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GLADYS-ON-THE-PRAIRIE: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
FORCES ON THE IDENTITY AND LIFE OF DR. GLADYS C. GALLIGAR

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

DESIREE M. E. KING

PITTSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY  
PITTSBURG, KANSAS  
AUGUST 2014

GLADYS-ON-THE-PRAIRIE: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
FORCES ON THE IDENTITY AND LIFE OF DR. GLADYS C. GALLIGAR

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# GLADYS-ON-THE-PRAIRIE: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORCES ON THE IDENTITY AND LIFE OF DR. GLADYS C. GALLIGAR

An Abstract of the Thesis by

Desiree M. E. King

Twentieth century Americans recognized problems created by both the subjected status women held by society and the harmful impact humanity had on natural resources and domains. America's search for realization and solutions for the inherent problems associated with the devaluation of women and nature did not come quickly or easily; it took a path that wound around both traditional concepts and progressive insights.

I argue in this thesis that the biography of Dr. Gladys C. Galligar demonstrates, on an intimate level, America's dawning awareness of the necessity of a healthier environment and a more egalitarian society. As a biology researcher and educator, she participated in the development of the school of American ecology; as a professional and empowered woman, she was both benefactor and survivor of society's struggle with gender. Her self-identity was the product of both the natural world and society, and as such she lived in the epicenter of the debate between tradition and progress.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Situated between the Illinois' timbered southern region and the patchy beginnings of the tallgrass prairie that lay in the central and northern parts of the state is Wayne County.<sup>1</sup> Gladys Charlotte Galligar, the oldest daughter of six children of tenant farmers, was born in this transitional land of woods and grasses on June 2, 1904. Her parents were Caleb Galligar and Fannie Newton; Caleb was born in 1877 in Kentucky and Fannie, an Illinois native, was born in 1882. Gladys attended rural schools until transferring to Decatur High school where she graduated in 1925. She received her M.A. and Ph.D., both in biology, from the University of Illinois, becoming Dr. Gladys C. Galligar in 1935. At that point, she married Dr. Theodore Melrose Sperry, whom she had met while digging a trench for biological research in the Illinois prairie. Dr. Galligar took a faculty position at Millikin University until 1948, when Dr. Sperry accepted a teaching position at Kansas State Teacher's College in Pittsburg, KS, where he had moved two years before. The couple moved into their home, Lyr'rose, on the grounds they named Paradoxs, an ecological experiment in wilderness conservation in a

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Wayne and Clay Counties, Illinois* (Chicago: Globe Publishing Co.), 15.

residential area. The administration at KSTC forcibly retired Dr. Galligar in 1952, in part because she was female; her husband, Dr. Theodore Sperry, also on the KTSC biology staff, was on a yearlong sabbatical in the Congo conducting field research. What is acknowledge by Dr. Galligar is that she believed the KTSC's administration was the result of bias against her gender. She retired to her home at Paradocs and spent her third life writing poetry, engaging in social activities, and never completely recovering from her career's abrupt end. She died in April of 1975 of a heart attack.

Just as Dr. Galligar was born in a place where two environments met, she lived where two worlds collided. During Dr. Galligar's lifetime, Americans went through both World Wars, the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Prohibition, the Great Depression, a Dust Bowl, a return to political and social conservatism in the 1950s, and the crest and waves of the rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The last of these represent a culmination of over a hundred years of ideas that became part of the social dialogue and caused profound changes in how American society regarded the role of the environment and of women.

Dr. Gladys C. Galligar's biography and body of works on the natural world – both scientific and literary – revealed society's struggle with the concept of gender, recognized increasing interest and concern about the condition of the American landscape, and demonstrated the impact those two influences had on the life of a Midwestern, white, educated woman in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis argues that Dr. Galligar recognized that the natural world does not prescribe the complicated roles for its inhabitants based on human understanding of gender; yet, she was in in a position to be sensitive and subject to these roles. Her self-identity was entangled throughout her

perception of the character of the natural world and the various expectations society placed on her. Galligar's self-identity reflected her successful attempt to maneuver the changing tide of social thought on gender and on the environment until her retirement in 1952.

Dr. Galligar's self-identity can be found between the two forces that worked to shape her self-image – society and environment. It is this emergent theme that is most important to this historical biography. It gives insight into the tangled web of her professional career, her decision to keep her last name, her personal relationship with her husband, her inability to have children, her independence and agency, and her curiosity and concern for the natural environment and its inhabitants.

Chapter I explores extant sources that give context and insight to Dr. Galligar's life and scholarly and creative literature. Sources in this section are important in either women's or environmental history. A discussion of the complex issues surrounding methods and interpretations of women's history includes material from Gerder Lerner, Anne Firor Scott, and Donald Worster.

Dr. Blum's historiography of women's environmental history opens a discussion on the primary thread within the field – ecofeminism, the idea that the domination of male-oriented societies over the natural world is a feminist issue. Difficulty in defining the relatively new field of women's environmental history necessitates the use of additional sources that do not explicitly fall within that new field. These sources give depth and texture to the various perspectives that have and continue to influence women's environmental history. This chapter includes samples from "social" and



“cultural” ecofeminist thought within the fields of sociology and nature writing, respectively, as well as a history of identity for women in Western history.

Carolyn Merchant’s *Death of Nature* serves to lay the groundwork in terms of both understanding the application of social ecofeminism to the historical narrative as well as describing what Merchant understood to be the effect of the Scientific Revolution on the characterization and marginalization of women and the environment. Alfred North Whitehead and John Muir express these ideas within the history of science and the environment.

Finally, a view of how the “wild woman” archetype informs women’s identity from the perspective of natural instincts comes from the literary genre of nature writing. The selection that best expresses the cultural ecofeminist implications of gender and nature is Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ *Women who Run with the Wolves*.

Chapter III explores Dr. Galligar’s formative early years, from her attendance at public schools in Wayne County, IL, through her graduation from Decatur High School, her B.A. from James Millikin University, and her MA and PhD from the University of Illinois. Woven throughout this time period – from 1904 to 1934 – are the traditional and unconventional perspectives with which Dr. Galligar contended, both in her chosen profession, biology, and the ecology movement. *The Decaturian*, or as it was nicknamed, *The Dec*, the student-run newspaper at Millikin, is invaluable as it reveals contradictory social attitudes in local academia in the 1920s.

Dr. Galligar co-wrote and co-published a biological survey for *Ecology* magazine with prominent early ecologist Dr. Henry Conard; she conducted her MA and PhD research with him as well. Worster’s *Nature’s Economy* illuminates the scientific and

social forces at work on the fledgling American school of ecology during this period of research.

Chapter IV examines the thirteen years Dr. Galligar worked as a professor at James Millikin University, and the four years she spent at Kansas State Teacher's College. Again, *The Dec* contains articles that show how America still grappled with the concept of women in the academic world. Drs. Galligar and Sperry moved to Pittsburg this time, and the social environment amongst the faculty and administration at KSTC, coupled with Dr. Galligar's aggressive personality, most likely were the primary factors in her dismissal. The result of losing her career was the dismantling of who she understood herself to be.

The subject of Chapter V is Dr. Galligar's unpublished book of poetry, *Verse: Verses for Paradoxs and Other Verses*. A rigorous process of categorization identifies which topics most prominently featured in Dr. Galligar's works. The main categories relevant to this thesis are "ethics and environment" and "identity: self, others, and nature."

Chapter VI examines Dr. Galligar's attitudes and beliefs about death. The importance the theme of death played in Dr. Galligar's "third life," and identity, as it relates to her poetry, necessitates its own chapter. Dr. Galligar explored death in nature, saw it as the ceaseless flow of molecules, yearned for it as an end to her suffering, and viewed it metaphysically. Her poetry ranges from practical observational science to a contemplation of deeper spiritual meaning of God, life, death, and the continuity of all things. Within these topics, she expresses her desire for death as mercy, as an end to the

cruel existence she experienced after her forced retirement. The chapter ends with her own death in 1975, at the age of 70, through Dr. Sperry's eulogy.

Chapter VII is an epilogue and contains conclusions and recommendations for further research. The epilogue is the author's own exploration of Paradoxs, the property first owned by Drs. Sperry and Galligar and later granted to Pittsburg State University. The chapter explores the potential usefulness of physical locations as historical sources. It incorporates the ideas espoused by cultural ecofeminists and the environmentalist observations of Edward Abbey.

The archive at Pittsburg State University's Axe Library holds the Sperry-Galligar Collection. Within that collection are Dr. Sperry's works and journals, which contain a great wealth of information that is still untapped. Future research in the collection will further develop America's environmental history as it relates to the reclamation of prairies in the United States and the development of the applied ecology movement. Because of his marriage to Dr. Galligar, it will possibly serve to enrich the history of gender as well.

The title of this thesis, *Gladys-On-The-Prairie*, is an homage to the old-fashioned names of plants, such as *Amethyst-In-The-Snow* and *Love-On-The-Mist*. *Gladys-On-The-Prairie* identifies her geographical location but also implies that like the species she studied, she adapted and survived the changing climates of her personal, social, and natural environments.

## CHAPTER II

### *EXTANT TAXON:*

#### WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

“Just what is in a name?”

“Identity I claim.”

-Gladys C. Galligar/Dys, *Possessed Verse* (1956)<sup>2</sup>

“A woman's issues of soul cannot be treated by carving her into a more acceptable form as defined by an unconscious culture, nor can she be bent into a more intellectually acceptable shape by those who claim to be the sole bearers of consciousness.”

-Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes

*Women who Run with the Wolves* (1992)<sup>3</sup>

This chapter explores the social, historical, and literary influences in the field of women's environmental history. Though somewhat eclectic in appearance, these sources taken together contextualize the different aspects of Dr. Galligar's life. She was an intellectual, scientist, and educator; an unconventional white middle-class woman; and a

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<sup>2</sup> Gladys C. Galligar, “The Key” *Verse: Verses for Paradoxs and Other Verses*, 15, Sperry-Galligar Collection, University Archives, AXE Library, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, KS.

<sup>3</sup> Clarissa Pinkola-Estes, *Women who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 6.

poet. The foundations and frameworks within each of these fields allows for a deeper insight into Dr. Galligar's biography.

Gerda Lerner's *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* is a summary of early groundwork in establishing and defining women's history. Writing in 1975, the year of Dr. Galligar's death, Lerner explains that historians had provided radically different historical timelines for women and men. Men's history reflects a traditional interpretation based in large part on political events. Women's history differs because the masculine sphere largely excluded women from politics. For example, Lerner writes that the definition and achievement of women's liberties have not correlated with that of men's liberties within contemporary scholarship on the American Revolution. Lerner argues in favor of an alternative timeline for women – one based on an escalation or diminishment of status on their own terms, related to their relationship to their role as mothers.<sup>4</sup> For example, women's historian Anne Firor Scott, speaking about Southern women's issues in the decade leading up to the Civil War, indicated that women's general discontent with their roles in the 1850s was a significant contributing factor to the Southern social unrest that culminated in secession from the North. Both Lerner and Firor Scott describe different frameworks for the narrative of women's history. Lerner advocates an alternate timeline whereby "[w]omen's freedom depends on breaking those links ... between sexuality and reproduction; child-bearing and child-rearing."<sup>5</sup> Firor Scott accepts the traditional historical narrative but more thoroughly

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<sup>4</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 154-55.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 155.

investigates the attitudes of the domestic sphere and determines how those attitudes manifest themselves the political realm.

It is useful to base women's history on an alternative timeline with parameters defined by women; such a history views women outside of a traditional male value system that has so long characterized women's role within in society. Viewing women on their own terms creates a more complete thread of the narrative, yet these parameters fail to incorporate women into the narrative as a whole. By seeking out gaps in traditional history but recognizing that women have been under-acknowledged participants in the political realm, one can identify their active contributions to an established timeline. However, this activity ignores experiences that are unique to women.

Gladys C. Galligar's life was a tapestry that interlaced elements of both a unique women's history and an enriched conventional history. An investigation of her involvement as an actor in the public sphere and within the sphere unique to women illuminates how she defined herself. Lerner asserts that historians should limit their emphasis on the relationship between society and woman as mother and wife. Dr. Galligar married but was unable to have children; she also spent long periods apart from her husband. Her life story allows an examination of women's history within Lerner's parameters. Firor Scott reminds us that the personal is political, and when we recognize that Dr. Galligar defined herself beyond wife and mother, we can better understand why her status within the American scientific community was such an important aspect of her self-identity, even after her forced retirement in 1953.

While Dr. Galligar's life presents a unique opportunity to test the limits of women's history, her activities allow the historian to examine the development of the environmental movement as well. As a scientist studying the natural world, Dr. Galligar understood, both personally and professionally, the role of ecology and its transformation from arcane science into one of the greatest social concerns of twentieth century society. Donald Worster's *Nature's Economy*, written in 1977, remains the authority on the historical evolution of ecology, officially defined at the Madison Botanical Congress in 1894 as a "subdiscipline of plant physiology that emphasized adaptations of organisms to the natural environment."<sup>6</sup> Despite its prominence in the field of environmental history, Worster's work shows little regard for the contributions made by women and a serious critique is therefore in order on the following pages.

