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Introduction

Keith Newlin

Readers who come to *A Summer to Be* because of an interest in Hamlin Garland will discover a fascinating side of the writer that he never revealed in his eight volumes of autobiography—the intensely-loving, domineering father whose deep love for his eldest daughter led him to change the trajectory of his career even as that love impeded his daughter's independence. Garland was ill-equipped by temperament for marriage and fatherhood, to which he came late, marrying in 1899 at age thirty-nine. He had spent his adulthood in almost incessant travel as he fulfilled lecture engagements and indulged his own wanderlust by exploring the West, by visiting the goldfields in the Yukon, and by journeying to England to meet the authors with whom he had been corresponding. As he entered his fourth decade, he found it difficult to break his solitary habits and enter the inevitable compromises of marriage and family life. Though he was a devoted father who spared no effort to ease the passage into adulthood of his two daughters, Mary Isabel, born in 1903, and Constance, born in 1907, his fatherly guidance was as often overbearing as it was loving—as Isabel (who dropped her first name in her late teens) amply illustrates in her memoir.

But *A Summer to Be*, which Isabel had originally titled "This Loving Daughter," is valuable in its own right as a story of a girl brought up in the shadow of her father's famous friends, enjoying all the advantages of celebrity even as she rebelled against her father's loving domination. Garland had a talent for forming friendships, and in their childhood his daughters played with the

children of Solomon Guggenheim, the founder of the famed art museum; Ira Nelson Morris, Chicago financier and later U.S. envoy to Sweden; and Ernest Thompson Seton, naturalist and co-founder of the Boy Scouts of America. As teenagers, the Garland girls met Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw, J. M. Barrie, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, and A. A. Milne; and as adults they formed friendships with the actors Walter Hampden, John Barrymore, and Walter Pidgeon. While Constance inherited an artistic ability from her mother, Isabel inherited her father's talent for writing. In her memoir, which begins with her earliest memories, Isabel charmingly describes her encounters with these and many other writers and actors as she honestly and movingly weaves a story of her own coming of age that is also a snapshot of American literary culture of the first decades of the twentieth century. Part memoir and part autobiography, *A Summer to Be* records a daughter's gradual emergence from her devoted and possessive father; it is a story full of moments of revelation and intrigue, betrayal and guilt, and ultimately the joy of self-discovery.



Hamlin Garland was born in a squatters' shack on the outskirts of the village of West Salem, Wisconsin, in 1860, just twelve years after that state had joined the Union. When he was three, his father, Richard Hayes Garland, enlisted in the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry and saw action in Georgia during the Civil War. When Richard Garland returned to his farm in 1865 (an event celebrated in his son's much-anthologized story, "The Return of the Private"), he promptly transferred the rigor of military service to child-raising. "His scheme of discipline impressed itself almost at once upon his children," Garland later remembered. When Hamlin and his younger brother, Franklin, misbehaved, "we soon learned . . . that the soldier's promise of punishment was swift and precise in its fulfillment. We seldom presumed a second time on his forgetfulness or tolerance."¹ His mother, the former Isabelle McClintock, was not demonstrative. Garland remembered that "she never expressed her deeper feelings. She seldom kissed her children," and once he reached his teenage years, Hamlin recalled that "she never

embraced us."² The combination of a stern father and an undemonstrative mother forever colored Garland's own attitude toward the outward expression of love. As an adult, he was painfully shy about interacting with women directly; as a father, he determined not to repeat his parents' practice and never missed an opportunity to remind his children of his love—with the result that his few occasions of discipline deeply wounded his daughters.

