transcriptions supposedly from the old guide’s tale, seem to me too long and strung out. You want a certain antiquity, suggested rather than exploited, in his language; but I do not think that elongated sentences give it.” In conclusion, he wrote that the story interested him because it has “originality as well as an idea and moves to an inevitable ‘end.’” He suggested she try some magazine, such as *Harper’s*. She did send her story to *Harper’s* in 1947, but they declined to publish it. The story was finally published thirty-seven years later in *The Edge of Disrepute*.

For years the entire novel *The Edge of Disrepute* was turned down by publishers, and Evelyn Oppenheimer, her agent, asked Kirkland to consider rewriting:

Heaven knows the material is there if it were just presented in a narrative style and flow (as you have done so well before) without so many interruptions of excess adornments which subtract rather than enhance. To be blunt, it needs a lot of cutting. You have put in everything in your arsenal, and everything is too much.

Today’s reader can and does go for the exotic and esoteric, but not when that gets in the way of the story.

Kirkland apparently did rewrite, but following publication review after review announced the appearance of Kirkland’s third novel, briefly identified the time period, heroine, and locations only to go off into more arresting descriptions and evaluations of Kirkland’s first two novels. In *Texas Humanist*, Lou Rodenberger objected to Kirkland’s “attempts to incorporate philosophical commentary [so that] the novel becomes a vehicle weighted down by complicated plot.” Furthermore, the author’s “lavender-tinted prose distracts,” complained the reviewer. “Intriguing as many characters and episodes are, so much baggage strains the novel’s credulity.” Another reviewer, Jane Rushing of the *Dallas*

*Morning News*, dismissed the romantic couple Sarah Belle and John as “a clear case of nineteenth century elective affinity.”

One discerning reviewer, Catherine Randolph, found something to praise:

Throughout the New Orleans chapters, descriptions and dialogue reflect the formal, elaborate, sometimes stilted speech characteristics of that time and place: the extravagant compliments paid to ladies, the affected manners, the exaggerated expressions of sentiment. But when Sarah Belle and John cut their New Orleans ties and go to the ruins at Palenque, the dialogue becomes simple, straightforward and sincere. . . . The dramatic transition is symbolic of their new-found freedom.

Oppenheimer gave *The Edge of Disrepute* an award for the Best Book of the Year 1984 for historical romance. However, Ernestine Sewell kindly suggests that *The Edge of Disrepute* received little critical attention on its own because it was the final novel of a trilogy. Compared to her other books, this novel is an adolescent romantic fantasy. The author provides the heroine with youth, beauty, and musical talent to make strong men—whether they are French Creole, American, or Spanish Carlist—swoon, two fortunes at her disposal, a jewel of a house, loyal servants, adoring men, soul-mate sisterly female companions, intrigue, danger from pirates in the Gulf of Mexico, travel to Mayan temples, and opportunities for fascinating costumes, jewelry, and coiffeurs. As the final chapter the author includes with “One Who Laughed,” the short story she had sent thirty-five years earlier to Pearl S. Buck for comment. Buck diplomatically praised it and declared that it was “ahead of its time and not yet commercially viable” (Porterfield “Kirkland Dies at 84”).

Readers who enjoyed Kirkland’s first two historical novels were given a taste of Kirkland’s way with history in *The Edge of Disrepute*. This novel also pleased those who responded to her mystical inclinations, which were so richly displayed in *On the Trellis of Memory*, a psychic novel written with Jenny Lind Porter and published in 1971.

## CHAPTER 7

### *ON THE TRELLIS OF MEMORY*

#### Unique Origin

Well-respected for her historical research, Elithe Hamilton Kirkland also researched numerology and harmonic convergence and clipped articles about arcane subjects: ghosts, voodoo, and Shirley MacLaine on reincarnation. Kirkland described herself as a “futurist.” During the ceremony when Kirkland’s papers were presented to the Southwestern Writers Collection, Billy Porterfield explained that Kirkland had “eidetic image” or “second sight.” She was a member of the national non-denominational Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship of Laymen and Clergymen. Elements of parapsychology, metapsychology, mysticism, and archaeological fiction found in her curious 1971 novel *On the Trellis of Memory* are the result of experiments in psychic research undertaken by Kirkland and a friend.

Jenny Lind Porter, once named Texas Poet Laureate, was introduced to Elithe Hamilton Kirkland in 1962 by a “mutual friend,” probably Ruth Goddard, a friend from Kirkland’s Radio House days, co-author with J. Frank Dobie of *The Seven Mustangs*, a book about the creation of the fountain at the University of Texas. As Kirkland and Porter explain in the first chapter of the book they wrote together, they soon joined forces to create *On the Trellis of Memory*.

In Chapter 1, the authors make it clear that the book is the result of eight years of experiments in meditation, begun when they met in 1962. Calling themselves “Listeners”

and “Recorders,” they present the book as the result of “memory projection and psychic research into man’s ancient past” (15), achieved without “LSD or drugs of any kind” although they do admit “a little depth hypnosis work with Dr. Kirkland at the start” (17).

Giving as the reasons for their success in receiving the mystical tales that they merely recorded, “the two who listened” list that they had the skills of writers, that they were not concerned with material things, that they were basically happy people, and they shared a belief in a Divine Creator without specific creed or dogma. Their friendship provided for what they describe as the “blending of two minds into a spacious one-mind” (16). In a 1999 letter to the author of this thesis, Jenny Lind Porter Scott wrote that their experience was not like channeling:

[Channeling] would suggest to most persons the reception of material in a semi-trance where some unseen entity is the source. We never worked in a trance but sat down in a normal state and could even get up and drink a cup of coffee without interrupting the work. We had no “control” nor “spirit guide.” I thought of the method as an extension of consciousness and our work as a partial insight into the wondrous powers of the human mind.

In their break-through experience, their combined powers of ESP allowed them to observe each other’s faces as they changed to many of the faces they had possessed in the past. They were “dual sensitives or paired psychics” (17). Conjuring up rose-colored auras for themselves and powerful currents of wind that swished up the chimney as well as sneezing fits (shared once by the cat) and laughter, the “two who listened” (41) received the novel and simply recorded what they received. Through them funneled four layers of existence of a single entity—Icanthe, Feather, Lutea, and Diela.

### **The Story**

Because it is less widely read, a brief survey of the novel will clarify this discussion. In Chapter 2, Icanthe begins her first person memoir following a brief third-person account of her birth as this identity. As princess destined to rule Aminosa-land, she

is forbidden to marry or have children. When she falls in love with Ri and marries him, evil—a murder and an attack on Ri by the tame palace lions—is unleashed.

In Chapter 3, the story of Feather (also called Aminosatea), a previous incarnation of Icanthe, is told as Icanthe reads her own earlier memoir, *The Book of the Amethyst*. She learns that her father had been her husband, Lord Tio, in another lifetime.

Still reading this book in Chapter 4, Icanthe learns of her even earlier incarnation as Lutea, who married Lutio, another incarnation of her present father. During this time period, a kind of Golden Age, these perfect soul-mates die in a natural disaster that destroys much of their homeland Mu, revered as an ancient ruin in Icanthe's own lifetime.

The narrative returns to Icanthe's time for Chapter 5 through the remainder of the novel. Icanthe agrees to accept her father's plan, reject Ri, and become the ruler of Aminosa-land. By fulfilling her destiny, working in harmony with her kindred soul, now her father, Icanthe restores peace.

Here the authors break in to suggest that the ancient civilization they are recording may have been a precursor of the highly developed Yucatan civilization and that this could have implications for “the Third Millennium since Jesus” (172).

Jia-lil, a minor character, gives Icanthe a scroll that tells of Icanthe's past life as Diela, the Harp Mother. Diela came with her father, the Dove, from the planet Esdor to Earth. Isi-u, her mother, refused to accompany them to earth. Instead, she arrived later, and in another colony killed a man who refused “to pay fleshly tribute to her beauty” (235). As a kind of Pandora, Isi-u brings evil to earth. Murder is followed by pride and slavery. She becomes proud when she submits to a brain operation that increases her powers, and she causes three dwarfs to become her slaves.

Icanthe conjures up Efren, a great dramatist from another age who is now Ri, Icanthe's rejected lover. The two discuss creativity, a subject with great attraction for the novelist and poet that are listening and recording. Defining creativity as “those out-of-time sequences when one is raised in consciousness and records what he receives” (243), Efren

lists three basic requirements, conspicuously present in Kirkland and Porter, the two authors: the ability to work with others; faith in the power of recall from other lifetimes; and willingness to tap every level—dreams, subconscious, guides from the astral plane, supersensory experience, present life, personal inner record, and the celestial library. The celestial library is a kind of world-wide web of the cosmos and all time. In this mystical world, those who are worthy, receive a number that allows them access to all elevated works stored in this great computer.