There are two examples of this discrepancy, both countered by Dr. Jean Langenheim's 1996 article "Early History and Progress of Women Ecologists." First, Worster describes the early biogeographers – those Westerners who ventured into little-explored regions of the world to map the plants of the area – strictly as "men."<sup>7</sup> Yet Dr. Langenheim emphasizes that female biogeographers had equal or in some instances better educations and training than their adventurous male counterparts, and they traveled and explored the same regions of the world. Despite these women's participation in

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<sup>6</sup> Jean Langenheim, "Early History and Progress of Women Ecologists: Emphasis upon Research Contributions," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 27 (1996), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 193.

biogeography, the scientific community regarded women in the field as mere amateurs.<sup>8</sup> Second, in Worster's etymology of the word "ecology," he fails to recognize Ellen Swallow's 1892 presentation and interpretation of "oekology" predated its 1960s application as an applied science concerned with the interrelatedness of human health and the environment.<sup>9</sup> The male bias of earlier works in environmental history unfairly downplayed the role of women within the sciences. Dr. Elizabeth Blum's "Linking American Women's History and Environmental History: A Preliminary Historiography," reviews the extant literature up to 2000 and indicates several obstacles historians face when categorizing and organizing a biography rooted in women's environmental history.<sup>10</sup> Both environmental history and women's history are in their adolescence; the combination is zygotic. The limited amount of literature focusing specifically on women's environmental history contemporary with Blum's writing has attracted little criticism; the notable exception being the rejection of cultural ecofeminist ideology, which stems from a movement of female sociologists. As historical ecofeminists understood, the clash of feminine nature and the male logic prior to Blum produced varied and harsh arguments without producing a winner.<sup>11</sup> Ecofeminism contains the largest selection of theoretical frameworks within women's environmental history. Karen Warren argues though feminists share basic ideas regarding the status of women in

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<sup>8</sup> Langenheim, "Early History", 3. For more information, see Donald' Worster's *Nature's Economy*, Chapter 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth D. Blum, "Linking American Women's History and Environmental History: A Preliminary Historiography," *H-Environment* (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1.



any patriarchal society – that “sexism exists, is wrong, and it ought to be changed” – the ways it is understood to exist, how it is detrimental to society, and how it should be managed vary between different feminist schools of thought. In this same way, no two ecofeminists are the same. Warren suggests “liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical and socialist feminisms, Black and Third World feminisms” as a few examples. However, each school of thought shares a fundamental idea – that the domination of male-oriented societies over the natural world is a feminist issue.<sup>12</sup>

According to Val Plumwood, two main categories emerge from the literature – “social ecofeminism” and “cultural ecofeminism.” Both contain the same basic elements – to provide a paradigm that comments on the connection between the masculine sphere’s domination over both the environment and the feminine interaction with the environment – and both propose to remedy women’s and nature’s subservience. The result too often is ahistorical and suffers from the same elitism it proposes to correct, as in the case of the social ecofeminists. The creation of a Gaia-minded psyche whose intuitive connection to the environment purportedly exists only in women would satisfy cultural ecofeminists but no one else.<sup>13</sup>

The differences between these ecofeminist philosophies, as well as one of the challenges presented by ecofeminist thought within history, is more easily identified when considering how Dr. Galligar’s biography and writings should be viewed as a work within women’s environmental history. Inherent in sociological and historical schools of

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Warren, “Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective,” *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994): 614-42.

<sup>13</sup> Blum, “Linking American Women’s History.”

ecofeminist thought is the view that women's environmental history should be subject to its social context. . Though it is important to understand Dr. Galligar in terms her society, this approach discredits her work and perspective as ultimately beholden to values created by males simply because she existed within a hierarchical society that tended to discredit the accomplishments of women.

Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* was the first significant work of social ecofeminist history. At the core of *Death of Nature* exists the argument that the Scientific Revolution is responsible for creating a second sphere of existence for human beings: the first being the organic, family- and community-based societies of feudal Europe. The second emerged as a mechanized, industrial byproduct of the new language and art of scientific inquiry and understanding.<sup>14</sup> Without understanding the empirical, objective underpinnings that validated the logical, masculine social structure, Merchant argues, humanity will continue to ignore what feminists and environmentalists have fought so hard to rectify in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: that nature and woman must be liberated from this socially and economically harmful status quo.<sup>15</sup> The idea that natural science and environment as it exists are segregated is not without historical precedent.

In *Nature's Economy*, Worster describes the segregation between the organic environment and the scientific viewpoint and addresses this segregation as incomplete in terms of the study of the natural world. British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead

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<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Movement* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 294.

described an uncompromising reductionism of the great scientific philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – Descartes, Galileo, and Newton – into all matters of the natural world, contending that the attempt to categorize nature by its smallest, simplest elements had reduced the natural world to its biological and chemical components. Upon relocating to America, Whitehead saw progress towards relatedness – that is, the integration of the scientific and the “depth, complexity, and even mystery” of the natural world. American scientists, Whitehead recognized in 1925, had begun to grasp the “realization of events disposed in an interlocked community,” or the interdependence of organic communities to the degree that “none could be abstracted without altering its own identity.”<sup>16</sup> Whitehead’s ideas of relatedness stretches further back to the lauded naturalist of the Gilded Age’s conservation movement, John Muir, when he famously quipped “[w]hen we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”<sup>17</sup> The importance of interrelatedness within any given ecosystem and uniqueness of an organism – context and identity - is inextricable.

In part, women have defined themselves throughout the course of American history with their name – specifically, how their names identified their relationship to their husbands. Una Stannard’s *Mrs Man* is a history of American women’s identity, written and published amidst the social firestorm fueled by second wave feminist intellectual dialogue. Stannard traces the relationship between women and men in terms of legal rights, social status, and philosophical roles from 1600s Europe to America’s Lucy Stoner League. “For hundreds of years men and women had believed that God or

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<sup>16</sup> Worster, 316-17.

<sup>17</sup> John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991).

nature had created the female sex defective, that women could not generate physical life in their wombs, that they could barely generate mental life in their heads, and that they were as weak in body as in mind,” she summarizes in her concluding chapter. These beliefs created a relationship between male and female in which woman existed not only to serve her husband but also to become absorbed within his essence, thus losing her identity in the process. It was the impetus of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to contend that they were, contrary to popular belief, as complete human beings as men and just as capable or incapable in all facets of human life.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Galligar’s channeled her creative energies during her forced retirement after 1953 into a notebook of poems she called *Verse: Verses for Paradox and Other Verses*. These 183 poems cover a variety of topics including, in many instances, nature; many fall under the genre of nature writing. There are two important texts used for further understanding Dr. Galligar’s life and poetry: the first is Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ 1996 work *Women who Run with the Wolves*; the second is the anthological *Norton Book of Nature Writing*, which includes the selected works of Aldo Leopold. Galligar would have been familiar with Leopold and his environmental philosophy because Leopold once mentored her husband, Dr. Sperry.

As surely as Carolyn Merchant’s *Death of Nature* is a crucial contribution to social ecofeminist history, so is Dr. Estes’ *Women who Run with the Wolves* an important addition to cultural ecofeminist thought, expressed through the literary genre of nature writing. Couched in a language that is both mythical and innately understood, *Women*

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<sup>18</sup> Una Stannard, *Mrs. Man* (San Francisco: Germainbooks, 1977), 332. For information regarding the merger of wife to husband, see Chapter 8.

*who Run with the Wolves* is a compilation of myths and stories that describe the “Wild Woman” archetype. Dr. Estes, a Jungian analyst and storyteller, argues the importance of such stories and myths lies in their ability to express that which is oppressed within women – the severed connection between feminine soul and natural world.<sup>19</sup> “It’s not by accident that the pristine wilderness of our planet disappears as the understanding of our own inner wild nature fades. It is not so difficult to comprehend why old forests and old women are viewed as not very important resources.”<sup>20</sup>

The Wild Woman exists within woman’s instinctive nature, and she goes by many names in many cultures and intellectual circles. In Spanish, she is “*Rio Abajo Rio*, the river beneath the river”; in Mexico, “*La Loba*, the wolf woman,”; and in Hungarian, “*O Erdoben*, She of the Woods.” From the psychoanalytic perspective, she is the “id, the Self, the medial nature,” in biology it is “the typical or fundamental nature.”<sup>21</sup> The Wild Woman archetype has many manifestations, and as such, all women know her, Dr. Estes claims, whether they embrace or turn away from their instinctual natures.

As Dr. Galligar struggled, at age 49, with the loss of her identity in the wake of the end of her career, she experienced an intense period of lethargy. Dr. Estes explains that separation from the Wild Woman causes, in the language of women, feelings of “fatigue, depressed ... weak, without animation ... without meaning ... volatile ... inert.”<sup>22</sup> Dr. Galligar expressed these feelings throughout her poetry from the crippling

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<sup>19</sup> Pinkola-Estes, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.

lethargy in 1956 when she seriously contemplated suicide to the still melancholy at the end of her life in 1975.<sup>23</sup>

In “Historiography,” Blum decides the best examples of women’s environmental history exist in the form of biographies. Blum’s claim runs counter to the arguments made by social historians like Gerder. In *The Majority Finds its Past*, Gerder outlines the stages of developing a holistic methodology to women’s history. She presented this description of the fluctuating conceptual framework in 1974 when it had been a mere 5 years since historians had taken up the task of developing women’s history as an independent field.

The first stage, “compensatory” histories, emphasize the contributions to women who acted against their socially prescribed roles or were exceptional in some way. These histories deemphasize the impact of society’s lesser strata to the detriment of a complete history. Indeed, earlier women’s historians and sociologists encountered similar attacks when later historians pointed out that early works of “women’s” history failed to include the lives of minority and economically disadvantaged women.

Reconstructing biographies within women’s environmental history is part of the initial stage of creating a framework for understanding any new historical discipline. Nancy Unger’s *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* is one of a handful of books available within American women’s environmental history. Unger’s work overviewed how women from different socio-economic

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<sup>23</sup> Chapter VI of this thesis details the various views Dr. Galligar held and how she grappled with death in her poetry.

backgrounds experienced relocation to the West, and as such acknowledges the valid concerns from later social and historical feminist writers.

Dr. Galligar is no more important to women's environmental history than those minorities and economically disadvantaged who experienced the environment on their own terms. However, she has left a thorough, written account of her life; one that merits historical study because she entered a gender-integrated discipline in her home state and managed to define herself despite middle class social conventions. Once transplanted to a state where professional opportunity was far more limited, she used her education and her shattered identity to explore the natural world through poetry.

## CHAPTER III

### NEITHER TARDY NOR ABSENT

APRIL 1904 – JUNE 1931

Gladys C. Galligar's spent most of her first twenty-five years in Illinois. Existing records focus on her scholastic achievements, to include various awards and report cards from her elementary and high schools; only her high school yearbook contains indications of her future interests. She attended common schools in rural Illinois until she attended high school in Decatur. Upon graduation, she began her undergraduate studies in Biology, graduating with a BS in Biology with a minor in Chemistry. For a total of four years – once during her high school education and once during her undergraduate studies – she interrupted her education to serve as an elementary school teacher. This chapter examines society's understanding of gender and its influence on Galligar's formative years. It also surveys the development of her interest in ecological studies.

Gladys C. Galligar was born in Fairfield, Wayne County, Illinois on June 2, 1904. She was born to tenant farmers Fanny Galligar (*nee* Newton), an Illinois native, and Caleb Galligar, born in Kentucky, also had five younger children.



Gladys first attended school in 1910. As an elementary student at Black Oak rural school USD no. 107 in Wayne County, she earned eleven monthly awards for being “Neither Tardy Nor Absent” over the next four years. While attending Bear Prairie USD no. 104 from 1918-1919 in Grover township, she received 12 certificates of proficiency and twenty “Excellence in Spelling” awards for perfectly recited lessons. For her seventh grade report card, she carried an average of 92%, which dropped during her 8<sup>th</sup> grade an 88.73% average<sup>1</sup>. At graduation from Decatur High School in 1925, she was a member of both the Silver and Gold Delta honor societies.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the only personal evidence of Galligar’s future from this time is printed beside her photograph in her high school yearbook. Her motto, “[a]mong us but not of us,”<sup>3</sup> is an abbreviation of 1 John 2:19, which in the King James Version reads: “[t]hey [the many antichrists] went out from us, but they were not of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”<sup>4</sup> The First Epistle of John, written before the Romans had recognized Christianity as a state religion, was an argument against Docetism – a contemporary argument that Jesus of Nazareth was not the incarnation of God; he only appeared to be.<sup>5</sup> The abbreviated quotation Galligar chose indicates a firm sense of self-identity that may have put her at odds with her peers and teachers. It also suggests she was interested in

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<sup>1</sup> Folder 41b, “Academic Series 2,” Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>2</sup> Folder F1, “Biographical,” Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>3</sup> “Biographical”, Decanoise yearbook, 28, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 2:16 (KJV)

<sup>5</sup> Burton, Ernest DeWitt. “The Epistles of John,” *The Biblical World* 7;51896, 367.

the recognizing truth in instruction. That her chosen profession was one of observable and quantifiable phenomena and more intellectually challenging than traditional female roles could only have reinforced this attitude.

Galligar interrupted her high school education to teach in a school house at Pleasant Ridge rural school, USD no. 105 in Wayne County, for \$50 per school month for the 1922-23 academic year and \$70 per month for 1923-24.<sup>6</sup> She taught again as an undergraduate at Mount Pleasant rural school for the 1926-28 and 1929-1930 school years, increasing her pay to \$130 in 1926-27 and \$140 in 1927-28. Her experience as an elementary teacher totaled 38 months before her graduation with a BS from Millikin. In keeping with the times, her teacher's contracts carried a clause that rendered the contract void "in case the said teacher gets married."<sup>7</sup> According to Millikin University's student newspaper during this 2-year interval, Galligar "made friends of the older people and struck up many staunch comradeships among her pupils."<sup>8</sup> A final contract, in the amount of \$80 for each of eight school months "Plus the Pension fund as outlined by the Co. Supt.," exists for the 1934-1935 school year, but that contract was never fulfilled; Dr. Galligar began teaching biology at Millikin University that school year.

The social and political forces that were redefining America during the Interwar Years provided a foundation for young Galligar's empowerment. The "Roaring Twenties" saw the emergence of a new American woman who was increasingly

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<sup>6</sup> Folder 41a, "Academic Series 2," Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>7</sup> Folder 41a, Academic Box 2" Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>8</sup> "Brief Interviews: Biology Student Assistant Has Done Considerable Research Work," *The Decaturian Weekly*, 8 March 1929.

participating as man's equal in the public sphere. Activities previously approved of only for men, such as drinking, smoking, and engaging in premarital sex, became openly available to women. Reflecting on his experiences during the decade, however, one youth counselor observed that most girls and young women of the period were still torn between their newfound social emancipation and the lingering belief that such activities were sinful.<sup>9</sup> It is unclear whether Galligar rebelled with youthful contempt for older values. What does become clear is that she worked for and embraced the newfound liberties and status associated with becoming a respected educator and researcher. While most young women outgrew Prohibition-era culture and reverted to more traditional social roles following its repeal, Galligar continued to challenge traditional expectations.