Richard Garland was an ambitious farmer who uprooted his family five times before Hamlin was sixteen. When the Garlands moved to a patch of land near Osage, Iowa, in 1870, young Hamlin was set to work to plow the tough prairie sod. "I plowed seventy acres of land when I was 10 years old and more each year after that," he told an interviewer in 1897. "I was so small that I had to reach up to catch the handles of the plow."³ His arms aching, at times tormented by flies or blasted by a bitter north wind, his small legs slowed by the accumulation of mud, Garland plowed two acres a day, ten hours at a stretch. It is little wonder that he later commented, "my heart was sometimes bitter and rebellious," even though he well understood that child labor was a necessity on a frontier farm.⁴ Garland's early years of hard labor would forever affect him, determine the subjects for his earliest fiction, foster his belief that nothing worthwhile comes without hard work, and engender a life-long fear of poverty.

When Garland was sixteen, he entered the Cedar Valley Seminary in Osage, a combination high school and junior college, returning to the farm each spring and fall for planting and harvesting. By the time he graduated in 1881 at age twenty-one, he was determined to leave farm life forever, and in 1884, after a brief stint at homesteading in Dakota Territory, he made his way to Boston. Like many young men of twenty-four, he didn't know what he wanted to do with his life. For a time, he dreamed of becoming a great orator and, later, a playwright and actor. He drifted into what was effectively an adjunct position as a lecturer at the Boston School of Oratory, tried his hand at fiction-writing, and discovered his calling.

He soon began to flood the nation's magazines with a blizzard of short stories, poems, book reviews, and essays on various topics, all the while campaigning for agrarian reform as a lecturer for Henry George's Single Tax movement, a proposal for more equi-

table taxation that would, adherents hoped, end land speculation and the consequent escalation of land prices that magnified the difficulties of Midwestern farm life. He gained a reputation as a radical and began writing stories that combined George's economic theories with realistic depictions of farm life. In 1891 the best of these stories appeared as *Main-Travelled Roads*; reviewers praised his method but were disturbed by the bleak subject. Other books followed rapidly (four novels in 1892 alone), and they were often greeted with hostile criticism that focused on Garland's persona as much as the books themselves.

Garland was a naturally gregarious man who made the acquaintance of many of Boston's writers and intellectuals, a circle of friends that enlarged when he moved to Chicago in 1893. By then he had become known as one of the nation's most vehement advocates of literary realism, a campaign that he brought to the leading magazines. When he issued his literary manifesto, *Crumbling Idols*, in 1894, and his novel celebrating the independence of women, *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*, in 1895, critics greeted them with hostility in reviews that often attacked Garland personally—and Garland thereafter determined to write no more controversial books. But controversy had also increased the demand for his lectures, and Garland traveled widely throughout the country and became involved in a number of organizations that enlarged his acquaintance with the leaders of American literary and art culture. In his travels he also discovered a new enthusiasm in the grandeur of the mountain West and decided to devote his energies to celebrating the West in his fiction, a decision cemented after a trip to the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898 in search of new literary material.

Garland married Zulime Mauna Taft in 1899. The daughter of a former University of Chicago professor of geology turned Kansas banker, Zulime (pronounced Zoo-lah-mee) had recently returned from Paris, where she had studied sculpture, a talent encouraged by her brother, the sculptor Lorado Taft, who was Garland's good friend. With the responsibilities of marriage, Garland began to write a series of western romances, beginning with *The Eagle's Heart* in 1900, which launched his pattern of issuing a book each year until 1911, when he began to tire of his subject. Two of these books—*The Captain of the Gray Horse Troop* (1902) and *Hesper* (1903)—achieved respectable sales, enabling Garland to

attain, for the first time in his career, a sense of financial prosperity. Poised to capitalize on literary and financial success, his world changed with the birth of Mary Isabel. Garland delighted in the joys of fatherhood and became a devoted and affectionate parent. As Isabel remembers, "We had glorious times, my father and I. We walked, we talked, we read, we drew, we romped. Daddy would lie on the floor, holding my hands, while I, stomach down across his feet, was lifted to thrilling heights. When I was little, I used to ride on his foot, clinging to his leg as he moved slowly around the room." Amid such distractions, Garland found himself unable to focus the drive that had hitherto made him so prolific, and as sales of his books slumped, he cast about for new literary direction. After much disappointment, in 1917 he published his autobiography, *A Son of the Middle Border*, to critical acclaim. Its sequel, *A Daughter of the Middle Border*, published in October 1921, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for biography for 1922, which Garland celebrated by taking his family to England, where he renewed acquaintance with the British authors he had met on his previous trips, alone, in 1899 and 1906.