Declaring that art is done “in the name of God” and not for the glory of the artist, Efren asserts that art is not a possession of the artist any more that the child is a possession of the parent. Furthermore, he says “man’s alignment with Nature” is important for his soul’s safety and for creative evolution. But most important is the reiterated conviction that a great artist listens “as the sound of our immortal Design washes against the shell that contains us for a while” (274). “All we consider tragic,” Efren concludes, “emanates from a dim vision of our personal design” (275).

In the final chapter, as Icanthe plans to go to Quetal (perhaps suggested by the Central American bird, the quetzal) to recreate the civilization brought from the planet Esdor that was almost lost in the destruction of her country of Mu. The genius child Da-stlet-lan speaks of the World Family at peace. Icanthe’s father and companion soul speaks of the future Magna Man, man evolved to his highest potential aided by Icanthe’s projection of beautiful and good thoughts down the ages.

Icanthe reviews her legacy—the memoirs she has collected which will add to the clear vision of the design for souls in many lifetimes. Icanthe remembers herself as a child wondering what she, with her soft hands, could do on a great sailing ship. She is satisfied with the mind ships she has sent into the future but wishes that if any listener should hear her story, the record should begin with Icanthe as a child wishing to journey on a sailing ship and end with her sending out her beautiful thoughts, like “mind-ships,” five hundred, then five thousand years into the future.

## Themes

The authors have a metaphysical agenda, and the plot carries their message forward: If “All Perishes Save the Ascendant Soul;” then, not only can you take it with you, you must. “It” is a record of your words and deeds in each life. “I work at my design” (142), Icanthe says to her enraged rejected lover Ri. The rediscovery of this self in each cycle is the proper task of a worthy individual.

The writer is especially important to this spiritual civilization. Icanthe’s astral teacher makes three promises: Her work, writing history to be stored in the temple, is more divine than kingship. Her voice in “astral song” will be a revelation on birth and death. The temple of light will rise from the sea and “on the trellis of memory, the scarlet flowers will open” (67).

Along the way, the authors disseminate various utopian ideas. The civilization they witness contains elements of science fiction. Characters can project themselves into another location (like the crew of the *Enterprise*), or they ride in airships (not airplanes). They can levitate. Dreams are recorded for viewing on a big-screen TV and analysis (Big Brother is watching). Life is viewed as two parts; the mortal represented by a line and the immortal represented by a circle (similar to the elements— 1 and 0— of computer language). Language, vital to recording each soul’s journey, reverts to a “core language,” as the two authors record the story, and they also record pages and pages of the vocabulary of this ancient source of all languages.

Other ideas about how to achieve perfection, scattered throughout the novel, reveal a civilization that has been brought from another planet with designs for the future. Marriage is not only for life, but for many lifetimes, and marriage partners are chosen by a third party who matches their auras. Death, a transition, should be experienced fully, without any dulling of the senses. Health and youth can be maintained by surrounding the individual with proper sounds, which would exclude harsh speech; by silence; or by full immersion in one’s intuition. Why they sometimes freeze bodies of those who are ill when

everyone is reborn anyway is not answered. Ri achieves the highest level of instruction—an astral teacher—when he suggests that human abuse of nature can lead to destruction by earthquake or other acts of nature. However, the destruction of Mu is not linked to any ecological banditry by the citizens or rulers of that land.

Because they understand that the evolution of Magna Man as the purpose of human existence, I canthe and her people pray, “O miracle at work in me, / Speak to me of perfection and purpose” (275), and they describe Magna Man, the perfected goal of all incarnations of all souls:

Magna Man is the proper term for the cosmi-oriented man of the future. He will represent a long history of core entity evolution (292). . . . Magna Man will be better prepared than all men before him to penetrate the veils of suspicion, jealousy, hostility, anger, and fear. . . . Magna Man the Judge will empty the courts and prisons by untangling the webs of karma which we ourselves have spun. Magna Man the ruler, politician, and diplomat will be too wise to involve whole nations in war and disputes simply to appease his own ancient sense of injury. (295)

*On the Trellis of Memory*, like any novel, has a story to tell, but what happens to various characters is not as important as the Aminosa-land framework of belief. “All Perishes Save the Immortal Soul” is written on their temple. In spite of the complexity of core characters who have several different personal identities and relationships to other characters who also have many identities in different times,<sup>5</sup> the authors, or as they prefer, the listeners/recorders manage to shine a light on a spiritual utopia.

### **Publishing Difficulties**

Agent, publisher, and even the authors themselves disagreed about publishing the novel. In March 1967, Evelyn Oppenheimer, Kirkland’s agent, wrote yet another warning not to publish *On the Trellis of Memory*: “My own feeling is one of deep anxiety about it and for the future of your literary career which I have always firmly believed has no limit.”

Lee Barker at Doubleday wrote at that same time: "I am very much interested in the whole ESP field and I was hoping this would be a book we could publish with some success. Actually it comes into the category of fantasy. . . a difficult category to handle." In her letter to Oppenheimer, Kirkland called Barker's letter "strange," "blunt," and said that he accused her of misrepresentation when he referred to the book, "which you apparently wrote with Jenny Lind Porter." In October 1969, Barker again wrote to Oppenheimer, that Doubleday still was not interested in *On the Trellis of Memory* because "it is a fantasy."

Unadmired by agent or publisher, this manuscript was the result of Porter and Kirkland's admiration of each other and their enjoyment of their collaboration in psychic research. Early in their acquaintance, Porter, who taught five hundred students a year and needed good material, proposed in a letter to Doubleday on Southwest Texas State Teachers College letterhead, that they bring out in an inexpensive paperback a book which could be called "*Two Texas Historical Novels*, by Elithe Hamilton Kirkland. This would combine *Divine Average* and *Love Is a Wild Assault*, two of the finest historical novels ever written about out country." She offered to "add an introduction covering the author's life and the enduring quality of her work, plus some comments on the historical novel in America and in our own state, Texas."

Kirkland's admiration of Porter is evident in her 1986 letter to her friends Barbara and Dr. Dossey:

Jenny Lind was brought into my life design in [a] circuitous manner . . . She was twenty years younger than I, much more the academician and scholar than I, gifted in languages, gifted in the shifting of levels of consciousness without being aware of [her power] (she had not explored or studied in the metaphysical areas); she was beautiful, unmarried, a marvelous teacher and definitely ivory-towerish.

But rocky times were ahead for the two authors following completion of their novel and before its publication in 1971. While caring for her ailing mother in Coleman, Kirkland went to Abilene to speak with a publisher about *On the Trellis of Memory*. She wrote to her husband to tell “Jenny Lind as much as you like on this.” There are hints of some unpleasantness between the two authors. Kirkland continued in her letter, “I think [Jenny Lind] is reluctant to see me,” and she wrote that she wanted Dr. Kirkland with her whenever they meet as a kind of protection. Kirkland had a feeling of apprehension: “I think when JL comes out of this, ‘recovers from the sickness’ is a better phrase, we can maintain a balance in our ‘authorship’ but as my dreams pointed out: things will never be the same.”

In her 1999 letter to the author of this thesis, Mrs. Scott explained that she and Kirkland disagreed about what should be included in the published book. She wrote:

My idea was that we should excerpt the inspirational passages and prayers from the larger MS, and combine them in one powerful small book, universal in appeal and independent of belief systems. We might publish the work in its entirety later on.

However, Kirkland and her husband wanted to print everything they had received, and her co-author remembered “that’s the way it ended up—though we didn’t fall out over it.” Although the relationship was strained for a time, it seems that the rift was healed. When Porter married Lawrence Evans Scott in 1981, Kirkland addressed her as “Lutea,” the heroine of their novel in her happiest married incarnation.

In a letter to the Dosseys, Kirkland wrote that she had found an unopened box of twenty copies of *On the Trellis of Memory* after telling people for years that no copies were available. The discovery caused her to reminisce about the origins and difficulties surrounding the creation of this book:

*Trellis* was not something I sought—it happened to me and I pursued it stubbornly against blunt and persistent protests of my editor at

Doubleday and my agent in Dallas. Doubleday wanted me to do another heavy novel to follow *Love Is a Wild Assault*—it was on the Mayan civilization and I had already made a beginning which they refused to consider unless I presented it as fantasy. Doubleday had had a bitter experience with publishing *The Search for Bridey Murphy* with damaging flak from both the press and certain religious faction admitting that you believe in reincarnation was like saying you belonged to the communist party during that period. . . . As I look back on it now, it seems that [Jenny Lind and I] came together under a specific Directing Source and that we had been programmed for the assignment we did together; it lasted for eight years and it was described in Chapter One in the book. It was a timeless sort of experience and without Dr. Kirkland's support and encouragement and understanding it could not have continued. For the practical (journalist) part of myself, it was sometimes too far out, but it was that very objective part of my nature that could monitor Jenny Lind's multi-dimensional states of consciousness.