Millikin University's weekly student-run newspaper, *The Decaturian*, or as it was nicknamed, *The Dec* contains a wealth of information regarding Galligar's activities as well as for Millikin's educational climate. What emerges from the pages of *The Dec* is further proof of the contradictions experienced by female students at Millikin. There is evidence that points to increased focus on women's accomplishments and agency in their professional and personal lives, but there are also examples of negative views held in common regarding the general nature of women.

One article, penned by an anonymous *Dec* staff writer and titled "Moral Education at the Point of a Gun" in April 1928, reacted with mocking surprise when the Women's Self Government Association (WSGA) issued regulatory standards for the activities Millikin women should and should not participate in regarding courtship.. The

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<sup>9</sup> Estelle B. Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," *The Journal of American History* 61, no. 2 (September 1974), 377.

author first acknowledged it was the directive of any such organization to impose wisdom upon the governed and then the author discussed several reasons behind imposing control over women's dates - all of which concerned the reputation of the co-educational University. The article expressed dissatisfaction that the WSGA viewed the female students as unable use their own discretion regarding the nature of their relationships. Ultimately, the article concluded such dictated morality proved only the self-actualized and purportedly enforceable "wisdom" of the WSGA. More generally, it asserted that America "chafes under some ten millions of laws regulating every conceivable action of the individual; laws passed by those who apparently have not the least doubt between what is right and wrong."<sup>10</sup> The date of the article – halfway through America's thirteen years of Prohibition – characterizes a larger discussion within American society as to how far the citizens of the U.S. should permit their government to regulate behavior. The author does not blatantly expose the sexist ideas that provoked the WSGA's supervisory formula; for example, it does not suggest what regulations should be imposed on men's actions on dates. Nor does the article acknowledge ideas of social equality regarding women's romantic relationships. But certainly the author questioned the WSGA's authority to restrict behavior and the impact such regulation had on the personal choices of Millikin's single women.

Further articles indicate the important steps these women were making towards academic success in spheres that by and large prohibited women's entry into them in the past. An October 1925 article explained that Suzanne Kissel, one of nineteen French students participating in a government exchange program, enrolled at Millikin with the

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<sup>10</sup> "Moral Education at the Point of a Gun," *The Decaturian Weekly*, 19 April 1928.

intention of studying political science so that she could return to France to practice law with a knowledge of the political status of women in industry. Kissel also expressed an interest in social work programs.<sup>11</sup> In the same edition, four female Millikin graduates had gone on to become High School educators and businesswomen – presumably an atypical achievement, given the lack of recognition for women who had gone on to be mothers or housewives.

*Dec* articles did not always defend or laud women. Some provide examples of the social attitudes that criticized women's behavior. These examples are decidedly more overt when Galligar was an undergraduate student at Millikin in the 1920s rather than when she was a professor in the 1930s and 1940s. Articles did not always express a sophisticated, nuanced argument in favor of a particular stance – sometimes they presented themselves as common witticisms, as with this example that demonstrates exasperation at women's perceived inability to react positively to either male honesty or deception regarding courtship:

It's better to love 'em and leave 'em  
Than just stick around and deceive 'em  
But women are queer,  
And I'll tell you right here,  
Either method is certain to peeve 'em.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Former Millikin Women Teaching and in Business," *The Decaturian Weekly*, 1 October 1925.

<sup>12</sup> *The Decaturian Weekly*, 1 October 1925.

And this quip from a column compiled by the questionably self-designated modern Diogenes of Sinope, recalling women's apparent inability to refrain from gossiping:

“[t]hree women may keep a secret if two are dead and the third is on a desert island.”<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes the contradiction juxtaposes humor and achievement. Under a front page *Dec* photo featuring Millikin's Kappa pledges – which includes, of the five women and single man, Gladys C. Galligar in the top left hand corner – is the large letter declaration “ARE GIRLS MORE INTELLIGENT!”

Though American women lived with prescribed behaviors in popular mind, evidence suggests that, at least at Millikin University, they were more prominent actors in the academic sphere. Inevitably, any change within a society is met with stubborn folkways and traditions. Many women enjoyed the liberty afforded by pursuing their goals in college yet eventually most would marry and have a family and a career, if they chose, that was in line with American society's traditions. One example is that of Lelah Galligar, Gladys Galligar's younger sister. Lelah attended Millikin University while Dr. Galligar was teaching biology there. Lelah married in 1937 and graduated Cum Laude from Millikin in 1940. She had followed her older sister's example, attained a degree Biology, and become, as her older sister had, the biology apprentice. Her efforts awarded her a biology scholarship to attend Tulsa's University. She never received a graduate degree; either she did not pursue this opportunity or ended her education between 1940

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<sup>13</sup> “Gleams from Diogene's [sic] Lantern,” *The Decaturian Weekly*, 5 November 1925.

and 1956. Lelah and first husband, John Scrimshire, did raise a family of two children, and she taught in public schools for 25 years.<sup>14</sup>

Gladys Galligar was an accomplished student at Milliken. As an undergraduate student from 1925-1931, Galligar received high academic marks in a variety of subjects, was active in several campus organizations and clubs, contributed heavily to research for a joint effort directed by an ecologist who would later be acknowledged for his dedication to his field. She returned once again to rural Illinois to teach in country schools in Macon County for the 1929-1930 school year.<sup>15</sup>

A demonstration of young Galligar's deep appreciation for nature comes in the form of her freshman botany notebook.<sup>16</sup> Eighty-two pages of eloquently transcribed contents - in terms of both stylish and legibly written notes and the painstaking rendering of the details of the sketches - suggest her respect for the assignment and for the subject studied.

The content of the first fifty-five pages reveals a thorough investigation of the basic scientific elements of living plants, supplemented with carefully hand-copied illustrations. These sections are a formative re-creation of botanical basics as the instructor and course materials revealed them. The detail afforded the illustrations and the artistry of the lettering are revealing. The dashes are ruled and the Baskerville-esque

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<sup>14</sup> Obituary of Lelah Scrimshier Jeter. Dr. Galligar's inability to have children was a serious factor in her dedication to her career, covered in more detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>15</sup> Folder 41a, Academic Box 2, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>16</sup> Folder f56a, Academic Box 2, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

lettering flourishes with highly stylized serifs.<sup>17</sup> “Botany 1925” represents a belabored exercise and the creation of a keepsake document.

Galligar’s uniquely creative contribution to the assignment resides in the last two chapters: “Clipping’s [sic] pertaining to botany” and “Poems and illustrations,” located in the last twenty-six pages of the assignment. These pages are filled with poems and images removed from unidentified magazines. The wonder and preservation of the natural world – especially trees – was the subject of Galligar’s interest.

It is arguable that Galligar was merely an enthusiastic student in her first year of college. She did keep most of her course notes from Millikin and they bore the same attention to detail as “Botany 1925”. She was likely influenced by the assignment, given her later choice of research subject and the reinvention of the assignment in her instructor’s notes regarding assignments for biology classes.<sup>18</sup> In Dr. Galligar’s personal journal in 1955, she expressed a desire to illustrate a book of her nature poetry– a collection that would have held more than a few similarities to the collected photos and poems of others at the end of “Botany 1925.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to courses in Biology, Galligar explored History, Bacteriology, French and German.<sup>20</sup> At the close of the Fall-Winter semester in 1930, *The Dec* mentions that

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<sup>17</sup> Folder f56a, Academic Box 2, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>18</sup> Folder f71, Academic Box 2, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>19</sup> Galligar, Gladys, “Dys, possessed Vol. 1,” 19 Jan. 1955, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>20</sup> Academic Box 2, Sperry-Galligar Collection.



the mid-semester grades were distributed and several families were sure to make serious inquiries over the break. Only one student, Gladys Galligar, had a 4.0 for that semester.<sup>21</sup>

Galligar accomplished much during her undergraduate studies aside from high marks. During her undergraduate studies, Gladys C. Galligar took a stroll outside her own neighborhood of familiar plants and traveled to Long Island, New York, to participate in summer coursework. The two consecutive summers she spent doing fieldwork and lab research empowered her to commit to professional research. The experience also resulted in her first scholarly publication.

Galligar co-published “Third Survey of a Long Island Salt Marsh” in the July 1929 edition of *Ecology* with her mentor, Dr. Henry Shoemaker Conard. Dr. Conard (1874-1971) was an accomplished American botanist. He was America’s leading authority on bryophytes – land plants with non-vascular tissue that contain the families liverworts, hornworts and mosses - and was recognized one of the early advocates of the applied ecology movement. This particular consideration won him recognition within the ecological scientific community during his 80<sup>th</sup> year, when he would become the first recipient of the Ecological Society of America’s *Distinguished Ecologist Award* in 1954.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Sperry, her husband, obtained a copy of the article for Dr. Galligar from the December 1954 issue of *The Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*, which she cut and pasted into Vol. 1 of her personal journals *Dys., Possessed*. “I studied with Dr. Conrad at the Long Island Biological Laboratory,” she writes, “in the summer of 1928

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<sup>21</sup> “Mid-Term Grades Show 97 Cases of ‘Unsatisfactory,’” *The Decaturian Weekly*, 4 December 1930.

<sup>22</sup> Today, the Eminent Ecologist Award.

(had Dorothy Frances Rice Scholarship). He is the finest botany teacher I had and one of the greatest teachers of all my teachers.”<sup>23</sup> Her affection and respect for her former mentor is evident; she also sent him a letter upon his recognition within the field and he responded in kind<sup>24</sup>

The research Galligar conducted while attending her second summer course at the Biological Laboratory of the Long Island Biological Association, Inc. at Cold Harbor Springs, Long Island, N.Y., in 1928. The previous summer she had received an “A” for the Field Zoology course. During the six-week course Galligar completed 108 hours on 33 field trips, 75 hours of laboratory work, 38 hours of lectures and 4 hours of examinations. She received an “A” again for the Field Botany and Plant Ecology course, in which she spent 136 hours on field trips, 84 hours in the laboratory, 28 hours of lectures and 3 hours of examinations. A note written on the letter of certification for coursework completed recommended that her work, described as “credibly done,” be approved for 8 hours of Biology 40.<sup>25</sup>

On her copy of “Third Survey of a Long Island Salt Marsh,” she had proudly written in her bold, neat cursive on the top right corner, “[m]ost of the work reported herein was done by myself. Gladys C. Galligar.” The article credits her work as well: “[t]he partial resurvey reported herein was made by the junior author in the summer of

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<sup>23</sup> Galligar, Gladys, “Dys, possessed Vol. 1” 19 Jan. 1955, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>24</sup> Correspondences, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>25</sup> Folder 1, Publications & Presentations, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

1928.”<sup>26</sup> Publication was a gratifying accomplishment for the 24-year old female undergraduate, a feat her instructors and co-author obviously respected.

The article was the third survey of the Jones Salt Marsh, an estuarial marsh that contained both saltwater and freshwater plant life. The first belt transect survey of the region had been conducted in 1910-11 by Conard and the second in 1922, with the intention of examining the tension zone between salt- and freshwater by describing the communities of plants and making conclusions about the adaption to the natural and artificial conditions of the harbor.

Conard and Galligar’s methodology was based on the physiographic model, an American ecological innovation first described in 1899 by Henry Cowles of the University of Chicago. Cowles’ “dynamic ecology” was interested in the progressive development of plant species in a specific region; in his case, the shores of Lake Michigan. “[Cowles] trace[d] a pattern of ecological succession *in space* which paralleled the development of vegetation in time.” Cowles recognized the differential environmental needs for plants, from hydrophytes, or water-loving plants, along the beach back to the xerophytic plants that needed little water, and beyond, to the deepening treeline. Cowles’ physiographic model and University of Nebraska researcher Frederic Clemens’, “climax community,” or the efforts by nature to produce an apex biosphere affected only by the effects of climate, would dominate American ecological thought well into the 1940s.<sup>27</sup> What Cowles and Clemens failed to incorporate into either model was

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<sup>26</sup> Henry S. Conard and Gladys C. Galligar, “Third Survey of a Long Island Salt Marsh,” *Ecology* 10, no. 3: 326.

<sup>27</sup> Worster, 208-11.

the impact pioneering or indigenous humans had on the natural environment. The reason for this may be that both these Midwestern ecologists had the opportunity to observe environments that were relatively undisturbed by the actions of man. Galligar and Conard, conducted their research in a region populated by Western migrants for centuries. Not only that, two previous surveys of the area existed. The mentor and student had access to a recorded natural history that could not justifiably discredit how man's activities had potentially affected the biosphere they studied. Even then, "Third Survey" only notes man's industrial mark on the environment and makes no conclusions based on the potential effect these actions had in the biosphere.

Defining the parameters proved somewhat challenging because of the inexact measurements originally used. The stump of a Black Cherry tree that had been living in 1910 and the later discovery of a survey stake helped Galligar and Conard identify the approximate boundaries for the third survey. Within the somewhat elusive parameters of the study, Galligar spent 136 hours of field trips identifying twenty-seven species of biotic life.

The introduction of "Third Survey" hinted at the later movement within ecology to practically apply the principles of ecology in an effort to understand human's impact on the environment.<sup>28</sup> "Third Survey" noted not only the potential impact of increased rainfall for the advancement of the freshwater plant communities but also suggested a causeway, built across the inner region of the harbor to create a solid ground for the

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to Chapter 2's discussion of the etymology of "ecology" for further details regarding pre-1960s conceptions of ecology.

construction of a highway in 1904, created a barrier that decreased the progression of saltwater and saltwater plants.

Their conclusions described an adapting environment and noted a more rapid encroachment of freshwater plants while the saltwater plants were retreating towards the ocean. The authors drew these conclusions from both the survey of the plant species and varieties and a soil acidity test performed by an unnamed senior student from Dartmouth. The conclusions stressed precipitation was the main cause of the increasing dominance of freshwater vegetation, further verified by higher levels of water based on driftwood locations.<sup>29</sup> The conclusions failed to mention further evidence, if any, of man's interaction with the Jones Salt Marsh.

Conard and Galligar did not attempt to interpret human events as possessing negative or positive impacts on the studied transect. That they mentioned human causes of adaptations within a biotic community suggests the scientific world was observing but not ready to commit to a deeper exploration of the human effect on the environment. Galligar and Dr. Conard survey and others were to become the preliminary studies within the tradition of Cowel and Clemens. . These surveys created a body of scientific work that, later in the century, necessitated an interpretation by which the scientific community considered the detrimental impact humans had been imposing on the natural world.