Isabel's description of her visits with England's famous authors has a certain charm. Hers is a teenager's view, impressed with the pomp and circumstance attending the famous, worried about the impression she makes in her adolescent self-consciousness, and commenting on the incongruous, such as the omnipresence of custard at dinner or the cheating at croquet by the son of the Maharajah of Jhalawar. By the time she returned to the United States after this memorable summer in 1922, Isabel had matured into a lovely young woman of nineteen with considerable self-confidence and poise.

While Garland was practicing his craft as a writer, he also kept up a very active life as a professional lecturer. Returning from England with new material for lectures on British authors, he set out on a fresh round of speaking engagements. He developed a new program entitled "Memories of the Middle Border" that included Isabel and capitalized on the success of his autobiography. Garland and his eldest daughter would read excerpts from his autobiographies, fiction, and poetry, with Isabel costumed as her mother and grandmother. Encouraged by the success of the program, he added two more volumes to the family saga, *Trail-Makers of the Middle*

Border (1926) and *Back-Trailers from the Middle Border* (1928).

The 1920s saw much change for the Garlands. Now in his sixties and often in ill-health, Garland was prone to the carping that often comes with the infirmities of age. His work on his autobiographies had led him to dwell in the past, a time in which, in his nostalgic myopia, the country was unified in its goals and values. In the Wisconsin and Iowa of his remembrance, his neighbors had hailed from New England or Scandinavia or Germany and had made it a matter of pride to assimilate into the nation. But the eastern Europeans he saw on the streets of New York struck him, in his now-conservative outlook, as alien to the traditions he was daily describing in his writing.

Then, too, cultural changes in entertainment, brought about by movies and the rise of magazines with circulations in the millions, served to increase his disdain for the immigrant. He perceived contemporary writers not as artists but as tradesmen who were writing for a magazine industry whose primary goal was not to publish works of literary merit, but to sell advertising. The story was only an incidental hook, full of sensation and violence, provided to lure readers into buying soap and underwear. Garland attributed the changes in literature to these magazines and their lowbrow readers. His long preoccupation with his own past, with reliving his former triumphs, and especially with retracing his own battle for realism in his autobiography, served to cement more firmly the value of that movement in his eyes. One effect was to leave him utterly incapable of recognizing the significance of the burgeoning modernist movement, with its linguistic inventiveness, chronological disruptions, sense of alienation, and invention of new narrative structures that marked a perception of reality that was markedly at odds with his own practice. Garland was especially galled by the modernist assault upon decorum, the frank depiction of sex, of adultery, of violence seemingly for its own sake, all of which he dismissed as "pornography." Everywhere he turned he heard jazz—though to his ear, accustomed to the soothing melodies of folk songs or the stately rhythms of classical symphonies, the music was raucous and jarring, inflaming desires better kept under wraps.

The effect of this cultural conservatism on his relationship with his daughters—now in their teenage years—was predictably confrontational. Always his favorite daughter, Isabel's increasing

interest in boys proved particularly trying to the devoted father. More disturbing was Isabel's ambition to become an actress. She and Constance were students at the Finch School, a private preparatory school for girls founded by Jessica Cosgrave, the wife of Garland's friend, John O'Hara Cosgrave, the editor of *Everybody's Magazine*. Isabel had discovered her dramatic talent in the school's theatrical productions, and it was only natural that she wanted to pursue her ambition on the professional stage. Garland's early interest in theater and his long friendships with a number of actors, actresses, and playwrights meant that he was well acquainted with the more casual intimacies of theater folk. When he couldn't dissuade Isabel from acting, he arranged for her to take parts in the theater companies of friends, believing that their watchful eyes would protect his daughter. This first experience on the professional stage was, Isabel remarks, "a liberal and raw education," for away from the protective gaze of her parents, she "learned more of the seamy side of life than I had learned before or since"—for the first time hearing profanity and smut from the lips of leading actors and encountering "the modern connotation of the word 'fairy.'" As an attractive and poised young woman with all the passions of youth, Isabel soon fell in love with a fellow actor, an affair that Garland did his best to end, which only served to increase his daughter's growing secretiveness.