Kirkland was anxious to continue her research into consciousness which had revealed so much of the philosophy of reincarnation and the search for perfection in the soul's destiny that are the core of *On the Trellis of Memory*. The conclusion of her letter to these interested friends was that she had more to say on these subjects: "I have much material left over from the experience that was not included in the book. Perhaps it is some of that material that has 'come of age.'"

Now that we have looked at Kirkland's major literary output, her four novels, we must review the many other types of literature she created--an impressive body of work.

## CHAPTER 8

### KIRKLAND'S OTHER WRITINGS

Besides her early newspaper articles and radio scripts, her four published novels—*Divine Average* (1952), *Love Is a Wild Assault* (1959), *The Edge of Disrepute* (1984), and *On the Trellis of Memory* (1971)—and an unpublished work on J. Frank Dobie, *Heather, for Love* (1987), that have been discussed, Kirkland published two short stories, “The Disappearance of Widow Ellen” (1982) and “Leet’s Christmas” (1985). She worked for many years on *The Middlebuster*, an unfinished novel, and she completed four musicals—*The Devil’s Backbone* (1969), *Hear the Flute* (1973), *Mr. Magnet* (1979), and *Precious Memories* (1986)—two television scripts, “Seminole Bill’s Lost Mine” (1953) and “Shakespearean Youth Fantasy” (1964), and scores of song lyrics and poems.

#### Short Story

##### “The Disappearance of Widow Ellen”

“The Disappearance of Widow Ellen” has a long history. In October 1950, Kirkland wrote her mother, “I enjoyed rewriting the Widow Ellen story.” In 1983 it was finally published in an anthology of writing by Texas women called *As Good As Her Word*.

Reviewer Jan Reid classified “The Disappearance of Widow Ellen” as one of the “three gems” in the collection edited by Lou Halsell Rodenberger for Shearer, Kirkland’s publisher. Reid asserted that Kirkland’s writing “overcomes brittle orthodoxy of form with

a genuine reverence for the land” and that “Kirkland somehow makes a believable character out of a retired ballet dancer turned rancher.” As a final accolade for this short story, Reid wrote, “The widow’s embrace of the supernatural phenomenon resembling the Marfa lights is a triumph—an E. T. for adults.”

Plans were made to televise the story, and it was turned into a television script with the help of Cynthia Salm and Dennis Tardan, a writing team from Victoria, Texas, that also completed a Peck Woodside piece. Neither project found completion.

The story, “The Disappearance of Widow Ellen,” satisfies with elements of pastoralism, folklore, the successful yokel, unexplained phenomena, and alien abduction. The goodness of working with her stock and her garden gives the widow, a former ballerina, a fulfilling life. After reporting the mysterious light that comes in August and September each year to her young neighbor Leet, she does not “delve into philosophy, astrology, or strange sciences” or meditation. She squirrel-hunts and writes to Leet occasionally, “healthy, normal things” about weather, the price of grain, or a hearty joke. The three locals who also see the mysterious light meet different ends. In the best traditions of folklore, the first becomes a drunkard; the second, a preacher; and the third is blind for three days. When a big car with “Dallas plates” arrives and the occupants begin to snoop around her place, the widow gets the best of the city slickers with her father’s shotgun and tough talk.

As she begins to understand the meaning of the light for her, the widow tells Leet that “just being in the presence of the light was one of the deepest pleasures she had ever experienced” (7). She asks Leet, a journalist, not to write the story, saying, “There’s something sacred about the light. I can’t betray it to a doubting and curious public; I have a selfish motive, too. I might lose it” (7). The widow takes on a glow of spiritual peace. “My impression . . . is that I will not be destroyed, but that I will attain some wondrous new form of existence,” she explains to Leet and makes it clear that she is not compelled to go to the light: “it is a matter of choice” (22). When Leet finds Ellen’s red ballet slippers,

left as she had planned at the site of the hovering light, she understands that Widow Ellen had offered herself “to the infinite and the beautiful” (25). The suggestion that Ellen’s abduction will lead to her spiritual perfection is reminiscent of the role of the unconventional in the march toward perfection, the major theme of Kirkland’s novels.

### **“Leet’s Christmas”**

“Leet’s Christmas,” a recollection of a childhood Christmas, was published in 1985 by Kirkland’s own publishing company, White Chapel in Wimberley, Texas, and republished in 1996 by the University of North Texas Press. This nostalgic little book tells the story of Christmas at the Purcell Ranch in Coleman County in 1912. The main character, besides Leet, the author at five, Daniel Elihu Purcell, her grandfather, sings the old hymn “Bright Prospect” at the end of the story while Leet, holding her china doll and petting the cat, listens and is filled with a feeling that all is right with the world. In this illustrated book, Leet is allowed to help Grandmother Purcell bake and to ride horseback behind her grandmother, who wears a riding habit and uses a sidesaddle. Leet is forgiven for dropping the bag and shattering the bottle of Four Roses Uncle Austin has brought for the eggnog. Hanging her stocking by actually hammering the nail into the mantle is exciting to the child, her doll gets a new wardrobe from Santa, and Christmas dinner is a cornucopia of good things to eat. The many thank you notes in Kirkland’s files indicate that she sent copies of “Leet’s Christmas” with Christmas greetings to many friends in 1986 in the same way that Frank and Bertha Dobie had sent booklets at Christmas.

### ***The Middlebuster***

Kirkland noted that she originally wrote *The Middlebuster* as a short story after she had taught in Crane and was living in Tenafly, New Jersey, in 1933. She explained in the manuscript that “a middlebuster is the man who collects the fees from the town’s illegal business enterprises and makes it all right with the law.” She turned the story into a serialization while she taught in Iraan in 1938 and finally used it for two graduate writing courses, one with Dobie. “Though unpublished and unfinished, it served me in three

graduate courses at a difficult time.” Her father “made his transition in 1940” while she was in graduate school at UT.

Dobie’s notes on the chapters she showed him should have encouraged her to continue writing. He was “positively enthusiastic about the novel.” It was better than another story she had given him because, he wrote, “It has reality in it and living people. . . perhaps you could make more of the sandstorm, by descriptions and by effect, before the girl is lost in it. . . . I don’t think that full and pitiless descriptions of sand-dust storms have been exhausted.” She also received assistance from Bryant Presley, her friend and State Editor of the *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*, who provided five typed pages of criticism.

### **Musicals**

#### ***The Devil’s Backbone***

In 1969 Kirkland completed her first musical comedy. The setting of Kirkland’s musical comedy, *The Devil’s Backbone*, is “Cedar Point, Texas (not a mapped place),” between 1920 and 1950. Sources for her cedar chopper musical included C. W. Wimberley’s “Cedar Cutter and Others” in a Texas Folklore Society publication. By way of introduction the author wrote about the main characters:

The Texas Cedar Chopper is an individual type of hillbilly, often illiterate, always picturesque, with a touch of wildness and temper, and very resistant to progress in general. Not a landowner or money-saver, he lives mostly at subsistence level. He exhibits a certain shrewdness and dare-devilishness, is conversant with nature and her ways, and when he decides to “cut up,” he has a really big, uninhibited time! He is clannish and sensitive to being looked down upon—despises those who would improve his lot.

The plot revolves around the European trip that is the prize in a contest; the comedy comes from the culture shock created when the seven Uphillers meet the outside world.<sup>6</sup>

When nine-year-old Bessie Uphiller enters a contest to get her dog Zip’s picture on the Zip dog food can and win a trip to Europe for her family, the officials at the company award

her the prize before they meet the embarrassing family—and the dog who will not eat their canned product. The Zip officials try to pay off the Uphillers to avoid having them represent the company, but the family insists on the trip, and Europe will never be the same. Finally after much expense and some undreamed of international publicity, the dog food company agrees to put Zip's picture on its product and everyone is happy.

Kirkland searched for the right producer for her cedar chopper comedy. In 1969 Minnie Pearl, famous Grand Old Opry regular, returned the script of *The Devil's Backbone*, writing to Kirkland: "I don't know in what capacity I could use it." Two weeks later Chet Atkins, Vice President of the Record Division at RCA, returned the lyrics from *The Uphillers*, another title for the play, saying, "I am unable to use your songs at this particular time." Kirkland sent a copy of *The Uphillers* to Lucille Ball in April of 1969, but the comedienne apparently did not reply.