Galligar completed her B.A. from Millikin University in 1931, majoring in Biology and minoring in Chemistry. The next semester, fall of 1931, she chose the University of Illinois to complete her graduate and post-graduate degrees. The University of Illinois embraced the contributions its female students and faculty made to

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<sup>29</sup> Conard and Galligar: 336.

the development of the field of ecology. Her thesis and dissertations were “The Environment and Absorption of Water by the Root” and “Growth Studies on Excised Root Tips.”

In addition to these, Galligar published “Some Bryophytes of Macon County” in the 1934-35 edition of the Illinois Academy of Science. Under the tutelage of Dr. Stella Hague, University of Illinois, and using two identification guides by A.J. Grout, Dr. Galligar traipsed through the Sangamon River’s woody banks and in the ditches and pastures of Macon County in April and May of 1933. Likely taking advantage of the fact that biogeographers had not yet enumerated the mosses and lichens of Macon County, she enumerated 41 different species.<sup>30</sup> Conard’s influence was present; he was the leading authority on bryophytes at the time. Also apparent is that Galligar enjoyed working in the field. Within the two months she conducted her study, she meticulously examined logs, stumps, and trees that provided the symbiotic conditions necessary for the growth and development of bryophytes. In her copy of the draft of the article she noted, in her handwriting, that there were X species she found that unidentified in Grout’s guides.<sup>31</sup>

Galligar’s personal life would change dramatically between the completion of her B.S. at Millikin and her enrollment in the University of Illinois’s M.S. Program. In June of 1931, as she reached her twenty-eighth birthday, she was working for the biology department at Millikin when she conducted field research at an railroad station outside of

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<sup>30</sup> Illinois State Academy of Science. *Transactions of the Illinois State Academy of Science* 27 (1934-35): 61-62.

<sup>31</sup> Publications and Presentations, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

Champaign. The project director was 24-year-old Theodore Melrose Sperry. Sperry had just completed his M.S. at the University of Illinois and would begin work at the same university the following fall on his PhD. Sperry published his research, "Root Systems in Illinois Prairie," in *Ecology* magazine in 1935. In the final paragraph of his report, he thanked "Miss Gladys C. Galligar...who cooperated in the field work at the Champaign station . . ." Sperry's photographs accentuate his interest not only in the roots systems of the various biotic species in rural Champaign county but also features two photographs of Galligar. In one, she is posing by a Model A Coupe dubbed "Botany 180." In the second, taken December 5 of 1931, she is reading; beside her stretches the track by which they excavated the roots earlier that year for study.<sup>32</sup> The two began their romantic relationship during the summer of 1931.

In a poem titled "June 16, 1964" Galligar writes:

In '31 we met  
And dug a trench together  
To map the roots of plants.  
Soon did I discover  
A tangled growing net,  
  
Enmeshing all of me,  
And part of you encumbering.<sup>33</sup>

Their affection for each other from this initial meeting found opportunity to grow. In the first semester of the 1931-1932 school year, both Galligar and Sperry had secured Botany Assistant positions at the University of Illinois.<sup>34</sup> As early as December of that

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<sup>32</sup> Photographs, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

<sup>33</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 66.

<sup>34</sup> Correspondence, January-May 1931, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

year, Sperry referred to Gladys and himself as “we,” the mark of coupledness. When writing home to his mother, he talked about a recent skating trip he and Galligar had taken. “Thursday we took advantage to make a try at ice-skating on the new ice-skating rink. I got along as well as could be expected, but Gladys gave up inside of one minute and vowed she would not get on the ice again.” He managed to persuade Galligar to try it one more time. Despite making it across the ice, she stayed away from the Biology assistant’s ice-skating party later that week.<sup>35</sup>

They agreed to marry in June of 1935, after Galligar completed her PhD from the University of Illinois. The punctual daughter of tenant farmers who left only one personal clue to the character of her high school career thus had become an exemplary, worldly student interested in a variety of subjects but prone to revel in the sciences. Inspired by her rural upbringing and her mentors to engage the natural world as an observer, she pursued excellence in biological studies and chose a future career within that field that would deepen her appreciation both for the status she would receive within her profession and her interest in the plants and wildlife of America’s tallgrass prairie.

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<sup>35</sup> Correspondence, August – December 1931, Sperry-Galligar Collection.



## CHAPTER IV

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

JUNE 1935 – DECEMBER 1953

“Just what is in a name?”

“Identity I claim.”<sup>1</sup>

-Gladys C. Galligar

For personal and professional reasons, the couple agreed that Dr. Galligar should remain Dr. Gladys C. Galligar in name after their marriage. The refusal to change her name puzzled people who were unacquainted with her. According to Sperry's eulogy of his wife, friends and colleagues found occasion to negatively remark on the nontraditional decision.<sup>2</sup> Despite the social consequences, Dr. Galligar realized the importance of identity, and she worked diligently to develop and maintain hers.

From June of 1925 to June of 1948, Dr. Galligar's career as a professor and researcher flourished. She had many hours to devote to herself and to her career because of the couple's inability to have children and because of her long absences from her husband. She would endure the stress of transplanted from her native Illinois to Kansas

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<sup>1</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Folder 1, Biographical Organization, Sperry-Galligar Collection, Special Collections, Axe Library, Pittsburg, KS.

in 1948, an environment that was less fertile for the self-empowered woman. Upon the premature termination of her career, Dr. Galligar would face a crisis of self.

Since the years from 1935-1953 correspond with her career as a professor, it is easy to argue that Dr. Galligar identified herself during this period, both professionally and personally, as “instructor.” Her biographical data from 1951, however, shows that she was much more than an instructor. She was an assistant professor, associate professor, and acting chair of the biology department at Millikin University from 1934-1948 and a member of the biology department’s teaching staff at Kansas State Teacher’s College from 1948-1952. She published poems in two publications as well as four scholarly articles on the development of excised root tips. She maintained membership in eight scientific organizations and five professional organizations. She found occasion to give lectures to audiences of various academic and social organizations. Ten biographical listings printed her bibliographic information, including all issues of *American Men of Science* since 1935. She had traveled abroad to Mexico, Canada, Europe, and Africa, and in her leisure time, she enjoyed arts and literature, establishing native prairie gardens, traveling, writing, and drawing, and painting.

This account of her accomplishments reveals her professional pursuits and her identity. Her dedication to professional development and achievement, noteworthy for a woman of that time, becomes evident in a survey of the female faculty members of the biology department of KSTC for the years 1949-1952. This survey corresponds with the

years Dr. Galligar started and ended her career as a biology instructor, and it exposes the social dynamics at play for women in the sciences in that department.<sup>3</sup>

There were seven Biology faculty members in the department during that period. The department professor and associate professor were Dr. Oris Dellinger, and Dr. Claude Leist, respectively. The list of assistant professors and instructors changed slightly within that period. The first year Dr. Galligar achieved instructor status was 1949; she was the Biology Assistant for 1948. Ruth Moon was an associate professor, but she resigned after that year. Dr. Alice Elliot replaced Ms. Moon from 1950 to 1952. Only two faculty members – Ruth Moon and George Ruggles – had a MA; everyone else held a PhD. In her final year of teaching, 1951-1952, Galliger was the only faculty member with a PhD at KSTC who held the rank of instructor; all other instructors held only bachelors or masters degrees. Better educated than her fellow instructors, Dr. Galligar, who was the acting head of the Biology Department when she left Millikin University, was frustrated with a faculty with a ratio that favored men over women – especially one that had no women holding a position higher than assistant professor. The position of women within the faculty, in fact, is typical of the vexing sexism inherent in the larger academic community in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

This had been the case in the 1930s and 1940s at Millikin University, while Dr. Galligar was on the faculty there. Two records disclose Dr. Galligar's identity as an instructor at Millikin. The first reveals how her students perceived her through her publications in *The Dec*. The second is her correspondence with her husband, first while

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Galligar first taught at KSTC during the 1948-1949 academic year, but the "KSTC Bulletin" did not enumerate faculty members for that year, nor did the yearbook feature pictures of faculty.

they were living apart because of their careers and later after Dr. Sperry volunteered to join to the U.S. military forces in England during World War II.

The May 27, 1928 edition of *The Dec* included an article titled “The Chemical Nature of Women.”<sup>4</sup> It is social commentary on aspects of women couched in scientific terminology. The element “Woman” has a chemical symbol “Woe.” The article describes the occurrence, physical and chemical properties, and uses of “Woe.” Though the article is humorous in nature, it is only an exercise in describing the ideal woman and deviations from this ideal. It places attention on women’s appearance, on their volatile nature, and their expensive taste. One of the observations of “Woe” is in the form of their “accepted atomic weight.”

A standardized “normal” weight for women was a topic that Americans had recently been discussing. The increasing demand for readymade clothing in the 1930s made it necessary to seek a standard for measurements for women. In 1937, the US Department of Agriculture undertook a project designed to discover the average measurements by sampling 15,000 female volunteers. There were several problems with the report. First, volunteers accepted small payments for the use of their bodies. Women who responded to the call for volunteers were those who needed income, potentially causing an over-representation of malnourished test subjects. Second, only Caucasian women could participate in the study, though occasionally non-Caucasian women were measured with the understanding that their numbers could be removed from the study. Third, although the study noted rural women tended to be bigger than urban girls, the study relied heavily upon younger, single, urban women, resulting in bias. Not

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<sup>4</sup> “The Chemical Nature of Woman,” *The Decaturian Weekly*, 27 May 1938.

represented in the study was the Midwest. Even though the 1937 survey clearly had conceptual and methodological problems disregarded at the time of publication in 1941, the authors still managed to conclude that the sampled American women varied too much in size to come to an average measurement, let alone an average weight.<sup>5</sup>

The anonymous staff writer of “The Chemical Nature of Women” proposes “The accepted atomic weight is 120” with isotopes of 95 to 100, an unrealistic beauty ideal for Midwestern women in the 1930s. The article goes on to describe “Woe” as an absorber of expensive foods, a “powerful income reducing agent,” and a magnet for Ag, Au, and Pt – silver, gold, and platinum. Types of “Woe” include explosive varieties, the magnetic varieties, the varieties with high boiling points and low freezing points. It concludes that “Woe’s” usefulness is “highly ornamental [with] wide application in the arts and domestic sciences.” What the article identifies as women’s “chemical” nature, in short, is their relativity and usefulness to men.

“The Chemical Nature of Women” was likely a surreptitious attack launched at an unconventional biology instructor from a low-performing student fleeing the campus for the summer break. It used science as its vehicle for exploring the traditional gender roles and purpose of women. Submitted anonymously, it appeared in the last edition of the 1938 spring semester. There were only two biology instructors at Millikin at the time of the article’s publication: Dr. Galligar and Frederick Charles Hottes. The only Chemistry

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<sup>5</sup>Sigrid, “A Short History of U.S. Women’s Measurements Used for Patternmaking, Or, Why Nothing Seems to Fit,” *Analog Me Blog*, November 30, 2011.

instructors were James Harvey Ransom and John Zimmerman.<sup>6</sup> Of the four, only Dr. Galligar was female.

Certainly, Dr. Galligar would have held contrasting observations and descriptions of the qualities of women, especially when her own identity was not contingent on her husband's. She also may have been troubled at the writer's misidentification of the taxonomy of "Woe," which the author describes as being in the human family. Humans belong to the *Hominidae* family, which includes chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans, humans.

Another article in the November 18, 1938 edition of *The Dec* describes the ratio of women to men in the Kappa Society. The Kappa Society was created at Millikin in 1910 for those students who had achieved high honors at the University.<sup>7</sup> Of the 140 total members in 1938, 108 were women and 32 men. "The women aren't merely the unattractive frigidly intellectual type either," the article assures its readers, "for 57 – and this number will increase in the next few years – have married."<sup>8</sup> Of these distinguished and partially available women, "a few" had attained professional careers, including forty teachers. Of those forty, seventeen, including Dr. Gladys C. Galligar, were on university faculties; the majority of these were language instructors. Another Kappa member, Dr. Alice Ambrose Lazerourtz, was a professor in psychology and philosophy who had, when studying at Cambridge on a fellowship, found occasion to challenge the philosophical

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<sup>6</sup> James Millikin University Bulletin, 1937-1939; 7-9.

<sup>7</sup> "Kappa Alums Number 104; Many Teach In Colleges," *The Decaturian Weekly*, 18 November 1938.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

arguments of Bertrand Russell. Though these women outnumbered the men, it was men who gained recognition for their key position in society; they were lawyers, mayors, researchers, engineers, and managers.

The article recognizes that Kappa women held public roles, though it still identified women relative to their matrimonial status. The article promotes the idea that academic success is not merely for the “frigidly intellectual type”; any well performing female student could have her Kappa and marry, too. In fact, female students were statistically three times more likely to be inductees in the society. The jobs available to them were different from those key positions the men held. Female Kappa members were secretaries, teachers, and faculty instructors, or they were involved in social welfare or advertising positions, quite unlike the prominent positions held on the men’s side of Kappa alums.

As had been the case in the 1920s, *The Dec* of the late 1930s still printed articles that presented a superficial view of women while noting with some pride the Millikin daughters who had accomplished something more than their traditional role as wife and mother. Dr. Galligar was no longer a student learning to maneuver the terrain of gender politics. In the Illinois academic environs, Dr. Galligar had evolved a persona that embodied scholarly prestige tempered with femininity.

That all changed for Dr. Galligar. In 1948 she joined her husband at Kansas State Teacher’s College in Pittsburg, Kansas. Dr. Sperry had moved to Pittsburg two years before to become an instructor in the college’s biology department; Dr. Galligar would join him as a biology assistant the year she arrived. She would spend only four years working at KSTC, when in 1952, she left the college.

Archived records do not explain the official reason why Kansas State Teacher's College removed Dr. Galligar from its faculty. Dr. Sperry's eulogy for Dr. Galligar recalled that one of the highlights of her life was teaching, but it carefully does not address the end of her career. In writing her biography for PSU.com, Thomas Kreissel states that she retired from all teaching, and Galligar seems to have agreed with that conclusion in an interview with the Kansas City Star in 1961. However, this contradicts a poem Dr. Galligar wrote in *Verse*. Given the circumstances of her retirement: Dr. Sperry - a potential buffer for her removal - was conducting field research on a year long sabbatical in Africa, the general climate of conservatism and the importance of the nuclear family in Cold War America, and Dr. Galligar's poem on the subject, it is clear that her gender played a significant role in her removal from the biology department.