Eventually, Isabel met a man who met with her father's approval. (James) Hardesty Johnson was a tenor with the Jean de Reszke Singers, a quartet that had trained in Europe (where Isabel first met him) and that had come to New York on an American tour. Always fond of musicians, Garland soon welcomed Hardesty as the son he never had. He was pleased when Hardesty and Isabel were married on May 12, 1926, mindful that Hardesty's singing career would be centered in New York, and he would have little separation from his beloved daughter. One year later, on September 12, 1927, Constance married Joseph Wesley Harper, a grandson of one of the founders of Harper and Brothers, Garland's long-time publishers. He was greatly troubled by the new couple's plan to relocate to Hollywood, but he took solace in Isabel's proximity. His world was turned upside down when Hardesty also decided to go to Hollywood to explore career possibilities in the movies.

Isabel touchingly reveals the emotional effect of this reloca-

tion on the Garland family. Now approaching his seventieth year, feeling increasingly out of touch with the literary world that had sustained him for forty years, Garland had centered his life around his daughters. Their absence was unbearable. In 1929, when he arrived in Hollywood to visit Constance and Joe Harper, he easily fell in love with California's temperate climate, so alien from the New England winters he had always known. He promptly decided to build a house for Isabel and Hardesty, conveniently located next door to Constance and Joe, who themselves had built a house next door to Joe's mother—all on DeMille Drive, named for the famed film director whose mansion graced the hilltop. He didn't foresee the difficulties this family ménage would present.

Garland had intended to visit during the winters, for Constance soon presented him with two grandchildren—John, born in 1929; Constance, born in 1930—returning to the East for the rest of the year. But in 1931 when Zulime became ill with what was eventually diagnosed as Parkinson's disease, he realized that she needed more care than he could provide. By 1932, the seasonal visit became permanent.

Garland has amply recorded the effect of this self-imposed "exile" on his career in his letters and memoirs: now separated by a continent from the clubs and writers that sustained him, he grew even more dependent upon the company of his daughters. Before long Isabel came to resent her father, for still in the process of becoming independent herself, she begrudged Garland's imperious demands upon her time. But her resentment was complicated by the continual reminder that she was living in a house her father had built for her, as well as being dependent upon his monthly allowance of \$100; her guilt at not feeling more appreciative only exacerbated the resentment.

While Hardesty was busy making contacts in the film industry, Isabel was determined to follow in her father's footsteps and become a writer, chiefly of mystery stories, which were enjoying a vogue in the magazines. In the evenings Isabel and Hardesty would socialize with film folk, all the while taking care to hide their drinking from Garland, who disapproved of all but an occasional drink. Then one day Hardesty met an old flame, the singer Marguerite Namara who, like him, had trained with Jean de Reszke in Nice. Marguerite, who was married to a struggling writer fifteen

years her junior named Mindret Lord, was in Hollywood to film *Thirty Day Princess* (1934). The two couples began to have regular dinners together, and while the two singers flirted over the piano, the two writers found they had much in common. Mindret had enjoyed some success with placing stories in the pulps, and he began to mentor Isabel with her writing. Not surprisingly, the two soon fell in love.

Still dependent upon her father financially, and fearful of displeasing and disappointing him, Isabel concealed her affair. Then one day, Marguerite surprised the two lovers in an embrace. For a cuckolded husband, Hardesty seems to have been unusually understanding, and he agreed to say nothing to the Garlands. Indeed, hoping that the love affair would play itself out, he even agreed to travel with Isabel to New York, where Mindret would join her. When it became clear that the affair was more than an infatuation, Hardesty agreed to take a separate apartment—and also to conceal their separation from Garland.