Explaining her interest in creating a musical, Kirkland commented that her father could call square dances and that the Dobies had thought the songs she wrote in *Divine Average* were authentic folk song discoveries, the result of special research. She was proud of having written songs that these experts took for the real thing.

### ***Hear the Flute***

After she abandoned a book based on Hervey Adams in favor of a totally different novel that grew out of it, in 1973 Kirkland set about creating a multi-media musical drama that was to serve as "a memorial piece to this man: Hervey A. Adams, an obscure branch of an illustrious family tree, as worthy of patriotic tribute as his presidential kinsmen John and John Quincy." She called him a "Northerner, Texian, converted Southerner, baptized with the bitter blood of civil strife into the America that was United, his life design in totality could be labeled Pure American."

The time of the play is from October 1861 through June 1862 with flashbacks to this youth in 1824 and 1834 and to the Somervell Expedition of 1842. Places include

Round Top in Fayette County, Texas; stops along the trail from San Antonio to Santa Fe; the Val Verde battle site; and flashbacks to Ohio and to the brush country of South Texas.

The author listed the following sources: fourteen letters from Adams to his wife Caroline, letters written during his time with Sibley's Brigade, a letter he wrote to President Lincoln, his account of his childhood in Ohio, his diary of the Somervell Expedition in 1842, and Colton's *The Civil War in the Western Territories*. Kirkland also interviewed her cousin Ophelia Gilmore about her grandfather Hervey Adams.

For Kirkland, the mention in his writings of his flute opened the doors of inspiration for her to write about Hervey Adams. The flute is, she wrote, "an instrument of mood, a channel of spiritual communication." An apparition of a Babylonian priest is conjured up by the flute music in the play.

Kirkland points out that Adams was fifty years old—the oldest in a group that averaged twenty-two years of age—when he joined Sibley's Brigade during the Civil War and that he served as the unofficial company doctor because of the medicines he carried and the knowledge he had gained from his mother-in-law, "a licensed physician."

The Prologue has many of the traits of a radio script, with a narrator and a chorus of voices. It is presentational with Adams making his first appearance from the audience. Film clips are used in the background of some of the scenes. For example, Adams is writing a letter home in Part I, scene 6, and a film of his wife greeting him at their gate is projected behind him as he writes.

Over the next seventeen years, Kirkland attempted to interest several groups in producing *Hear the Flute*. On December 6, 1973, Kirkland sent a letter to Mrs. Gene Brownrigg, Executive Director of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Texas, offering her musical drama for consideration. On the same day, Kirkland sent her first letter to Michael Straight at the National Endowment for the Arts. She later withdrew her solicitation to the NEA, and in 1974 she renewed her application to the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Robert Collinson, director of the TV/Film division of Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, a non-profit Texas corporation, attempted to assist Kirkland for almost five years in getting funding for *Hear the Flute* from the National Endowment for the Humanities after his organization was not able to produce it. Kirkland enlisted the aid of others in her attempt to get this funding from the NEH. References for the application included Evelyn Oppenheimer, Judge Fitzhugh, Dr. Decherd Turner, Director of the Birdwell Library, Bill Porterfield, writer and TV producer, and Dorman H. Winfrey, Director and General Librarian of the Texas State Library. Funding was not received.

Harvey Herbst of the Public Broadcasting System was enthusiastic about the project in 1974, but he wrote that it would cost KLRN \$300,000 to produce *Hear the Flute*. Herbst also listed some things about the script that would make it hard to enlist the support of a financial angel: First, the glorification of the master/slave relation “won’t sell.” Second, the plot is lost in narration. It needs “more action, less introspection.” Third, the music, “though tuneful, lacks overall theme,” and a “bundle of dollars could be spent on it.”

Years later in 1986 after several months of planning to perform *Hear the Flute*, Tyler Junior College decided they “couldn’t do the project justice.”

Kirkland paid Conrad Fath, a friend from Radio House days, \$500 for the music. In 1990 on the strength of Fath’s reference to Eli Wallach near the time of his death, which Kirkland called “a startling pronouncement related to drama and music in which your name was a centerpiece,” Kirkland wrote to Wallach offering her script to him. Fath’s wife also wrote to Wallach. Wallach responded that he would read it, but that musicals “are out of my range.”

### ***Mr. Magnet***

Kirkland and Fath again collaborated on a musical comedy in 1978. A present-day musical comedy set in the Rocky Mountains—first at a remote weather station and then at a university—*Mr. Magnet* has several romantic triangles and what the author called “neo-

physics, and psycho-functions.” The plot is full of extra-sensory perception, sleep instruction, schizophrenia, body polarity studies, clairvoyance, and precognition.

Kirkland stated the purpose of the play: “Space Age entertainment through dynamic and authentic presentation of activity on the current frontiers of neo-physics as exemplified in certain psycho-functions.” Mr. Fly, a wealthy founder of Colozona University in the Rockies, asks Tim Sims, known as Mr. Magnet, to come to the university, but Sims’s lack of a degree makes the board refuse. Kirkland summarized the plot:

Magnet’s extra-sensory abilities and Fly’s indignation and ire, mix humor, suspense, and surprise with such unusual results that the controversy leaps from regional to international importance. Linnie enters the complications quite early and doesn’t leave until love, ESP and certain “magnetic forces” resolve it all. She is the woman Sims has been searching for, but once she is on the scene, Fly feels the same way and the competition, in spite of friendship becomes as intense as both men can make it with their determination to win Linnie.

Other entertaining characters include Gertrude Hunter, “Space Woman,” the first woman in space or at least the first woman to fly among the man-made satellites; the triplets, Phil, Will, and Gill, who all love Little Red; and a shoemaker who is almost driven out of his mind by the demands of students to cut thousands of pairs of shoes in half—a prescription of “Reality” Compton which he believes will bring about proper “body polarity.” Kirkland explained in her summary, “He is a novel demonstration of concern for the inner man” although in this play Kirkland made light of many unconventional subjects such as clairvoyance, ESP, and body polarity that she considered to be serious areas for research and thought. *Mr. Magnet*, like her two earlier musicals, was never produced.

### ***Precious Memories***

In the *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*, Perry Stewart reported the performance of Kirkland’s 1986 musical review *Precious Memories* at the White Elephant “above a saloon

in the Stockyards area.” Kirkland informed the audience that she was making her stage debut as an octogenarian, and she received a standing ovation. The reviewer thought her role as narrator fitting because of her position as a “much-respected and significant figure in Texas letters,” but he wrote, “her tentative delivery” from the stage was “a minus factor.” He also thought the production was “far too cluttered—its several well-intentioned cooks over-busyng the broth.” The many cooks included the author who narrated, the Hip Pocket troupe that provided dramatized scenes, and both the Salt Lick and Dixie Dewdrops singers who offered Kirkland’s original songs as well as an impersonation of the legendary Stamps Quartet. In addition, slides from family albums or other historical sources flashed on a screen at the side of the stage to coordinate with the action on the stage.

Of the dozen songs<sup>7</sup> in the script, four titles are reminders of earlier Kirkland works. Kirkland remembered the Stamps Quartet from her stint as publicity director for the popular gospel group during the thirties. Other creations from Kirkland’s past writing were revived: “Camp on the Calcasieu,” appears in *Divine Average*, “Zip, the Dog Pioneer,” is perhaps an ancestor of the Uphillers’ dog Zip, and “The Texas Strut” might be related to Mrs. Tuxley’s “Texas Stomp” in *The Devil’s Backbone*. Kirkland’s son James Beal plans to include the videotape of a performance of *Precious Memories* in the Elithe Hamilton Kirkland Papers in the Southwestern Writers Collection.

### **Television Scripts**

#### **“Shakespearean Youth Fantasy”**

“A Shakespearean Youth Fantasy” was presented on the four hundredth anniversary of his birth by KLRN on Thursday, April 23, 1964, from 9:30 to 10:30. Based on an activity in creative imagination at the University Junior High School, it focused on segments from *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest*. Student writers and narrators under the teaching direction of Eula Lee Gill provided the raw material for Elithe Hamilton Kirkland, writer/producer, to prepare for broadcast. Costumes were provided by the Department of Drama, Alicia Annas, designer.

The first scene, “The Eye of Childhood,” was taken from the students’ study of *Macbeth*. They created a youth, making him the son of the gatekeeper and the one whose voice cried, “Sleep no more. Macbeth does murder sleep.” His is “the eye of childhood” disparaged by Lady Macbeth. The narrator tells us that “He proves Lady Macbeth’s undoing.”