Dr. Galligar interpreted the end of her teaching career as the result of the inability of the upper echelons of the KSTC to tolerate a female faculty member. In "The Key," Galligar recounts in iambic tetrameter the final minutes of her departure from her office – the Science Hall's Room 104.<sup>9</sup> The door was not able to be opened from the outside without a key. A voice inside her head lightheartedly prompted Dr. Galligar to take the key and thereby grant Kansas State Teacher's college the inconvenience of replacing the lock.<sup>10</sup>

There's something in my head that sings,  
'Why don't you take the key? ...

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. Galligar's writings never confirm nor deny whether or not the events that transpired in "The Key" actually happened. Given the external world inspired the majority of her poetry and it is noted or obvious when the work is the product of her internal world means that the episode is probably based in fact. Overall, the poem profoundly reveals her interpretation and reaction to the end of her teaching career.

<sup>10</sup> Galligar, *Verse*; 64.



The key's a symbol of the years  
Of fruitless work you've done  
To reach the stature of your peers,  
A something never won,  
Because you were a woman born.  
Never mind your mind.  
Reward is ridicule and scorn.  
What else is there to find?'

Galligar's choice to introduce this voice into her head clearly demonstrated the creation of a coping mechanism meant to deal with a consciousness stressed to the point of fracturing. Dr. Galligar's conscience is briskly set aside in the interest of a gleefully vengeful third party actor initiated by the anger at the injustice of her dismissal. Stealing the key appeals to her sense of justice. "[Y]ou'll never be reproved," the voice tells her, and thereby the voice rationalizes her behavior. The act was not petty spite but rather righteous indignation for the administration's failure to see past her sex and recognize her intellect or for the status she had relentlessly pursued and, in the end, failed to gain. The weight of the hopelessness and despair she describes becomes clear when her twenty-five years as an exemplary educator amounted to the locked door of a bare office.<sup>11</sup>

The pleasure she gained was brief. She found herself unwilling even to gaze upon the memento, and she finally decided to discard it in a river.

The yellow water swallowed it.  
It will remain unseen  
Through years and years that I'll forget.  
(I wish it were the dean.)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Folder 1, Biographical Organization, Sperry-Galligar Collection..

<sup>12</sup> Originally, Dr. Galligar had written the word "Dean" - with a capital "D" - but then forcefully pressed a lowercase "d" over the capital.

By the poem's end, the deviant voice has been reabsorbed into Dr. Galligar's "I" thoughts. She has reasserted her ownership of thought and action, though they have taken an arguably darker turn. Such as it is, hope qualifies the final line. She suggests that either the key or what it symbolized – her thwarted career or the pain the situation caused – would, by and by, be forgotten. The parentheses that frame the final line make the sentiment an affirmation that she was still angry. Throwing the key in the river is an attempt to let go of the past and the realization that her ended career could not fully taint her academic aspirations – made more difficult by her perception of society's insistence on her role as a woman.

It would take more than this symbolic act to reclaim her dignity and her belief in herself. In the years after her forced retirement, Dr. Galligar would emerge profoundly changed.

## CHAPTER V

### ‘DYS, POSSESSED

JANUARY 1954 – APRIL 1974

“Self-seeking  
is the whole of it biologically-speaking.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Galligar’s life after the commencement of her career was no longer the series of deadlines and sequence of events it had been before. Life at Paradocs existed as day-to-day moments. Her *Verse: Verses for Paradocs and Other Verses* became the best record of the subjects Dr. Galligar most cherished – good or ill – during what she called her “third life.”

Within the first year of her removal to Paradocs, Dr. Galligar developed a malady that “neither science nor medicine” could explain.<sup>2</sup> This appears to be the definitive theme during her retirement. Medical records are absent or buried unmarked in the semi-processed Sperry-Galligar collection, but Dr. Galligar’s unpublished book of poems, *Verse*, explains the character of the episodes of lethargy, her concerns about it, and her reaction to her lack of energy that would continue until her death in 1975.

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<sup>1</sup> Galligar, *Verse*.

<sup>2</sup> Folder 1, Biographical Organization, Sperry-Galligar Collection..

Dr. Galligar's "third life" began with her choice of a *nome de plume*, one she stumbled upon early and kept throughout most of her writing. All the spines of her volumes of personal journals and the single volume of *Verse* indicates that Dys, Possessed is the author. The name of the Sperry-Galligar property, "Paradocs" has two layers of meaning. Paradocs was both a pun on the word *paradox*, which described the two PhDs that resided on the property and represented of the ecological paradox of the couple's wilderness-within-Pittsburg. Like Paradocs, Dys, Possessed has one immediate meaning along with a subdued significance.

Dys, possessed  
Of uncollected bits,  
And disconnected wits,  
This expressed.  
-Gladys C. Galligar  
(Ted, you've guessed,  
Authored the name.  
Dys wrote the rest.)<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Galligar's definition of her newfound name described a disjointed mind. The approximate dating of *Verse's* earliest entries puts this poem's creation as shortly after she ended her career as an educator. She entered into the long, quiet hours of Paradoc's daytime, punctuated by Dr. Sperry's familiar presence when he was not at work or researching in the field. Her life would be void of the time-consuming obligation to develop and maintain the courses she had instructed for the previous twenty-five years. Dys, Possessed marked the beginning of Dr. Galligar's adaptation to the new environment – an avatar who began writing so prolifically it was as though life depended

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<sup>3</sup> Galligar, *Verse*.

on the activity. Perhaps her life *did* depend on it; Dr. Galligar's lethargy struck her as an affront to the biological forces of life, and she wrote vividly and often about death.

*Verse: Verses for Paradocs and Other Verses* is Dr. Galligar's unpublished collection of poetry. The journal contains 83 pages of poems that spanned two decades and chronicled her relationship with Sperry, life at Paradocs, and her thoughts on nature, ethics, other people, and herself. Most of the works are undated, but the table of contents notes 12-9-1954 and the first poem, "December Night," indicate she started the journal a year after her dismissal from KTC. A few of these early works appear to be transcribed from elsewhere, having been published in the 1951 edition of *We Light a Fire*, a small book with contributions from women associated with KSTC. She was most prolific for these first six years, writing or transcribing 54 pages from the winter of 1954 to the winter of 1960. From 1960 to December 14, 1970, she wrote twenty-five pages. She only added seven poems from December 15, 1970 to her death in April of 1975. It is not possible to determine the exact dates of origins for most of the poems. She transcribed some poems from other drafts; at other times, she appears to have used *Verse* as a more immediate poetry-chronicle, although it cannot be used as a chronicle of events. Despite the dating and the timeframe, they are not a chronology of events. Viewed as strata of thought on a variety of subjects, *Verse* unfolds as poetic clusters of thought from Dr. Galligar's reflective last decades.

A quantitative evaluation of the subjects discussed in *Verse's* poetry reveals what subjects Dr. Galligar used poetry to explore. The 174 poems recorded in *Verse* can form two categories; in keeping with the biological nature of Dr. Galligar's work, these two

categories are *Family* and *Genus*. The three subdivisions within *Family* identify if the poem was strictly about either humans or nature, or if the poem was a hybrid of both.

A second breakdown, *Genus*, discovered what topics were most on her mind: *Genus*'s topics, which included the most poetic entries are, in descending order: nature and Paradoxs (48), identity and self (42), other people (33), behavior and ethics (31), Dr. Sperry (26), happiness (22), death (22), and loss or pain (21), which constitute eight out of the thirteen identified topics.

Often poems overlapped into several topics; these cross-categories are useful for identifying poetic trends such as "Biological Death Poems," "Nature Eases Pain," and an intriguing relationship between death, contentment, and Dr. Sperry. ]

Title	Family			Genus						
	Nature	Humans	Hybrid	Nature	Death	Biology	Ethics	Spirit.	Others	Self
A Name		1							1	1
Hokku		1								1
Dys, Possessed		1								1
Lost Identity		1								1
To A.		1							1	1
By the Shore	1		1							1
People		1							1	1
Down	1	1					1			1
Waiting		1								1
Listen		1							1	1
Every Time I...		1								1
From Equinox...	1		1							1
I am Obsessed...		1								1
If All is Illusion		1								1
Why...		1							1	1
Memories...		1								1
If Inner ...		1								1
I Don't Regret...	1		1							1
I wouldn't eat...	1		1							1

The *Families* of poems, or aspects of humans, aspects of nature, or a hybrid of both, reveals Dr. Galligar's preference for human or natural subject matter. One hundred nine poems related to strictly human events. Aspects of nature only constituted nineteen poems. Hybrid poems – those that discussed humans and nature, or humans within nature, appeared forty-seven times. Poems that referenced biology but not nature still fit within the hybrid category because Dr. Galligar often wrote about the biological aspects of nature, human or otherwise.

Though it may be tempting to assume that Dr. Galligar became reclusive and immersed herself entirely within the natural world at Paradocs, the 109-strong Family of poems about herself and other people reveal that she was actively engaged in her social world, concerned with ethics, behavior, and her own identity and relationships. In “Social Psychaitry [sic],” she first poses that “Pseudo-analyzing/Proves very tantalizing,” but later thinks better of what that might say about her and edits it to read “Crudely tantalizing,” still acknowledging the temptation but qualifying its character.<sup>4</sup> Despite this self-chastisement, *Verse* contains thirty-one poems about ethics and behavior and thirty-three about people other than herself or her husband. She wrote forty-two poems concerned with herself and her identity and twenty-six about her husband, Sperry, including poems about their relationship. Of these, the poems Galligar wrote about her own identity and gender are most applicable to this thesis.

Hybrid poems constituted the second largest Family. These poems include any mention of both natural and human elements. For example, “Golden-crowned Kinglet” and “Ruby-crowned Kinglet” are both metered verse about Kinglets. “Golden-crowned

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<sup>4</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 6.

Kinglet” does not mention the author, but only observes the flight of one of the many species of birds Galligar catalogued at Paradocs.<sup>5</sup> “Ruby-crowned Kinglet,” on the other hand, finishes with the lines:

Your brilliant feathered ruby crest  
Draws me on to know your quest,  
Until I’m lost. I blame  
Your brilliant feathered ruby crest.<sup>6</sup>

In inserting herself within the poem, she has expanded its meaning from mere observation into a facet of her own afternoon. Though not a large *Genus*, poems about “work and leisure” indicated that she would sometimes forgo more constructive activities in favor of writing. “Distraction,” a poem about her frustrated attempt to capture the poetry of an afternoon, tells the reader:

with all this sun and wind and sky  
and trees and birds and flowers,  
perhaps a sin, to sit and try  
For three long precious hours.

“Distraction” also indicates Dr. Galligar’s dedication to writing about the natural world.

Her poems include those that explore gender and the natural world; she wrote some poems about gender and more about nature, but the two never explicitly intersect. The hybrid Family produces a cross-section of the Genuses “nature and Paradocs” and “ethics and environment,” creating a small collection of poems that express the ideas Dr. Galligar held on applied ecology. Perhaps the best source of information regarding the intersections between science and nature, and humanity and self is Dr. Galligar’s views

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<sup>5</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



on death, which surfaced in her writing as a richly complex issue. Paradoxs' environment appears often as an alleviator of Dr. Galligar's pain and lethargy as well as the source of moments of contentedness. Environment, therefore, appears in tandem with the smallest Family of poems, which include those about observing nature. The activities of wildlife and descriptions of the landscape constitute the largest part of these nineteen verses.

The poems found in *Verse* are usually structured and metered, with the occasional free verse, freeform lines that resemble a paragraph of prose. Dr. Galligar experiments with a number of forms like sestets, triolets, and haiku, but most often employs metered lines with AB or Aa/Bb rhyme schemes. They range from two lines to over 33 lines – one page. They are all handwritten, sometimes edited and footnoted, and occasionally rewritten. Dr. Sperry interjects only once for clarity. When titles are not provided, poems are identified by using a portion or all of the first line. Most are signed by the author as – Gladys C. Galligar.

Her poems about herself tended to be short, only four to six lines long, and wearied. Within this category of poems are those she wrote about herself and her thoughts, poems in which she discussed herself as compared to others, and poems where she saw herself in nature. “Dys, Possessed” is one of importance and appears in the introduction to this chapter. Given her assertion of her own identity, “Lost Identity” is an expression of her impression of what it meant to be a woman in America

In our nation  
It's characteristic  
To be a generalization  
Or a statistic.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18. The poem appears early in *Verse* and is likely to be from around 1956.

Dr. Galligar feels her uniqueness is lost amongst the tendency American society had during the 1950s to make general claims about women. These generalizations included a reinforcement of social conventions remodeled as the “happy suburban housewife” as later described by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*. Dr. Galligar’s intellect and education would not have been strongly valued within the social circles that defined her as a “faculty wife.” This poem illustrates her isolation and reduction to a statistical outlier in this domestic culture. “Down” further exhibits her lack of intellectual exercise when she writes “-To search within and only find/a malnutrition of the mind.”<sup>8</sup> Yet these thoughts do not keep her from being hopeful that a vague “something” will appear. In “Waiting” she writes:

Still and alone I wait  
For what, I scarcely know,  
Filled with a sense I’m late  
And unprepared to go.<sup>9</sup>

When she does find herself in a position to call forth her mental prowess, however, she is frustrated and blocked from communicating:

Everytime I need them most  
What wits I have take cover.  
They might as well be always lost  
Now that I think it over.<sup>10</sup>

Frustrated with herself, Galligar felt devalued and incapable of succinct self-expression.

I am obsessed by  
My passionate prejudice

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.

For cloistered quiet.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps she felt the outside world – in which she was active as a student and educator - increasingly misunderstood her; maybe she no longer accepted or wanted the expectations it placed on her or found she did not share what society accepted as normal. Increasingly she found it difficult to communicate with others. Her privacy, her interior dialogue, *Verse*, and *Paradocs* replaced what she had known before. With age and isolation, the past she cherished began to fade.