In November 1934, Garland learned that Isabel and Hardesty had separated. He was devastated. "This was an appalling revelation to me for I had no suspicion of it," he confided to his diary. "I could not believe it for it involved a long period of duplicity on Mary Isabel's part."⁵ Four weeks later he learned of her involvement with Mindret and promptly fired off an angry letter to his wayward daughter: "Your sister tells me you have left your husband and are involved with another man. I need not tell you what this means to me but I want to say I will never see this man or take him by the hand. Your monthly allowance will continue but do not expect anything else from me."⁶ Isabel responded immediately, pouring out her heart to her father, trying to make him understand. His reply was a curt note: "I understand you are contemplating divorce. You will have no help from me in this matter. I have always stood for honesty and decency and I wish no part in this dangerous venture you embarked on. From now on, the subject is closed between us."⁷ Thereafter, his letters, usually effusive in expression of his love and interest in his favorite daughter, were curt and impersonal. For consolation, Isabel turned to her mother, who was far more supportive and acted as an intermediary to temper the disappointed father's wrath. As soon as she and Mindret could save enough money for a lawyer, Isabel arranged for an

absentee Mexican divorce. Isabel and Mindret Lord were married on December 21, 1936.

While Garland was fretting over his disappointment in his eldest daughter, Constance was dealing with her own marital difficulties. In 1930 Joe Harper had been an usher at the marriage of Cecil B. DeMille's daughter, Cecilia, to Francis Calvin. The newly-wed couple moved into the famed director's mansion atop DeMille Drive. The Calvin and Harper children often played together, and soon their parents developed a warm friendship as well. One day in 1936 Joe announced to Constance that he wanted a divorce so he could marry Cecilia. Again Garland was devastated at this crumbling of his world and mourned to his diary, "Constance informed us today that she and Joe—after eight years of wedded life, had agreed to separate and so—I who have stood for decency and loyalty in social life find myself with two daughters seeking divorces!" Adding to his pain were fears that the sensation-loving press would learn that Cecil B. DeMille's daughter was now involved with his son-in-law. Two days later, he added, "If ever I have a biographer he can take this as one of my darkest weeks. Both my daughters separated from their husbands, my wife an invalid, myself threatened with pneumonia and unable to see even the few friends I have left."⁸ By January 18, 1937, Garland had rallied and accompanied Constance to her lawyer's office to sign the divorce decree. Joe Harper and Cecilia DeMille Calvin were married one year later, on January 21, 1938, and, remaining blissfully in the neighborhood, promptly settled in to live in the Cecil B. DeMille house, directly across the street. Little wonder that the ménage on DeMille Drive led Constance to sell that home, and she moved out of the neighborhood and into the then sparsely settled San Fernando Valley. As her father reflected, "These are the complications of divorce, deeper yet are the complications in the minds of the children. They can not understand why their father and mother do not live together as they used to do."⁹

Garland eventually got over his disappointment with Isabel, and when she and Mindret returned to Hollywood in November 1937, he welcomed the new husband into the family, taking great pleasure in their discussions of the writing game. Garland expected Isabel to return to the DeMille Drive house he had built for her, but in the intervening years she had learned how to say "no"—

indeed, she had made independence a condition of her return to Hollywood. To her surprise, Garland did not resist.