“Such Different Issue” from *King Lear* was the second scene. The students presented Cordelia as a nine-year-old child who tells of the deep love she has for her father and her inability to use words well enough to express her love or her thanks for the jewel her father has given her. Cordelia suffers from the “taunting of her rowdy sisters—her misery at their hands an artistic foreshadowing of the sorrow and dishonor of the king as Shakespeare portrays his condition at the mercy of his older daughters.”

In the third scene, “Cleopatra’s Daughter,” the students show how the three children of Antony and Cleopatra—the twins, Cleopatra Selena, the moon-queen, and Alexander Salois, the sun-king, and a younger son, Ptolemy Phonecia—might have felt a few years after they were so tragically orphaned and trapped between Roman and Egyptian loyalties.

“The Invisible Scepter,” the final scene, is based on *The Tempest*. Long after the happy marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand, the son of the King of Naples, their only daughter, a second Miranda, is instructed by her wise grandfather Prospero in the mysteries of Atlantis.

### **“Seminole Bill’s Lost Mine”**

Planned as a television series called *Unfenced World*, “Seminole Bill’s Lost Mine” was written in 1953. Dobie, holding his book *Coronado’s Children*, opens the television show with narration, ending with, “[T]here are no boundaries to the Southwest because when these stories were created it was a vast unfenced world.” He shows a sample rock “that assayed eighty thousand dollars to the ton,” and sets the scene in 1887, the Big Bend

country. The camera shows Reagan and Brewster Counties and the Sierra Ladrones in Mexico on a map.

The characters include Billy Kelly, known as Seminole Bill, a Negro-Seminole who spoke little English or Spanish; the Reagan brothers, Jim and Lee, who did not believe Bill's story; and Lock Campbell, railroad conductor between San Antonio and Sanderson, who believed the story and had a sample and years of searching to prove it. As the scenes unfold, a strong longing for "what might have been" is created each time the location of the gold is lost,<sup>8</sup> but the script was never produced.

### **Song Lyrics and Poetry**

Although Kirkland is best remembered as an author of historical fiction, she was first a poet. In the biographical information she provided when *Love Is a Wild Assault* was first published, she told of writing her first poem "under the shade of a cottonstalk" when she was supposed to be picking cotton. Often while her mother, who was not well, called out directions from the bedroom for domestic duties in the kitchen, young Elithe would comply with peeling potatoes for time and then "trade her knife for a pencil" and write her poems. Apprehensive about criticism of her poems, she kept them to herself, but she continued to create verse throughout her life—song lyrics, occasional verse for Christmas and birthdays, and poems.

Kirkland played the organ, but she did not compose music. She had several friends who supplied music for her songs. Julia Smith, a friend from college days at the North Texas State Teachers College, who later composed the music for operas based on Texas themes, Beverly Jean Kirkland, her step-daughter, J. Howard Lumpkin and Conrad Fath, friends from Radio House days, and Maurine Rylander were some who wrote music for Kirkland's lyrics.

"Back Alley Bonnie" was a collaboration between Kirkland and her friend Julia Smith. A letter from Smith, who was modeling the music after a hit song that was a fox-trot, advised Kirkland to do the same with the lyrics: "If you do that, Peggy, we ought to

coin the money. . . . I had to change a few lines that had too many feet.” Kirkland’s “Do I Look All Right for My Man Tonight?” featured music by Beverly Jean Kirkland and Maurine Rylander. Rylander also wrote the music for “Sugar Bowl” and “Wake Up Bright.” “I’m in Love Again” was intended for Jim Beal’s wedding 1987, but judging from his letter, a friend named Buddy apparently did not get around to writing music for the lyrics. The Kirkland Papers contains a published copy of “Long Live America,” lyrics by Kirkland and J. Howard Lumpkin, music by Conrad Fath.

Several Kirkland songs were copyrighted: “Sugar Bowl,” May 16, 1958; “Each Atom Is a Memory,” February 24, 1958; and “I Want a Space Man,” October 4, 1954, which was used in a student revue at UT Round-up in 1959. There are fifteen songs and 235 poems<sup>9</sup> in the two boxes of poetry and song in the Kirkland Papers at the Southwestern Writers Collection, but only one—“Da Man on da Mule,” from *Divine Average*—from among the many that appear in her books.

Poems written at every stage of her life affirm that poetry writing as a favorite activity. Among the collected poems are several, such as the one called “Picking Cotton,” that may have been written when she was a child. “Tell Me Not in Mournful Numbers” is a college take-off on Longfellow’s “A Psalm of Life,” but the subject is sleeping in class that leads to “busting” out of school. The poem ends with, “Education is real, education is earnest / And sleep is not the goal.” In the thirties, Kirkland was not only the first woman editor of the Coleman newspaper, but also she once wrote the editor’s column in verse: “Music Will Be Furnished.” Along with cartoon illustrations, it advertised the offerings of the Coleman County Fair. Kirkland noted on the copy of the poem that, “the press foreman said it looked like hell, but the people liked it.”

Christmas poems, which were printed on cardstock with holiday illustrations, were sent as Christmas greetings by Kirkland for many years; her archives contain examples from 1944 to 1963, except for 1955, and the card for 1988. Emphasizing the many years Kirkland spent writing her first novel, her “Apology at Yuletide 1946” and “Apology at

Yuletide 1948” promise “a free autographed copy of *Divine Average* by the next or some other Christmas Day.” The novel was finally published in 1952. Special occasion verses were also a favorite. Kirkland composed poems for births—“For Penny James (Born to the Space Age)” and “For Robert Lamar Boyd, Jr.: Your Heritage born April 12, 1973”—birthdays, “When You Were Born You May Always Hide;” weddings, “For Charles and Sandra Schiller, on their wedding in 1973,” and “High Priestess of the Temple;” anniversaries, “For Conrad and Shudde Fath, for their fiftieth wedding anniversary on September 30, 1988;” and deaths, “A Good Man Can Never Die.”

Some of her poetry was published. “Whispers” and “Dreams” were published in *The Avesta*. “The Dance Divine,” first used as a Christmas card, was published by the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Inc., located in Virginia Beach, in the winter of 1969.

“Quadroon Maid,” described as a “narrative poem in four sequences written for dance interpretation,” is extraordinary. The four scenes—Fear, Servitude, Love, and Freedom—would provide a unique performance.

One of her most effective poems was written and framed for her mother in 1949. At the dedication of her archives to the Southwestern Writers Collection, her son and daughter-in-law distributed copies of this poem is called “Mother.”<sup>10</sup>

Kirkland’s metaphysical beliefs permeate her poetry. She asked the musical arranger of “Christmas Tree Love” to place the number 675324 “in an unobtrusive manner, preferably near the last word or measure. Metaphysical reasons,” and her poem “Soul Encounters” is marked “892-76-42,” which seems to be another metaphysical or numerological notation. Poetry from the period when she and Jenny Lind Porter were working on their book *On the Trellis of Memory* is represented by three poems. “Prayer for a Set of Masters” has core language words and their English meanings typed in red in the margin, and two poems, “Prayer for a Star/Prayer for the People of Our Galaxy,” were written on “April 16, 1968, in JLP apartment” according to a handwritten notation.

Another note in ink explains that the poem's reference to Christ is a reference to the planet Esdor in the novel: "Understand Christ as Esdor—not simply a pretty phrase."

"A Revelation" was written around five A.M. at Seton Hospital on June 30, 1985, near the time of Dr. Kirkland's death. In the conclusion, she underlined terms used in *On the Trellis of Memory*:

He'll be spared to you a while,  
 Then his mission must proceed,  
 For he is one who carries in his code  
 The precious primal seed.

"The Chasm: A Dream," is printed on beige trifold cardstock with this explanation, "from an actual dream while living in Kyle, Texas, Circa 1985, following the demise of my husband, Dr. R. D. Kirkland, in August of that year." In the poem, the author's feeling of dread when faced with a wide abyss eventually is eased by her faith in the rightness of all creation, her assurance that the chasm can be leaped and peace attained on the other side. Her term for death—transition—reveals her confidence in the continuation of the most important soul-self in the times between each soul's various lives.