Memories, vivid  
Instant, numberless, leave me,  
Wordless, pinned in time.<sup>12</sup>

A few poems later, Dr. Galligar began to reflect on how she adjusted to her third life at *Paradocs*. She penned these words, tinged with reflection and regret:

If inner strength  
Be not in you  
To cope wisely  
With your lot,  
Then may you be able  
To endure in dignity.<sup>13</sup>

Her advice chastises the undignified anger she expressed when she was younger. It is highly doubtful Dr. Galligar had accepted whatever reasoning behind her removal to *Paradocs*. Even so, she desired self-respect and a calmer demeanor, if not wisdom. When speaking alone of herself, Galligar tends to be unkind, but when she places herself in natural surroundings, she is much more satisfied with who she is.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 77.

The second Species of poems in this section are a stark contrast to Dr. Galligar's self-depreciation poems. Once she stepped outside of her thoughts and into nature, she became vibrant. "On the Shore" expresses an self-acceptance rarely glimpsed in her other writings. Though she writes the poem from the vantage "you," it is a tendency of many writers use when they actually mean "I." In this case, she wishes to share something of her happiness with others, and so changes the subject of the poem from herself to others to allow others to experience what she has experienced.

You search for meaning, and reason for being  
And wonder why they elude you.  
You think that your mind is given for seeing  
And find that its thoughts denude you.  
Of all the encrusted conventional acceptance  
Of unreasoned codes of behavior;  
But your mind's fresh clothing is not much assistance  
And obviously not a savior;  
So you turn toward the shore and look hard again  
At rockweed, skimmer seagulls, and clams,  
They, and all else, make it quite plain  
That all you can say is "I Am".<sup>14</sup>

This poem is the best example of Dr. Galligar identifying herself within nature. She sheds the "unreasoned" human behaviors and shuts down her busy mind. Taking her cue from the natural world around her, she existed within and outside of herself, embracing a state of mere existence. It is worth pointing out that Drs Galligar and Sperry traveled throughout the United States and abroad. Seagulls and clams are not native to Pittsburg, KS. The poem then would have been inspired while she was away from Paradoes, on a vacation or exploration that would have given her enough distance to see herself with some perspective.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26.

The other poems she writes about herself within nature are observational. They date from May of 1971; both are untitled. In the first, she is overflowing with happiness when observing the natural world where she resides. The first is playful; she even suggests foregoing bathing for a more interesting activity:

I wouldn't eat, I wouldn't sleep;  
I wouldn't even wash  
I'd jist set here and study birds  
The whole spring through, by gosh!<sup>15</sup>

The second is a testament to the pleasure she gets out of her backyard more than she does from books or people.

I don't regret all the books I haven't read  
Nor the folks I haven't met,  
Half so much  
As all the things we haven't seen on Paradoxs.

When Galligar keenly feels her loneliness, she is often tempted to be hard on herself.

When she is able to let go of that – a skill she expressed more often later in her life – she thoroughly enjoys being in nature.

Galligar lived during transitional time for American women. When she was born, women had no federal guarantee in federal elections; by the time she died, second-wave feminism had made serious headway into academics and mainstream American thought. She lived in a zone of tension in which women's status fluctuated – radically – between the domestic and the public spheres. Ironically, during the period when it was becoming more common for women to choose non-traditional roles, she found herself without formal purpose or career.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 81.

What “The Key” reveals to the reader is the only written account currently available of what ended the relationship between Dr. Galligar and Kansas Teacher’s College. It is not the only example in *Verse* of the hardships experienced by the confinement of gender roles. Her poetry is never satisfied merely to portray the happy homemaker or groundskeeper, placid wife or maintainer of the perfect relationship, or perfect hostess. Instead, what it reveals is a woman given to flights of whimsy at the risk of ignoring the dishes. The poems show moments of disagreement with her partner, accusations of considered infidelity on both sides, and doubt about their relationship, often followed by declarations of love. If she were the perfect hostess at Lyr’rose, she reserved a sharpened tongue in *Verse* for those she felt had been ignorant, bland, too talkative, or discourteous. Most intimately, she reveals how she saw herself. She could be bold or full of doubt; often she indicated fatigue. For a woman described as “prim,” by the *Kansas City Star* staff reporter, she was occasionally deviant; she occasionally employed a swear word and encouraged others to add a spoonful of rum to their tea.

Dr. Galligar viewed death from many vantages. She held it sadly as a limp songbird, and observed it with scientific detachment when scrutinizing a decaying tree. She reflected quietly on its presence in the late-night sobs of a stranger who lost a spouse in recent hours, or she desperately desired it for the sake of oblivion.

In *Verse*, death most often appeared either as an elusive end to her pain or as a biological fate of all life. The combination of the two suggest that Dr. Galligar did not readily fear her own mortality. She viewed death as an eventuality and welcomed an end to her lethargy, to her pain. Occasionally, and if Sperry were in the poem, she would resign herself to contented living at Paradoes until the end, yet these instances are rare; in

1956, she even wrote a note on an index card briefly describing why she would have committed suicide. She indicated that should energy, necessary for life, be lacking, then it was remiss to end suffering both for the one who suffered and those who had to care for the sufferer. She described it as neither unnatural nor a sin. She begrudgingly opted to outlive this action.

Scientifically, Dr. Galligar saw death and decay as a natural process. The molecules would re-organize themselves into other things and become new. The poems focused on death provide the necessary perspective to interpret a few curious poems that are spiritual and esoteric. In one poem, for example, she says that God is one with all things the universe enfolds. In another, she experiences what it is like to be one with all things, but she destroyed the line in the editing process. In a final poem, she experiences a series of shifting clouds that prompt her to see a new dimension outside of herself. The poem's title is a question, and it ends with a series of questions that suggest that Dr. Galligar could not fully accept what she wanted to believe.

She wanted to explore a new world, as she had during her earlier years; she wanted to try again somewhere else. Her hope could not survive the risk of re-enacting the events that so severely struck her. She held on too fiercely to her anger and wanted only a silent end. She could not leave the doubt behind long enough to understand what she tried to express – the perfect union of science and continued consciousness. She feared another fall too much. If she could not have it all, she would shatter what remained. Her will was almost strong enough to kill her, yet she retained a thread of survival and curiosity. In short, she had evolved.

The Genus “Ethics and Environment” offers the opportunity to discuss what Dr. Galligar believed to be an ethical treatment of the environment, mostly regarding human-animal interactions. One of the first obstacles in dealing with human-animal interactions is the tendency humans have to anthropomorphize animals. Edward Abbey eloquently grapples with the usefulness of this inclination in his autobiographical *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* was written during and after the three seasons he spent working as a ranger in Arches National Monument. Originally published in 1968, *Desert Solitaire* chronicles his interaction with the American desert’s landscape and animals in a profoundly personal and philosophical manner. In one spectacular example of both, Abbey comes across a pair of corn snakes engaged in what appears to him to be either a fight or a mating ritual. He literally dropped his belly to the ground and crawled towards the pair to examine what transpired. While he was able to maintain his prone position long enough to have observed their behavior at length, the snakes eventually recognized him as a threat or a curiosity only three feet away and charged him, at which point he leaped out of their way. Not knowing if the snakes were fighting or mating, Abbey wonders how his perception of animals in the natural world may have shaped his understanding of it.<sup>16</sup> He eventually concludes, “I recognize that when and where they serve purposes of mine they do so for beautifully selfish reasons of their own.”<sup>17</sup> Abbey believed that his anthropomorphism of nature was not dangerous to the animals or two

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<sup>16</sup> Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), 24-25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 25.



himself because he respected both his purpose and their purpose for doing what came naturally to them.

John James Audubon, on the other hand, witnesses the cruelty that humans can enact when dealing with animals they believe to have intentionally injured the individual. Audubon's *The Birds of America* (1827-1838) described the abundance of wildlife in the new world and won him international recognition for his efforts. The accompanying text, *Ornithological Biography* contained additional stories of the wilderness.<sup>18</sup> In "Pitting of the Wolves," Audubon describes his chance encounter with a sheep rancher whose flock had been worried and diminished by a local pack of wolves. The rancher invites Audubon to watch how he dealt with this particular problem. Audubon accompanies him on a walk to the wolf-pits as the rancher explains that the wolves have taken most of his sheep and one of his colts and that he intends to "pay...them off in full." The baited pit tempts and then traps the wolves until the rancher can deal with them. The manner in which he deals with the wolves is beyond what is necessary for the extermination of an apex predator. The rancher gets into the pit with the wolves where he slashes their hind leg tendons, crippling them. He then strings them up, one by one, and lets his own dogs finish the chore. The last wolf – an older and ferocious female – grievously injures one of the rancher's dogs, even in this prone condition.<sup>19</sup> It is only then that the rancher shoots her through the heart, at which point "the curs rushed upon it, and satiated their

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Finch and John Elder, *Norton Book of Nature Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 117.

<sup>19</sup> John James Audubon, in *Norton Book of Nature Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 118-120.

vengeance on the destroyer of their master's flock."<sup>20</sup> The language of both Audubon's observation and the rancher's choice of words indicates a sense of rewarding ill behavior in like terms.

The reward for the wolves is a petty game of cruelty and revenge on behalf of the rancher. Zoologists point out that predators "play" with their food, but because of a biological impulse to hunt, this play is not intended to satiate any emotional intention. Yet in the case of the farmer, these wolves deserved to be tortured before they died because of what they had done to him. Thus, the dangers of anthropomorphizing animals becomes clear when humans expect that animals are acting from an emotional, rather than biological, necessity.

In the same way that the rancher mistakes an animal's sense of self, so does Galligar – not with cruelty, but with an unrealistic hope that all humans may treat all animals kindly, and in mistaken belief that animals share mutual respect and appreciation of humans. "Bluebirds" is a triolet that describes a family of bluebirds in a tree. Nearby, men go about their work. Galligar's concern is for the safety of the birds. She assures the reader that "The birds seem sure these men do care/And will know how they should rate."<sup>21</sup> Dr. Galligar does not explain why either these men should care about the safety of the nest. No mention is made of a friendly look or nod in the bird's direction. Rather, she is hopeful of the possibility that the workers will not harm the songbirds because their safety *should* rate highly in the minds of these workers. She does not explain why the birds would instinctively understand that the men feel responsible for their safety. Thus,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>21</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 10.

it is impossible to judge this poem in the same way one might analyze Dr. Galligar's scientific observations. Dr. Galligar understood that nature and man have conflicting interests, a topic explored further in "Reflections on a Felled Maple Tree" later in this subcategory.

"Bluebirds" is not based in objective reality. The tree in which the family of bluebirds nested was, in the original draft, a post. It is uncertain whether she changed it because a tree seemed a better home for birds or for other aesthetic reasons. Ultimately, "Bluebirds" should be regarded as an idealistic interpretation of how things ought to be. Dr. Galligar desired to live in a world where the conservation and protection of nature should rate highly or exist naturally among human interests; in response, nature should regard man as benefactor and friend. Nevertheless, nature does not surrender to humanity's view of fair play, as the game of predator and prey demonstrates daily. The naturalist-poet grapples with nature and morality in the next selection.

Doctors Galligar and Sperry were something of an ornithological dynamic duo in Pittsburg in the 1950s and 1960s. The local chapter of the Audubon society named itself in their honor – partially on the achievement of Dr. Sperry, who served at one time as President of the Kansas Ornithological Society. As early as 1938, Millikin's *The Dec* was chronicling the pair's summer vacation bird-watching numbers.<sup>22</sup> The couple also practiced non-lethal forms of cataloging birds – they trapped, banded, identified and enumerated the many species of birds that visited Paradocs. At the time of the *Kansas City Star*'s 1961 human-interest piece, Galligar and Sperry had catalogued 163 species of

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Willis, Sperry Galligar Audubon Society History, July 1999; "Dr. Galligar to Madison," *The Decaturian Weekly*, April 22, 1938.

birds.<sup>23</sup> Today, visitors to Paradocs can still see one of the metal cages used for trapping attached to a tree on the northwestern shore of Ryldamere, the property's pond.<sup>24</sup>

Galligar's "A Dead Pink-side" describes an incident that occurred during the cataloging process. It demonstrates her understanding of ethics in the environment from the perspective of nature. During one of these routine trappings, a Shrike sighted a Pink-side trapped in a cage. The Shrike advanced relentlessly but could not claim its meal because it was unable to negotiate the wire cage. The Pink-side struck its head against the cage and from fear or the stress of the attack died.

Are nature's ways all either right or wrong?  
I hold your little shape  
And feel a sadness that you got this way,  
Recalling well your tinkling sleigh-bell song.

Dr. Galligar's inquiry regarding the morality of nature further enhances her personal ideas about ethics and the environment. She directly questions nature's morality and categorizes the cycle of life and death as either right or wrong. She is clearly saddened that the Pink-side, which brought to her its light, gay song, met such an eventful end when it could have been safe. Dr. Galligar's personal affection for nature begins to emerge as one of empathy for the sensitive, handsome birds in which she was so interested.

Dr. Galligar tended to root her ideas on the ethical treatment of wildlife in conservation and preservation. "Wildlife Wilderness – *in their backyard*" written by

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<sup>23</sup> Fred Kiewit, "Wildlife Wilderness – *in their backyard*," *The Kansas City Star*, June 18, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore M. Sperry, "Sherry Herbarium: History of Paradocs: Map of Paradocs," Sperry-Galligar Collection.

Kansas City Star staff writer Fred Kiewit, shows two further opinions of Dr. Galligar's on the subject that appear to contradict each other. In the text of the article, Dr. Galligar "declared stoutly ... 'I firmly believe that every other living thing has as much right to this earth as man does.'"<sup>25</sup> Yet later in the article, the author explains that there are a few animals who are unwelcome on the property. "About the only visitors of the animal and bird kingdoms not welcome," Kiewit tells his readers, "are cats, dogs, Norway rats and starlings."<sup>26</sup> These particular animals are not invited because they are predatory, invasive, or simply a nuisance. The first two animals are species long domesticated by humans, and both would disrupt the "indigenous" animals living there. Norway rats may be predatory or invasive, whereas the endless streams of starlings are a backyard nuisance. Denying any animal to live freely in a place that is intended to be an animal sanctuary – especially if those species are predators – denies the balanced cycle of life and death in nature. Given Dr. Galligar's desire to see man respect the bluebirds, her anthropomorphized lament to the dead Pink-side, and her contradictory views regarding animal life at Paradocs, her views at this point can be regarded as one of preservationist and protector of the sensitive prey species.