A Summer to Be concludes with Garland's death, on March 4, 1940. For the next nine years, Isabel and Mindret lived contentedly in Los Angeles, with Mindret achieving modest success writing scripts for the radio and the movies (most notably, for *The Virgin Queen* [1955], starring Bette Davis). Isabel published her first novel, *Abandon Hope* (Mystery House, 1941, also published as *Death Comes Courting*, Arcadia House, 1941), followed by four others, under the name "Garland Lord," in collaboration with Mindret: *Murder's Little Helper* (1941), *She Never Grew Old* (1942), *Murder with Love* (1943), and *Murder, Plain and Fancy* (1943). Unfortunately for Isabel, Mindret's growing involvement with the film industry led to jealousies on her part. She had found fulfillment in their writing partnership and she regarded Mindret's decision to work for the movies as a betrayal. As she later explained to her attorney, "We had had such fun working together, writing together, that I was hurt and jealous that he would prefer another career without me. He says that that was the moment that opened his eyes to my complete selfishness, my possessiveness. I was selfish, I admit. I so loved our life together and what I thought was our happiness, that I hated to let it slip away from me."¹⁰ Mindret began drinking heavily. He entered into an affair, and in 1947 the marriage collapsed. Eight years later, in 1955, Mindret was dead, a suicide.

In the 1960s, Isabel read her father's diaries in preparation to depositing them in the Huntington Library. Garland had begun keeping a daily diary in 1898 and had continued the habit until a week before his death. In them he had recorded the minutia of a busy author and also a great deal about his family, especially about Isabel, the daughter he adored. He filled the pages with her every advance, noting her first steps, her first words, recording every achievement, no matter how small. Reading the diaries gave her a renewed appreciation for the meaning and scope of Garland's life—as well as her own part in it. Before the diaries left her hands, Isabel made a selective transcript, some 146 single-spaced pages. At some

point in the process she decided to use them as the basis for a memoir, and that was the genesis for *A Summer to Be*, which Isabel had originally titled "This Loving Daughter." Despite her occasional conflicts with her father, Isabel wished the book to stand as a testament to her deep and lasting love for the father who had cherished her, perhaps not fully realizing how revelatory it would prove of her own complex attitude toward him.

As a writer, Isabel well knew that every story needs a conflict, and she decided to place her own struggle for independence at the center of her memoir. *A Summer to Be* contains two stories. In it can be found a sequel to Garland's own biographical series, the story of a famous man who intensely and possessively adored his daughters to whom he represented the extremes of social privilege. The other story is Isabel's own, the tale of her rebellion against her father and her growing independence, brought about by the discovery of her one true love. But lurking behind the narrative is the knowledge that her own insecurity drove love away from her, and though she nowhere mentions the later outcome, she foreshadows it by infusing the memoir with her own tendency toward possessiveness, as at the close of chapter 20 where she implores Mindret, "Promise me that no matter what happens you'll go on loving me! Promise me that you will love me forever!" In fact, Isabel carried her undying love for Mindret to her own last day, decades after their divorce and his suicide. Just as *A Summer to Be* is an ode to her father, the second half of the memoir becomes her ode to Mindret. Isabel also casts Hardesty as a saint in his tolerance of her affair, out of his own love for her, perhaps in part as penance for her betrayal of him. Writing *A Summer to Be* thus became an act of catharsis.



I am grateful to the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, for permission to quote from Garland's unpublished diaries (GD 1-43) in this introduction and in the notes. For permission to quote from Garland's unpublished letters and to publish photographs in its collection, I wish to thank the Hamlin Garland Papers, University of Southern California Libraries Special Collections, hereafter abbreviated as (USC). I also thank John

Ahouse and Claude Zachary for help in acquiring materials at USC, and Stephen C. Brennan and Gary Culbert for helpful comments on a draft of this introduction.

Notes

¹ Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 7-8.

² Garland, "The Wife of a Pioneer," *Ladies' Home Journal* 20 (September 1903): 8, 42.

³ "Gossip about Hamlin Garland." *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1897, 21.

⁴ *A Son of the Middle Border*, 88.

⁵ Diary, November 2, 1934 (Huntington Library, GD 1-43).

⁶ Quoted in chapter 17 of *A Summer to Be*.

⁷ Quoted in chapter 17 of *A Summer to Be*.

⁸ Diary, November 9, 11, 1936 (Huntington Library, GD 1-43).

⁹ Diary, April 12, 1938 (Huntington Library, GD 1-43).

¹⁰ Isabel Garland Lord to Mr. O'Connon, March 2, 1949 (USC).