In the investigation into the development of the writer Elithe Hamilton Kirkland, analysis of her less familiar short stories, musicals, television scripts, songs and poems must be considered along with her popular novels. Kirkland's interest in unconventional ideas and mystical consciousness appear occasionally in these other works; for example, in the Widow Ellen's trust in the spiritual security of her eminent alien abduction, in the appearance of a Babylonian priest as a confidant for Hervey Adams in *Hear the Flute*, and in Kirkland's reliance on parapsychology as a source of humor in *Mr. Magnetic*. In spite of these unconventional ideas, Kirkland's other works do not promote the major theme—the march toward perfection—found in much of her poetry and in all of her novels.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE MARCH TOWARD PERFECTION

After considering the themes, the organization, the problem of race, and the incorporation of history and folklore in her novels, along with the critical reaction to each, I see Kirkland's major theme—the march toward perfection—in each of her major works.

As a writer, Elithe Hamilton Kirkland began with facts. She was first a journalist, and when she became a novelist, her method was that of a historian—one who searches the accounts from times past for truth—although truth for her more and more wore an aura of the mystical. Combined, the historical and the mystical coalesced into a confidence that the purpose of human life, played out in its struggle with choices, is ultimately perfection of humanity—Mega Man.

As Kirkland's visionary philosophy becomes more and more conspicuous in her third and fourth novels, it seems at variance with the historic approach to her first two best known novels. Although J. Frank Dobie, Kirkland's mentor, called her "fanciful," and his outspoken humanist attitudes seem to be diametrically opposed to her inclination toward mysticism or parapsychology, it is surprising that similarities can be found between their philosophies and these can help reconcile the historic and the mystical in her writing. When Dobie wrote in "This I Believe" that his belief in a Supreme Power "has no effect on my conduct so far as hope for reward or fear of punishment hereafter is concerned," Dobie clearly stated his opinion that this life is the only one any man will experience. In spite of

this major point of disagreement about reincarnation, when he wrote that “The progress of man is based on disbelief of the commonly accepted,” we see the similarity between his belief in thinking for oneself and Kirkland’s belief in the power of unconventional ideas often presented in her novels. The importance of unconventional thinking is well-supported in her novels by Dr. Wiedeman’s belief, in *Divine Average*, that racial blending will bring about the destruction of racial hatred and a perfection of mankind, or Harriet Ames’s belief, in *Love Is a Wild Assault*, that her granddaughter must be taught to ride, shoot, fish, and swim like a man to ensure her ability to take care of herself in the wilderness if necessary. Ri, in *On the Trellis of Memory*, wins the highest level of learning by asking a question that had never been asked before, a question also asked by John Sterling, in *The Edge of Disrepute*: if Man and Nature are one, how does Nature respond to Man’s perversion or abuse of knowledge? (*Trellis* 36, *Disrepute* 21). The answer to this question could change the behavior of man, causing him to become a steward of nature and bringing great benefit to man through ecological balance.

In “This I Believe,” Dobie stated that the noblest action of man was in “trying to budge the status quo towards a larger and fuller status. . . . I am sustained by my belief in evolution—the ‘increasing purpose’ of life in which the rational is with geological slowness evolving out the irrational.” Dobie’s words echo Kirkland’s theme that through the ages, man is destined to evolve, for Dobie, into a more rational man and, for Kirkland, into Mega Man. The hallmarks of Dobie’s stated belief including freedom, justice, beauty, truth, and nature could have been lifted out of Kirkland’s most fantastic novel. Furthermore his belief that “goodness and wisdom and righteousness in Garden of Eden perfection lie somewhere far ahead instead of farther and farther behind give me hope and somewhat explains existence” also conforms with Kirkland’s hope for the future perfection of mankind.

This combination in Kirkland of historian and mystic can be seen in the beginning and ending of her 1958 poem “Full Moon over Monte Alban,” written during a Christmas

visit with her husband to these Zapotec ruins in Mexico. Kirkland begins by asking the question that she often asked as a novelist who dealt with history:

What mighty forces built these walls?

What wisdom thrived within?

What message can be compassed here

To bridge from now to then?

The poem ends with the answer that the knowledge acquired in man's ancient civilizations as well as the history of those times remains a mystery and only Nature is certain:

No answers come . . . and yet we hear

An echo down Creations' Hall:

"The moon's pure light, the tree's white blossoms

Are timeless treasures for us all."

Those who spoke at the presentation of her papers to the Southwestern Writers Collection at Southwest Texas State University contributed to understanding Elithe Hamilton Kirkland. Her son Jim Beal called Kirkland a "Christian mystic," who was a long-time follower of Yogananda and his Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship. Her daughter-in-law Roberta Beal recalled Kirkland's comment that she had one "body child," her son Jim but many "mind and spirit children," her books. Anne Durham Robinson, a friend from Radio House days, acknowledged Kirkland's belief in reincarnation: "She is not gone off the stage, but giggling in the wings waiting for the second act."

Kirkland touched on this idea of reincarnation in many of her novels. In *Love Is a Wild Assault*, Harriet's memoir for her granddaughter is her attempt to arm the girl with wisdom gained in a long and tumultuous lifetime of errors and successes. The granddaughter looks just like Harriet and is very much like her in personality. It is as if the girl is Harriet reincarnated. Kirkland's theme that study of past deeds and words can improve the individual can also be the message of the historian saying that those who

refuse to study the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them. However, in *The Edge of Disrepute* Kirkland is a messenger of reincarnation not a historian when Sarah Belle finds true love in the jungles of Mexico in her union with John, her soulmate from the past. As the Mayan priest tells them the story of “The One Who Laughed,” it is clear that he sees in them the souls of the hero and heroine of the legend. In *On the Trellis of Memory*, authors Kirkland and Porter present reincarnation as the major premise of their psychic novel in which each character has multiple identities over time.

Kirkland felt passionate about the philosophy in her novels. When, after many changes in the original manuscript of her first novel, her title *Divine Average* was finally accepted, Kirkland wrote to her mother in relief, “[I]t must be called that—the whole story—the whole philosophy expresses that and that alone!” The whole philosophy of the novel is that racial blending and the elimination of racial problems will eventually help bring about the perfection of mankind, and the title, taken from Walt Whitman’s poem “Apostroph,” also presents the idea that the “race of the future” will be a “divine average” inspired “to build for that which builds / for all mankind!” Kirkland’s characters explain by their words or demonstrate by their actions her belief that God’s plan will eventually result in the elimination of man’s “greed and hate and violence” and the perfection of mankind in “brotherly love, reverence for God, and appreciation of the world’s natural beauty” (248-249). In the novel Dr. Weideman makes it clear that such a result will be attained after “thousands or tens of thousands of years” (368).

Kirkland took the title for her best known novel *Love Is a Wild Assault* from the following poem by Kahlil Gibran in *The Earth Gods*:

Love is a distant laughter in the spirit.  
 It is a wild assault that hushes you to your awakening.  
 It is a new dawn upon the earth,  
 A day not yet achieved in your eyes or mine  
 But already achieved in its own greater heart.

These lines echo Kirkland's belief in a perfection—"a new dawn upon the earth"—to be achieved by the slow and steady improvements made by each generation through love in the march toward perfection. Kirkland again presents the idea that man's continued struggle toward perfection encompasses unconventional ideas and actions. Harriet's life was certainly unconventional, and an important part of Harriet's code is also a part of the author's code: the belief that "when all is finished, the love force will somehow bring perfection out of it all, and the final equation will be good" (21). At the conclusion of the novel, Tricky, who has learned much from her grandmother's account of her life, emerges like a perfected Harriet.

Kirkland weaves her belief in the unconventional as witnessed in dreams, visions, the effect of past incarnations on present lives and the importance of recording these events, the psychic effect of voodoo, the influence of nature on humans, and the value of freedom for all women and men in the march toward human perfection into a pattern of related themes in *The Edge of Disrepute*. Near the end of the novel, Sarah Belle plays the harp and sings for John:

And know the very thought of love  
Can breach the walls of time and space  
And deify the human race. (365)

When Sarah Belle and John exercise freedom in their unconventional actions, they benefit themselves and others. Sarah Belle and John's freedom to marry in spite of social conventions, Emile's freedom from his mental illness, and Maury's freedom from slavery all contribute to the human march toward perfection.