Dr. Galligar's viewpoints do not deviate when she considers the natural environment, but they do take on a less personal, more reflective stance. "Reflections on Seeing a Maple Tree Felled" is the retelling of a sixty-year old maple tree chopped down to make a place for children to play.

Huxley says the avenues of life are closed save one;  
The key to future forms resides in man alone.

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<sup>25</sup> Kiewit.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

But now the key is lost unless he can atone  
The bungling interference and destruction he has sown.<sup>27</sup>

These lines contain an argument against humanity's destructive tendencies not simply because these things are weak and need a protector but because it is imperative to the shaping of humanity's future. Galligar recognizes humanity's "bungling interference" with the natural world has set mankind on a dangerous course that could have disastrous consequences. Her staunch defense of nature, while manifesting itself through the poetic medium as personally empathetic, is also rooted in the understanding that a harmonious environment is prudent for all that exist within its realms. These viewpoints could result from the social understanding that as a gender, a woman naturally exhibits qualities that are protective of the weak. Her career as a biologist and her marriage to one of America's forerunners of the environmental conservation movement may have strengthened her viewpoint. Dr. Galligar's connection to the natural world goes beyond being objectively or femininely sentimental, as she experienced the tragedy of "bungling interference" on a very personal level.

A careful inspection of "Compassion" reveals the poet's personal link to the ethical treatment of the environment and all its life forms. The poem describes an instance in which bathing robins displace water boatmen living in a birdbath. An unnamed human male – certainly Dr. Sperry - returns them to their home. Dr. Galligar sees herself in the same position as the whirligigs – "dispossessed", as she describes it – from their homes, and she qualifies the act of returning them as one of compassion. By

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<sup>27</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 52. Thomas Huxley, 19<sup>th</sup> century biologist, nicknamed "Darwin's Bulldog" for his relentless support of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution.

invoking the pen name Dr. Sperry gave her, “dispossessed,” she identifies the end of her career to that of the water boatmen. Though the water insects are

Unaware  
That ready neurons  
Complex enough  
To fire compassion

have saved them from their waterless fate, Dr. Galligar is conscious of the act as both the observer to and a recipient of compassion from the same individual.

Aldo Leopold’s writings may be able to shed some light on the gesture. Leopold was a professional conservationist who fought for recognition of the role of apex predators in a healthy ecosystem, but his major contribution to the genre of nature writing is *A Sand County Almanac*. He gave as much interest to the seemingly insignificant actors in the natural world as John Muir could give the Sierra Nevada Range. He was also “a magnificent teacher about the way the natural environment has been impoverished,” and this interest and his location at the University of Wisconsin put Dr. Sperry and Leopold in each other’s paths.<sup>28</sup> Leopold writes that “in its origin” ecological and philosophical ethics are “the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation.”<sup>29</sup> Leopold saw the wisdom in holding together the components of an ecosystem. That Leopold regarded Dr. Theodore Sperry as “a very good man” speaks well of his reputation.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Sperry, an ecologist who built a wilderness in his backyard, was sensitive to the interdependency of all things. When he

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<sup>28</sup> Finch and Elder, 376.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>30</sup> Ted Sperry’s Letter of Interest, Ted Sperry, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

rescued the insects, Dr. Sperry extended a symbiotic gesture of community. Dr. Galligar keenly recognized the human element within the action. She interpreted his efforts to repossession the displaced as an effort to restore balance to the environment by ensuring a position for dispossessed females and bugs alike.



## CHAPTER VI

### DEATH AND 'DYS, POSSESSED

JANUARY 1954-APRIL 1974

Each discrete living mass  
An individual is,  
And bridge;  
'Possum, owl or buttonback,  
A bat, or you and I,  
A passion flower  
Or walnut tree,  
Or any other forms that be.

Whence came the molecules  
Which make up each and all?  
Where go the same  
When all these forms disintegrate  
In death's decay?

The usual way  
Into other forms,  
A restless flow  
Shedding carelessly in passing  
Thought and poetry  
Music, art, or joy.

-Gladys C. Galligar<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 74.

Dr. Galligar viewed death from many vantages. She held it sadly as a limp pink-side, and she observed it with scientific detachment when contemplating a decaying tree. She reflected on its presence in a hotel resonating with the late-night despair of a stranger who lost their spouse only hours before, or she desperately desired it for the sake of oblivion. The best path to take through the death-poems sprinkled throughout *Verse* is to start with those that are more basic and immediate in their meaning – that is, those poems which regard death from the ground floor – the biological level – but also those lines that reflect the immediacy of her desire to end her life. From this framework, it is also possible to interpret Dr. Galligar’s meditations on outliving her lethargy that also include Dr. Sperry’s influence. Finally, the poems that embrace and then transcend the previous categories mark an end to this exploration.

Within the archives is a record of her thoughts regarding biological death and release from pain; it is her suicide note. The 4X6 index card reveals the conditions and purpose regarding her possible suicide:

To whom it may concern,  
If and when the undersigned should commit suicide, it will be either because of some incurable and disabling disease, or because energy, which is essential to any worthwhile life is reduced to ever diminishing returns. Whether in my case, gradually waning energy is due to some, as yet, unknown organic deficiency or some inherited deficiency of the nervous system, neither medicine nor science, for the present, can tell. When the step is taken, it will be because I have outlived my usefulness and have become an unnecessary burden to others. Suicide is neither unnatural, immoral, nor sinful. Under some circumstances it is the only right thing to do for all concerned. Signed,  
1956

Gladys C. Galligar<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Galligar’s anger towards her dismissal from KSTC and the symptoms that would today indicate a mental illness, such as depression, undeniably indicate that the shattering

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<sup>32</sup> Folder 1, Biographical Organization, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

of her identity as scientist and educator contributed heavily to her contemplations on suicide. She wrote the note sometime between two and three years after her forced retirement, indicating that she was languishing in semi-solitude at Paradocs for many long months without the bustle of her previously intellectually challenging and accomplished life. Despite this low point, she begrudgingly outlived this decision. Her life ended in April of 1974 after she experienced a heart attack in the home she had designed at Paradocs.

In *Verse*, death most often appeared either as an elusive end to her pain, or as a biological fate of all life. Often they appeared together in combination, which suggests that Dr. Galligar did not readily fear her own mortality. She accepted death as an eventuality and welcomed an end to her lethargy, to her pain. Often her biological observations of death came about when trees were the subject, such as with “The Tree is Dead,” “Dead Cottonwood,” “Dead Branch,” and “Reflections Upon Witnessing a Felled Maple Tree.”

“The Tree is Dead” is a short response to what appears to be somebody’s indecision regarding what to do with a dead tree. Dr. Galligar offers a matter-of-fact solution to the problem:

You cannot wait the healing balm  
Of natural decay,  
And watch the tree fulfill its role  
In nature’s wiser way.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 25.

The biological death of the tree is simply “nature’s wiser way,” and what to do with the remains is merely a matter of letting remain “[o]nly what is sound.”<sup>34</sup> Dr. Galligar’s approach is not aesthetic but exists within the realm of practical nature. The poem written immediately below “The Tree is Dead” appears to be something of an addendum to the ideas concerning death and nature. Dr. Galligar applies her ideas regarding “nature’s wiser way” to herself in “Preventing death” and in doing so illustrates the way in which she saw extending life beyond what should have been its ending.

Preventing death, to  
Remain a suffering wreck, is  
Obscene tyranny.<sup>35</sup>

“Cottonwood” further enhances the significance Dr. Galligar saw in dead trees and the connection she made between them and biological death.

Stark gray beauty constant the year through,  
Bird’s perch and wind’s instrument  
Until fungus-crumbled to air and dust,  
one piece more made and unmade  
In nature’s ceaseless changing.

Dr. Galligar appreciates the presence and the process of the dead tree’s beauty, usefulness, and decay. Again, she writes through the lens of a naturalist as she considers the process of the decomposition. At the beginning of the poem, she suggests that the tree’s death-color is constant throughout the year, yet by the end, she acknowledges that the tree’s death is merely a process. The observations she makes of the tree’s physical, practical and enjoyable aspects are present but not to last. She appreciates the dynamics

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<sup>34</sup> The couple would make brush piles and leave trees that had fallen off the beaten paths of Paradocs because the debris provided shelter and sanctuary for animals and birds.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 25.

of natural processes as much as she enjoys contemplating the tree's shorter significance. Galligar repeats this regard for death in nature in "Dead Branch." She describes a conversation with a branch used as a decoration in a vase. She asks the branch what it would prefer for its situation, and the branch replies that it would have preferred to stay where it fell, "To blot slowly from sight/by natural decay."<sup>36</sup> These three poems indicate Dr. Galligar's appreciation for leaving dead trees alone to succumb to the processes of nature.

In these poems, nature's ways appeal to Dr. Galligar because nature simply decomposes what is no longer alive. This appeal reveals that, given Dr. Galligar's own lethargy, she profoundly identified with these trees. Her ceaseless fatigue led to a desire for an end. Ending what was inert was merely "nature's wiser way." Lack of energy for a living thing made that thing no longer useful to nature; to maintain harmonious balance, nature decays.

Natural decay on a molecular level was a topic Dr. Galligar discussed frequently in tandem with death. In the poem introducing this chapter, she considers the source of the molecules that make up living things and where they go when those things decay. Her answer is that they go into other forms, other delightful and beautiful forms.<sup>37</sup> "Molecular Fate" is of a starkly different tenor. She describes her irritation with humanity for putting up "so much fuss at dying time," and she secretly believes the money spent on caskets and flowers are hubris while mourners mime their grief. She indicates that when she died she would rather be

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 74.

hurried by fire into dust  
And the ashes scattered...  
Eventual escape is our molecular fate.<sup>38</sup>

The process of death is immutable fact, even if the circumstances for her commenting on it varies radically. Her frustration with others comes from their inability to accept what is inevitable. To her, death is not only inevitable, it is a welcome release.

Dr. Galligar suffered immensely from her shattered self-identity. Agony shrouds her darkest poems as they mourn her unrequited release. These poems, dispersed throughout *Verse*, appear as low thoughts that alternate with happier times. Read together, they are an aching mantra, repetitious and immediate in their desire for an end to all.

When the last molecule is free  
My body completely displaced,  
May the last memory of me  
Be as surely erased.<sup>39</sup>

Fatigue with animation  
Protoplasm finds relief  
In death's disintegration.<sup>40</sup>

No use to coddle  
What remains. Diverse nature  
Makes a new model.<sup>41</sup>

We do not see too clearly  
why they are held so dearly,  
the minutes hours and days of vain existing.  
There's pain that has no end,  
fatigue that will not mend,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 16.

and others suffering, too, by our existing.<sup>42</sup>

To understand all  
is not to forgive all. It's to  
want death to come now.<sup>43</sup>

Confident and self-assured with a scientist's curiosity before her forced retirement, she struggled for the rest of her life with a sadness so profound that it almost destroyed her. Convinced that nature should do its work and begin the natural process she so intimately desired, she was to outlive, yet never fully escape, from this longing for death. The grounds at Paradocs provided some comfort and allowed her distractions from her misery, but her most apparent refuge was what she found in the company of Dr. Sperry.

Two poems illustrate well this willingness to be content a while longer. "Our Time" describes a conversation with Dr. Sperry in which she comments that he and time disregard each other. He asks her, "Who wants to live so long?" She tells him,

...I cheat  
My way through extra years not meant for me,  
My dignity diminished, so I agree.  
Do you think that what we had's complete?

That more that's left with you I'd like to spend.  
Content in quiet ease until the end.<sup>44</sup>

Dr. Sperry appears to be challenging her – perhaps because she has expressed a desire to end her suffering, maybe he is playing the devil's advocate. Either way, this forces her to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 29.

consider the cost of an end to her life – the loss of the comfort of her spouse. Finally, she decides that it may not be so undesirable a life if he is with her.

“Collector’s Item” is similar in its conclusions, but gives a better description of “quiet ease” with her husband – an evening by a fire, wrapped in warmth. She is content to stay in this place of happiness, but sadly acknowledges the feeling is fleeting. So great is her peace, that she writes,

I’d like to think we feel this kind of bliss  
Within that moment just before we die.  
To be released at last from pain would make  
Our going easy.<sup>45</sup>

It becomes clear that Ted’s company is one of the few things keeping Gladys from shuffling herself loose the mortal coil. If not her devotion to him – because for all intents and purposes, she was most devoted to herself – then perhaps his devotion to her mandated she kept death at arm’s length. These poems are rare within *Verse*; poems about the immediacy of her pain far outnumber them. Nevertheless, these moments were sufficient for her to carry on. “Double Hokku” is the best example of the integration between her shattered ego and Dr. Sperry’s presence.

The marvel is that  
Mind and love can bloom  
Maturely, after hate has  
Gripped a human heart within  
Its blight-begun and  
Death devoted hand.

For all her self-destructive tendencies, she was also keenly aware of an inner opposing force at work. Her fierce willpower was almost enough to destroy her. Without the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 7.



reputation and the career she had staked her life upon, she was willing to shatter what little remained. Dr. Sperry helped her recognize that life can go on and be pleasant.

Dr. Galligar's hides her sacred concepts. She only spoke about the character or even existence of God in one of her poems. The entity presiding over her death was nature; it was not exactly atheistic but revealed her belief in a strict set of laws that ruled all things existing within the universe. "We are part of all there is or ever was" she begins in the poem she titled "Unity I." "Unity I" and "Unity II" both describe an endless flow, or cycle, that culminates things of the past, the present, and the new forms they will take in the future.

We are part of all there is or ever was.  
We will be a part of all the future holds.  
We do not question whether God exists, or has.  
He is one with all the universe enfolds.<sup>46</sup>

In "Unity II," she uses this idea as an argument against someone who advocates for living in the moment:

You state, "The past is gone beyond recall.  
The future's just another race to run.  
It's only now that one can live at all."  
For me they flow unbroken three in one.<sup>47</sup>

She seamlessly integrates God with the entity of nature and its physical, universal rules and laws. As molecules ebb and flow through different forms of being, God integrates within all things past, present, and future. All things, positive and negative, are constantly in flux. Dr. Galligar does not seek her comforts in religious dogma. Instead, compassion is a human characteristic, manifested within the human confines of Sperry's

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 35.

synapses. Mercy belongs to harmonious nature in the form of relenting life. God exists not in terms of a benevolent deity dispersing good and ill fortunes as He sees fit – she never blames God for her problems nor thanks Him for alleviating them. Her insistence on constantly changing forms on the molecular level would not allow her to expect to reside in any Heaven after her death. However, she carefully discussed the persistence of consciousness and the idea that she could re-emerge at some node along the cycle of molecular fate.

