

Hoax With Famous Poem A Monument

BY BONNIE CRENSHAW

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WASHINGTON, March 10—One of Washington's oldest and best-known restaurants is the Occidental. The steaks are still authentic, but in the poetry department, the place "where statesmen dine" has just suffered a serious blow.

That same blow will be felt by anyone who has thought James A. Joyce was the one who penned "Love and Laughter," a 66-year-old poem that begins:

"Laugh and the world
laughs with you,
"Weep and you weep
alone."

Good food is the Occidental's main achievement, but second in their pride is the vast collection of autographed pictures of Washington's great on the walls of the restaurant.

Among these framed photographs is what has been thought the original manuscript of "Love and Laughter," written in Joyce's handwriting. Surmounting the copy is a picture of Joyce himself standing by his own tombstone, inscribed with the first two lines of the poem.

But Joyce, it seems, snatched the poem from Ella Wheeler Wilcox, whose "Poems of Passion" thrilled our grandmothers. He liked it so well that he attributed it to himself during his lifetime and immortalized it to his credit on his grave.

Until the Occidental got involved in literary scholarship, it was forgotten that around the turn of the century, the nation, and particularly Washington, split itself right in the middle

over "Love and Laughter." The Joyce-Wilcox battle raged and spent itself. No one clearly established the poem's true author. Today, however, researchers at the Library of Congress say that it was first published on Feb. 25, 1883, by the New York Sun under Mrs. Wilcox's name.

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The Joyce version on the Occidental's wall states in a note penned to the bottom of the poem that it was composed by him for George D. Prentice, editor of the Louisville Journal, in the Wine Room of the Old Gault House in January, 1863, or 20 years before the poem really saw print.

Prentice in 1914 presented the original manuscript to the founder of the Occidental, where it's been proudly displayed to guests for a generation.

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The hoax might have gone on forever had it not been for a recent radio quiz program. One woman who heard a prize given for naming Ella Wheeler Wilcox as the correct author, came in the restaurant, saw the discrepancy and called it to the attention of the manager. The manager called the Library of Congress feeling confident his claim would be verified.

But alas, when the report came in the library said "No." According to an old "Who's Who," the Scottish-born Joyce, who was reared in Kentucky and practiced law in Washington, was actually a writer of some note. He had a long list of books and poems to his credit, including "Life of Lincoln," and "Personal Recollections."

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Now, the Occidental manage-

ment can laughingly point out their prize as a celebrated forgery, and Joyce fans will either have to find some new evidence of authenticity of pull in their horns. The Wilcox forces have won.

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