In *On the Trellis of Memory*, Icanthe, the enlightened ruler of a utopian society, sends out mind-messages of peace that will aid others centuries in the future in the struggle to create Mega Man. Because they view the evolution of Magna Man as the purpose of human existence, Icanthe and her people pray, "O miracle at work in me, / Speak to me of perfection and purpose" (275). After completion of the novel, Kirkland was anxious to

continue her research into consciousness which had revealed so much of the philosophy of reincarnation and the search for perfection in the soul's destiny that are the core of *On the Trellis of Memory*. In the conclusion of the novel, Kirkland describes Magna Man, that perfect human, the goal of all incarnations of all souls:

Magna Man will be better prepared than all men before him to penetrate the veils of suspicion, jealousy, hostility, anger, and fear. . . . Magna Man the ruler, politician, and diplomat will be too wise to involve whole nations in war and disputes simply to appease his own ancient sense of injury. (295)

All of Kirkland's major works tell us that the struggles of each human life advance the next generation. In *Divine Average* these struggles result in the breeding away of negative traits and the strengthening of positive traits that will eventually create perfected mankind. In *Love Is a Wild Assault* a young girl, improved by the story of her grandmother's life struggles, prepares to live a better life. In *The Edge of Disrepute* souls return to new lifetimes that provide opportunities for their discovery of values and goals only fleetingly glimpsed in earlier incarnations. Finally in *On the Trellis of Memory*, Kirkland assures us that Magna Man will stand tall at the completion of the ages' long march toward perfection.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kirkland remembered her 1941 brush with international intrigue and always intended to create a sensational literary account of Peck Woodside's "private war" against Nazi activities in the jungles of Mexico.

Garrett D. Woodside was called Peck from the term "red-headed peckerwood" because of his red hair. Woodside's first airplane ride at the fair grounds in Memphis, Tennessee, was with Glenn Curtis. Woodside worked as a mechanic around the fair grounds and race tracks. His only formal pilot training was a San Diego refresher course in 1926 after he had been flying for several years. Before World War I, Woodside had flown, and when war broke out, he had an appointment in aviation, but because the twenty-year-old volunteer could not wait to be called, he enlisted as a mechanic. As a sergeant in the Second Engineers of the Second Division, he was first stationed at Fort Sam Houston. In Europe he was involved in five major engagements, and he was awarded the Croix De Guerre for bravery in action between October 8, 1918, and October 10, 1918.

Peck Woodside, American World War I veteran, had made and lost a couple of small fortunes before he decided to start an airline in Mexico. His cargo in Mexico, mainly coffee and tobacco, occasionally included salt, groceries, or cocoa, and once, a hundred head of hogs. (He said that their noise drowned out the noise of the airplane motors.) His innocent business operations seemed far removed for Nazi intrigue, but Nazi interest in Mexico increased, especially in the rubber plantations where a new process made it possible to get high quality rubber from native plants. Desire for more rubber for military build-up brought more Germans into Mexico, and Peck Woodside's airline records made their movements easy to trace. Woodside was offered 350,000 pesos and new Junker planes in Nazi aid to expand his company. He refused. Soon he was facing mysterious hangar fires, engine sabotage, and surveillance of his radio communications. Then came the slander. In a newspaper article, a disgruntled former employee accused Woodside of making huge amounts of money flying classified mail and materials to his "secret" landing field—suggesting that Woodside was a Nazi agent.

In 1941 when Woodside heard a broadcast from the US about his airline that had brought modern transportation to people who had never seen a railroad or a truck, he wrote to the script-writer Elithe Hamilton Beal and invited her to ride anywhere in Mexico on his airline. Soon Elithe was sent to Mexico to research ideas for the *Know Your Neighbors* broadcasts, and Dorothy Kurtz, a friend from New York City, went along.

In September of 1941, Elithe and her friend flew with Woodside to Palenque, where the women stayed with Ernst Rateike, a German National with both US and Mexican citizenship. They all listened to the radio, and when Roosevelt was critical of Nazis, Rateike angrily turned off the radio. Later the women could hear him listening to Hitler on the radio. Next the women visited Las Palmas, a large rubber plantation in Chiapas, owned by H. Rau, a former German diplomat. They landed on a 350-yard island

runway in the jungle, went by canoe to the headquarters, and found a large picture of Hitler hanging in the administrator's office.

When Elithe told Woodside about these incidents, he was very concerned and wanted her to report them to Mr. Rau when she met him and his wife in Mexico City. Rau had also been accused of being a Nazi when Woodside's airline was implicated. However, because Rau was quite old and very ill, Elithe was reluctant to upset him. At dinner with the Raus' Canadian friends, Mr. and Mrs. Beier, Mr. Beier, a former representative of Junker, the German airplane manufacturer, pumped Elithe about the purpose of her research and her observations at Las Palmas and revealed that he was to be the new manager of the huge rubber plantation.

Later Elithe sent a confidential report on Nazi activities in Mexico to US Naval intelligence in October 1941, six weeks before Pearl Harbor, but it is not known if any US investigation into the matter of Nazi intrigue in Mexico was authorized.

<sup>2</sup>Besides Tom Lea, many other writer friends attended the Dobie Day ceremonies: Roy Bedichek and Walter Prescott Webb, the other two-thirds of the Big Three of Texas literature were there. Bedichek, director emeritus of the Bureau of Public School Service at the University of Texas, had in recent years turned author with two books, *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist* and *Karankawaw Country*, to his credit. Webb, an eminent historian, best known for *The Great Plains* and *The Texas Rangers*, had a new monumental book, *The Great Frontier*, soon to be released. Others attending included Fred Gipson, known for his books *Hound Dog Man* and *Home Place*; Mody C. Boatright, author of *Folk Laughter on the American Frontier* and co-editor with Dobie of many Texas Folklore Society publications; and newspaperman Lon Tinkle.

Bertha planted a live oak, instead of the mesquite she first had chosen, "giving up her chance to make history by planting a mesquite!" Kirkland wrote, "Mr. Dobie named the tree 'Bertha,' in gratitude, no doubt, for her abandoning the mesquite idea." Bertha and Frank Dobie were initiated into Pi Delta Epsilon, a journalism fraternity, in spite of Dobie's disdain for formal journalism. He had agreed to the ceremony, saying to "just tell the boy let's neither of us take ourselves too seriously." Kirkland confides that everyone was amazed that he agreed because of his comments in "The Life of a Writer in the Southwest":

When I find a young man or woman who wants to write and who shows promise, I always tell him or her for God's sake not to squander time on journalism but to study subjects that will fortify the mind with knowledge and develop the fibers of the brain. Anybody with any intelligence can learn in three weeks on a newspaper about all that three years of journalism can give.

In an interview that day with Southwestern President Finch, Dobie related the importance of his first day at Southwestern. The president of Southwestern at that time, Dr. Hyer, asked young Dobie if he liked to read, and upon hearing that he did, Dr. Hyer replied that he made it a habit to read a book a week. Dobie said he was impressed and began to do the same thing. Dr. Finch commented that he must have read three thousand or so books.

<sup>3</sup>Kirkland considered these other phrases from Whitman's poem as suitable titles for her novel *Divine Average*: The Brood Continental, O Continental Brood, O Divine Average, and O Men of Passion and of Storm.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter titles from Kirkland's earlier unpublished novel, *Unspoken Love*, suggest many of the episodes in *The Edge of Disrepute*:

The Unregenerate  
 Stillborn  
 Flaming Sword  
 The Ugly Prince  
 Self-Sale  
 Death Watch  
 Webb of Passion  
 The Tropical Trap  
 The Buggy Whip  
 Bloody Fingers  
 A Song to Sing

<sup>5</sup> The following chart should help the reader follow the intricate relations between major characters in their different incarnations and when they are between times of physical existence.

Incarnations In *On The Trellis Of Memory*

Present	Recent Past	Golden Age	Earth Colony from Esdor
Icanthe, ruler	Feather/Aminosatea, queen	Lutea, queen	Diela, Harp Mother
Tio, father/Icanthe	Lord Tio, husband /Aminosatea	Lutio, defender & husband/Lutea	unknown
Jocanthe, mother/Icanthe	between times	Cuerl, daughter /Rault	unknown
Ri, lover/Icanthe	Sen-Lai; later Efren, dramatist	Sen-lai, attacker /Lutea	unknown
Lineve, astral /Icanthe	Kedim, sister /Efren	Lineve, cousin /Lutea	unknown
Mellitius, doctor	between times	Lafoedin, doctor, husband/Lineve	unknown
Yunan, priest	between times	Kundai, priest, father/Lineve	unknown
Maia, Tio's mistress killer/Sxia	between times	Jetan, dancer, daughter/Lineve	unknown
Sxia,, Tio's first mistress	between times		unknown
Tasia, daughter/Sxia, half-sister/Icanthe	Ndrasia, actress	between times	unknown
between times	between times	Lutea's child, Mieru	Unli, the Dove
Sfalil, orator	between times	Rhadim, teacher /Da-slet-lan	Rhadim
Jia-lil; Tarozca, Sfalil	between times	Jia-Lil, lover/Sfalil	unknown
Isi-u, Earth Mother	Isi-u	Isi-u	Isi-u, mother/Diela killer/Radim
Da-stlet-lan	between times	between times	Da-stlet-lan, 6-yr,-old genius

<sup>6</sup> Characters in *The Devil's Backbone* include the Uphiller family and the Tuxleys from Cedar Post and several outsiders:

Pa Jule (Julius C. Uphiller), 40  
 Ma Dilly (Delia Jessica Uphiller), mandolin player  
 Great-Granddaddy Fleece, 107  
 Little Pa Jule (Julius C. Uphiller, Jr.), 18  
 Dilly Echo (Delia Jessica Uphiller), 11  
 Bessie and Buddie, twins, 9  
 Zip, Bessie's dog  
 Mr. Tuxley, postmaster of Cedar Post  
 Mrs. Tuxley, an expert at the "Texas Stomp"  
 K. B. Fledderbox, president of Zip Dog Products  
 Other Zip employees, including the advertising manager, publicity chief,  
 and public relations expert.