The agony recorded in her death poems makes obvious that Galligar assumed there was to be oblivion and an end to sentience. Two poems in *Verse* suggest that perhaps death was not an end, but perhaps an opportunity to try life a second time. Perhaps the idea of intersecting the biological processes with spirituality was too foreign or blasphemous. More likely, upon examining her life through the lens of incredible heartache and loss, she felt that walking again as a sentient being was too much a risk to take. However, her ceaseless curiosity for the natural would prompt her at least to consider the idea. The idea of existence beyond this incarnation came to her in a natural setting, which suggests that despite all her scientific training, nature still held mysteries beyond the grasp of logic and rationale. The poem “A Moment of Knowing,” describes an event in which she experiences oneness with all things – by her own description in “Unity I,” a oneness with God.

Up from Ryldamere  
A living flowing  
Of sunlit patterns,  
Endlessly shimmering  
Under the ceiling and pin oak leaves

At this point in the poem there are two sets of final lines – the first, destroyed in the editing process, expresses an esoteric experience; the second relents to a more practical perspective. This is the unedited couplet:

Gave to a heart a moment of knowing  
The ecstasy of being one with all.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of what was sacred – that is, what is separate from the profane, the day-to-day, God was one with all things; this event allows her to recognize divinity within herself. That she took the lines out of a spiritual experience and made them say she was only experiencing the “exaltation of being alive,” indicates a fear of this experience. The second poem of this nature, “An Opening Door?” expresses doubt even within the question mark at the end of the title. The poem differs radically from most of the others contained in *Verse*. First, it is freeform – resembling a block of prose rather than following the line breaks of structured poetry – and while there is an internal rhyme scheme, it hinges on the melodious flow of words and not on where they appear. Second, though edited, she chose to re-write it in its entirety. Both anomalies existed a handful of times but never for the same poem with the exception of this one. This means her self-expression did not cling to the conventions she usually adhered to, and she cared enough for its subject matter to re-write it more adeptly.

She moves, detached and drifting, through a place in space and time unlike the kind she knew before this night, too weak, too sick to care, or even fear the clouds in muted reds that crowd so closely all around, some moving fast, some almost standing still. A white and billowing mist thrusts in to shroud them all and melt them to a blue-gray veil like haze on distant hills. Tableaus, from broken memories emerge, first here, then there, to sprinkle vivid accents, compelling in their interest-holding power. These slowly change to scenes with new and fresh design. It would take her all night to tell. Aware that where she is can make no earthly sense her wonder turns to questions: Is this a glimpse of consciousness

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 15.

unknown to her before; has her range extended? When this fantastic world around her fades, will she be free at last to comprehend dimensions, infinite in being, there beyond?

That the poem is from the vantage of the second person indicates a detachment, self-imposed or otherwise, to the subject. In addition, the series of questions at the end indicate there is something keeping Galligar from believing what she is saying.

The most obvious assumption is that her scientific and logical mind could not allow her to believe in multi-dimensional consciousness. This would make more sense if it were not for her insistent desire elsewhere for oblivion. This handful of poems expresses the exact opposite of oblivion – of continued consciousness, more than just an instinctual desire for survival. Dr. Galligar's hope for persistent existence for is a keen desire of her relentlessly curious intellect.

Yet there is insistence of doubt, another byproduct of her suffering. She may have secretly wanted to explore a new world, as she had during her earlier years. Her hope could not survive the risk of re-enacting the events that so severely struck her down. She held on too fiercely to her anger and wanted only reprieve in the form of death. She could not leave the doubt behind long enough to understand what she tried to express – the perfect unison of science and continued consciousness. She feared too much another shattering fall.

The most prominent facet of Galligar's adaptation to her personae as Dys, Possessed is the persistence of her depression. The second-to-last poem in *Verse*, written in September 1974 – less than a year before her death – is a melancholic summary of her life, generally speaking.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The last poem contained in *Verse* is about observing the antics of two sibling skunks.

To be or not to be  
Goes on without decision.  
To do or not to do  
Keeps life a constant fission.  
Near the end we know  
We have no special mission.<sup>50</sup>

Dr. Sperry's eulogy for Galligar includes her biographical information – her humble beginnings as the eldest daughter of tenant farmers in Wayne County, Illinois, her regular academic achievements in county schools and Decatur high school where she received all As except for one B in Music. He related her experiences at Millikin University, where she received straight As and graduated in only three years – at the time of her death, the only student at Millikin to hold that record. Sperry enumerates her scholarships, MA and PhD, honors, and assistantships. He recalls the thirteen years she spent as a biology professor at Millikin and the four years she spent at Kansas State Teacher's College. He lists her eight publications, the extension studies she made, her personal interests – English and American literature and her expertise in Staffordshire pottery, and her eight volumes of journals and the unpublished *Verse*.

He lauds her accomplishment as an instructor, citing her students' high praise and recognition that, as their mentor, they recognized the value of their academic accomplishments. He briefly talks about their marriage but describes in detail that Dr. Galligar "had to battle some petty local state and federal office holders, college professors and president, relatives and especially some petty social snobs among the local town and grown women (much more than men), but she was equal to all of them put together."

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<sup>50</sup> Galligar, *Verse*, 82.

He ends with her death on April 19, 1975, without warning, of a heart attack in Lyr'rose, the home she had designed. The final lines regarding her death are the only ones that contain obvious grammatical errors; the sign of careful Dr. Sperry's broken heart.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Biographical Organization, Sperry-Galligar Collection.

## CHAPTER VII

### EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSIONS

#### PARADOCS, SPRING 2014

“Paradocs is slightly more than one acre of land, roughly square in shape, and located at 1413 South College, Pittsburg, KS,” Dr. Galligar modestly and accurately begins in her description of the features and intentions of Paradocs.<sup>52</sup> Yet Paradocs holds within its boundaries much more than her description foretells. To understand Paradocs more completely, I felt it was important to walk its trails, see its trees, and experience its sunlit patches and hidden shadows for myself. Like pages of *Verse* or Dr. Galligar’s biographical information, however, Paradocs revealed a few of its secrets that May afternoon.

In May of 2014, I first wandered the grounds of Paradocs. Aside from personal curiosity, I wondered at the workability of using a location as a historical source and the human observer as interpreter. Despite my expectations of profound revelations and underprepared with only a meticulously detailed map drafted in Dr. Sperry’s handwriting, it was later that I realized I had only a scant idea of what I may find.

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<sup>52</sup> Gladys C. Galligar, “Journal Entry dated 11-18-56,” *Pittsburg State University Online: Biology Department: The Sperry Home*. Notation indicates it was transcribed with minor changes, with acknowledgements to the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society.

The map contains a careful rendering of the paths, natural landmarks, and structures of Paradocs. According to a journal entry made in 1956, Dr. Galligar writes “[e]ach path and trail has an identifying name for both convenience and whimsy.”<sup>53</sup> So, too, do the natural features. Twilight Trail meanders toward the Possum Junction, which splits at the shed into the North Trail and the North Woods Path. North Woods Path circles the cluster of trees on that edge of the property. If one chooses to go that direction, they may see the outhouse, the compost heap, and the mess of trees, living and downed, that constitute the North Woods. Going east from here, the map indicates a series of experimental pockets of prairie: tall, midgrass, and short prairies, along with sand and wet prairies. These experiments failed the test of time because prairie is not supposed to grow in such closed quarters. Grass needs space, and as of May, 2014, the plants that filled these areas were a mix of weeds and acclimated prairie leftovers.

Because of the efforts of Pittsburg State University’s Biology Department to preserve and maintain its place in the Southeastern Kansas, Paradocs has changed relatively little in terms of human manipulation. The paths are no longer mowed, and S’Way Back, the shed that housed the couples’ research materials, has been reduced to its foundation with only the fireplace; even it is embraced by native vines.. For the most part, Paradocs remains as it has since its conception and creation.

Ryldamere held the most hope for me – a shimmering lake embraced by trees – but the lack of rain in 2014 had left Ryldamere without the romance or poetry of shimmering waters. The pond’s bed was cracked and scattered with a few branches; it

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



looked more like a Kansas farm pond during a drought than a gazing pool. Such was the dispelling presence of Paradoxs. I left that day feeling let down. Paradoxs was just trees and burgeoning humid overgrowth – what even the most nonchalant Southeastern Kansas inhabitant can find in untended public lands, along farm roads, and in run-down yards. Birdcalls that were anonymous to my ears chirped, but they only added texture, not significance. The single trap I could find was merely an empty steel cage nailed to a tree species I could not readily identify.

One of the surprises was stone marker bearing an “S,” presumably indicating that this was indeed the Sperry property. No stone marker etched with “G” existed on the grounds that had supported the weight of Dr. Galligar’s retirement. Among the other manmade curiosities include a few benches scattered strategically among the paths; the best spot for reflective thinking was the one nestled into the flora and fauna on the southwestern side of Ryldamere’s waters. Originally, mining activities within the Pittsburg city limits created Ryldamere; the couple left it there as a centerpiece of the property, ensconced in trees. If the reclaimed deep wound in the earth had been full that day, rather than bone-dry, one could imagine Dr. Galligar sitting on its shore, veiled in the dotted shadows of the trees overhead, thinking deeply about the many shadows and flashes of light that occupied her mind.

With no stone marker bearing the initial of the last name Dr. Galligar fought so tenaciously to keep, I dedicated a landscape abnormality to her memory. A neat circle of Junipers grows where the reclaimed prairie experiment lay. Oddly, and due not to the prevailing winds of the region, each grows inward, creating the appearance of a sparse but unmistakable outline of a religious steeple. “The Juniper Temple” represents, for me,

a frail place of reverence for the woman who suffered so much pain here and found enough solace in its beauty to carry out her life to its natural end. It is not a fabricated stone marker; indeed, she desired no headstone. The meaning of The Juniper Temple is the deeper story that whispers of where the wild acre and Dr. Galligar enmeshed. These Junipers do not grow into this shape out of remembrance. As Walt Whitman once wrote, “Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.” I shamelessly admit that I name and give meaning to this small cluster of coniferous trees for my own selfish reasons. However, those reasons act as a counterbalance to the selfish memory of history, the one that has tended to blur and erase the significance of both woman and nature. The act of naming claims an identity for Dr. Galligar and remembers her in the place she so dearly loved.

The natural history of Paradocs gives further insights into the changes and significance of that environment. This acknowledgement became important when I visited the property. Even though some of the things I witnessed inspired what many would dub flights of whimsy, they are rooted in how Dr. Galligar lived her life within its borders. Only by experiencing the environmental paradox firsthand could I further understand its contribution to the historical narrative. The yards that surround Paradocs are still well manicured; indigenous, imported, and hybrid beds of flowers flank homes atop this short sea of green. Paradocs emerges from these neat, sunny lawns as a mist of dense trees and an impenetrable interior that shrouds its significance within itself. It appears to be more unkempt than experimental, more invasive than indigenous. In their hope that their home would inspire neighbors to allow nature to reclaim its soil without prejudice, Drs. Sperry and Galligar failed. Americans enjoy the manicured landscaping

ascetic; but this residential mainstay has been recently changing as Americans realize the pressure this ideal puts on natural resources. For example, xeriscaping – a landscaping technique that involves using geographically indigenous plants instead of plants developed in other zones that have higher demands for water – is a growing trend. Paradocs is an important part of that history.

Dr. Galligar experienced the hardships and successes of being a woman in America in first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her proximity to Illinois schools that encouraged women to pursue the sciences created sense of a security that could not withstand transplantation to Southeastern Kansas. Some species invade and thrive in a new environment; others founder. She keenly desired an end to her suffering. Her curiosity and love for the grounds of Paradocs tempted her to evolve into Dys, Possessed. As a scientific observer of the natural landscape and admirer of its wildlife species, she learned the foundations of environmental relationships and discovered what it meant and could mean to be a modern human within an ecosphere.

If one stolen metaphor succinctly and eloquently could describe her, it must come again from Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, from a description of his favorite Juniper tree in Arches National Park:

My favorite juniper stands before me glittering shaggily in the sunrise, ragged roots clutching at the rock on which it feeds, rough dark boughs bedecked with a rash, with a shower of turquoise-colored berries. A female, this ancient grandmother of a tree may be three hundred years old... My juniper, though still fruitful and full of vigor, is at the same time partly dead: one half of the divided trunk holds skyward a sapless claw, a branch without leaf or bark, baked by the sun and scoured by the wind to a silver finish... The essence of the juniper continues to elude me unless, as I presently suspect, its surface is also the essence. ... At times I am exasperated by the juniper's static pose; something in its stylized gesture of appeal, that dead claw against the sky, suggests catalepsy. Perhaps the

tree is mad. The dull, painful creaking of the branches in the wind indicates, however, an internal effort at liberation.<sup>54</sup>

The struggle Abbey speaks so eloquently about is Dr. Galligar's struggle for identity; one part of her psyche dead and clawing at air; the other still able to feel the wind tussle her prim, upswept hair.

The Sperry-Galligar collection is largely an untapped source of historical information. The forty linear feet of the collection is, at the time of this writing, only semi-processed. The smallest section of the collection belongs to Dr. Galligar. Eight large volumes of Dr. Galligar's personal journals, kept from 1956 to the year of her death, will reveal more of Dr. Galligar's personal and environmental philosophies for future researchers. There are two boxes of personal correspondence between Doctors Sperry and Galligar and with their friends and professional contacts.

Dr. Sperry's own biography is unwritten; his journals, notes, and professional career would further enrich Dr. Galligar's biography and add to the historical accounts of the early ecological movement in America. It is also important to note that understanding Dr. Sperry's relationship with his unconventional wife may yield fresh insights into the dynamics of male/female relationships, thus adding another necessary dimension to the topic of gender in American history.

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<sup>54</sup> Abbey, 32.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1