<sup>7</sup> Produced in 1986, *Precious Memories*, a musical review, presented scenes and songs with the following titles:

The Glyptodon Glide	A Little Monster in a Red Ant Bed
I Heard an Armadillo Cry	Old Rip
It Gets Mighty Lone	The Texas Strut
Zip, the Dog Pioneer	The Ballad of Lilla Lee
Hazel, Put Your Bonnet On	Camp on the Calcasieu
I'm A-Hankering for My Woman	When God Made the World
Faded Diary	The Stamps Quartet.

<sup>8</sup> In the unpublished *Heather, for Luck*, Kirkland told of how she and Dobie had been encouraged to submit "Seminole Bill's Lost Mine" to a Hollywood agent who then never contacted them again. A brief scene-by-scene description of the script reveals a suspenseful tale of a lost gold mine.

In the first scene of while looking for wild horses, Bill finds gold. Bill leaves a sample and crude map with the telegrapher to give to Lock Campbell.

Bill gets another sample assayed. Jim Reagan reads the assayer's letter to Bill, gets mad, and throws the crumpled letter in the fire. An unidentified hand retrieves it. Bill is shot by an unidentified assailant as he rides away.

Bill goes to the Stillwell ranch for help; he draws a slightly different map.

Lock Campbell gets a letter from his assayer; he plans a prospecting trip.

Bill, who has been shot, is tended by Prendita, a lovely Indian girl.

Bill goes to see Campbell who is on a train run, he is followed, and he flees down an alley.

While Campbell searches for Bill and for the gold, Bill returns to the area with Prendita. She hears a shot after he has left her at their campsite.

Campbell tells Reagan that Bill was right about the gold and shows him the sample, they become partners, but they never found the location.

Old Missouri, hired by Campbell, fills the Big Bend with burros and searches a day's ride from the Reagan cow camp for years before finding a blue stone he thinks indicates the spot. He dies before he can explain or send others to the spot.

Another man, called Finky, finds a rusty rifle near what he thinks is Bill's skeleton and not three hundred yards away—gold, which he buries before he heads back. He too dies before he can take others to the location.

<sup>9</sup> Kirkland thought of herself as a poet, and the following sixteen songs and over two hundred poems indicate her enthusiasm for poetry writing.

Poems (box 438, files 1-20; box 439, files 1-78)

An Appeal to La Cima  
 Astral Memories  
 At Twenty-Five  
 Autumn Delight  
 Beautiful Moments  
 Birthright  
 Birthday Poems  
 The Chasm: A Dream  
 Christmas Poems  
 1944 Greetings from a Friend Like You  
 1946 Apology at Yuletide  
 1947 It's plain to see, one wise man said  
 1948 Hallowed Be His Day of Birth  
 1950 God of Wisdom, God of Truth  
 1951 The Measure  
 1952 Starlight and Storm  
 1953 I choose to give you, friend, with love and  
 pleasure  
 1954 Star Symbol  
 1955 Of Such Is the Kingdom  
 1956 Christmas Angel  
 1957 The Guiding Thread  
 1963 Christmas Picture  
 The Flute and the Lyre  
 And the Wonder Is  
 1651 at the Palace Gate  
 1988 Full Moon at Monte Alban  
 n.d. Season of Gifts  
 The Christ's Birthday  
 This Christmas Day Will Pass Away  
 The Dance Divine  
 Glimpse of the Kingdom  
 Light Life Love  
 Christmas Poems from EHK to Dr. RDK  
 Come, Come from the Mist  
 Concept Audile (Hear, Mr. President)  
 Confession in Verse  
 The Dance Divine  
 Did You Ever Hear A Tree Talking?  
 Don't You Call Me Sweetheart  
 Dreams  
 Eternal Truth  
 Exceptional Mary  
 Fairy of Fancy  
 February  
 A Floral Salute  
 The Flower Princess  
 For Charles and Sandra Schiller  
 For Conrad and Shudde Fath  
 For Penny James (Born to the Space Age)  
 For Robert Lamar Boyd, Jr.: Your  
 Heritage  
 Freedom form Want  
 From the Avil  
 A Good Man Can Never Die  
 The Great Hoax of '43  
 He Thought  
 High Priestess of the Temple  
 I Am Tired  
 I Brought Something Down from the  
 Mountain  
 I Do Not Care for Streets of Gold  
 I Have a Picture in My Mind  
 I Like a Man with Guts and Brains!  
 I Love You with an Old Love  
 I Shall Write a Poem  
 I Wear Your Rose  
 Light-Sight  
 Love Is a Robber  
 Marriage  
 Mixed Up  
 Morning Sun Is Glory  
 Mother  
 Mother Love  
 Mother of a Writer  
 Mother Star

Music Will Be Furnished  
 My Thoughts That Are Traveling Along  
 Memory's Way  
 My Town  
 Mysteries of Life  
 Natural Gas  
 Ode to Education Reporters  
 Orcas Island  
 Out of the Shadows  
 The Pale Blue Cow  
 Petroleum  
 Picking Cotton  
 Pioneer Texas Women  
 Prayer for Balance and Tranquillity  
 Prayer for Love  
 Prayer for Nature  
 Prayer for a Set of Masters  
 Prayer for a Star/Prayer for the People of  
 Our Galaxy  
 Problem Solved  
 Quadroon Maid  
 A Revelation  
 A River Has a Soul  
 Seeing the Big Bend Country for the First  
 Time  
 She Dwells in Beauty  
 Signs of Spring  
 A Son You Have  
 Sonnet to a Boarding House  
 Soul Encounters  
 Soul Power  
 Spring--But My Poem Is Different  
 The Spring Has Brought a Glad Surprise  
 A Sweetheart's Letter on a Rainy Day  
 Talked with Friends  
 Tell Me Not in Mournful Numbers  
 Thanksgiving' Is a Time  
 There Was a Handsome Young Man Near  
 Clymer  
 There Was A Valley Deep and Wide  
 Thinking of Rev. Charles B. Diltz  
 To John Bryant for Louise  
 War Poems  
 We Shall Not Fear!  
 Fighting Man's Prayer  
 The Friend  
 The Kid  
 An Army of Dads  
 A Mother's Prayer  
 When You Were Born You May Always  
 Hide  
 Where Have All the Willows Gone?  
 Whispers  
 Widow's Weeds  
 Unidentified, some possible by EHK as a  
 child  
 Poetry by Jim Beal  
 Poetry written by others, including Jenny  
 Lind Porter's "Wedded Souls"

Songs (box 444, file 1-16)

Back Alley Bonnie  
 Christmas Tree Love  
 Da Man on da Mule  
 Do I Look All Right?  
 Each Atom Is A Melody  
 I Want a Space Man  
 I'm in Love Again  
 Light Me Three Candles, Darling  
 Long Live America  
 The Old Timer Sings  
 Praise to Lindbergh  
 Sugar Bowl  
 Two Toned Honey from Texas  
 Wake Up Bright  
 What D'Ya Think?  
 Unidentified fragments

<sup>10</sup> Kirkland gave a framed copy of the following poem to her mother, Eva Hamilton, in 1949.

Mother

Now that I am woman more than grown  
And am in turn a mother to my own,  
The mother-daughter tie that binds me to thee  
Seems not the same as that which used to be;  
Tis still the sweet sure thing it ever was but more  
Because your mind as well as heart has left the shore  
Of sheltered nooks and followed me to places far,  
Yea, even gone ahead to beckon like a star  
That keeps me looking, reaching up to where you are.  
The tug is gentle now, not firm as in my youth,  
And yet compelling as the pulse of truth.  
But underneath it all recumbent is a mother's will  
That should I falter from the way that's high to low  
Would rouse nor hesitate at all to show  
Me in such state dependent as a daughter still.  
But I prefer, if I am strong enough, unto the end  
To hold the deep communion of a critic and a friend.

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