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ESSAYS

"Even as His Sita is Pure, She Still Loves Him":
The Repudiation of Sita in the *Ramayana*

Paul H. Lorenz
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The Indian subcontinent has produced two of the world's major epics, both of them written in Sanskrit and both important texts in Hinduism. Probably best known in the West, the *Mahabharata*, sometimes called the *Veda of Krishna*, is eight times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined and is attributed to the sage Vyasa, who it is said, transcribed the epic as it was dictated to him by the elephant-headed god Ganesh (Leeming 110). The other great Indian epic is the *Ramayana*. Like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, the *Ramayana* existed in the oral tradition for centuries before the rishi, or transmitter of divine knowledge, Valmiki composed the epic in about 300 BCE, though devout Hindus believe that it was originally composed hundreds of thousands of years ago in the *Treta Yuga*[1] (Menon xii). Valmiki is often credited in India with being the inventor of poetry, for he invented the metrical form called the *sloka*, which he used in the composition of the *Ramayana*, which is 24,000 *slokas* or 48,000 lines long (Shastri xvi). Since its composition, the *Ramayana* has been a popular work among Hindus around the world. The stories of the *Ramayana* have been retold countless times in scholarly translations, in popular updates, in versions aimed at children and adolescents from Hindu India and Bali, to Europe and the Americas. Of special note is the Hindi translation by Goswami Tulsidas, which has greatly influenced the thought of modern India (Shastri xvii). The discussion in this essay is based primarily on the scholarly translation into English of the *Ramayana* published by Hari Prasad Shastri in the 1950s (nearly 1600 pages), which is out of print, and the 2001 abridged retelling of the epic by Ramesh Menon (686 pages), which is readily available from bookstores.

While this essay will focus on the repudiation, or rather repudiations, of Sita which occur in the *Ramayana*, because the text of the epic has not been generally available in the United States for many years preceding Menon's quite accurate retelling, a bit of plot summary to establish the contexts for Rama's repudiations of his wife Sita is probably in order. The *Ramayana* is traditionally presented in seven books. In the first book, called the *Bala-Kanda*, King Dasaratha of Ayodhya performs a sacrifice in hopes of having a son to replace him. As a result of his sacrifice, all three of his wives become pregnant. At the same time, the gods or *Devas*, are worried about the rise of a rakshasa, or demon, named Ravana. Vishnu, the pervader and preserver god, decides to come to earth in the form of Dasaratha's sons:

Rama, Bharata, and the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna. When the boys grow up, Rama, who is in line to become king, distinguishes himself from his brothers when, after demonstrating his courage against the rakshasas who are tormenting the holy men in the forest, he becomes the only person capable of bending a sacred bow. As a result, King Janaka gives his daughter Sita to Rama as his wife. Sita is literally a child of the earth; she is the daughter of the earth goddess, a girl whom King Janaka had "plowed" out of the earth years before, and as such, she is the avatar, or incarnation, of Vishnu's wife Lakshmi. In the second book, the *Ayodhya-Kanda*, Rama is about to be named heir apparent when the mother of his brother Bharata recalls that she has been granted two boons by the aged king Dasaratha. She demands that Bharata be named king and that Rama be exiled to the forest for fourteen years. A king must keep his word, so Bharata becomes king against his own wishes and Rama calmly accepts banishment into the forest. Sita and Rama's brother Lakshmana go with Rama to the forest, where the two brothers drive out demons and make the forest safe for the monks who live there. Shortly after Rama's banishment, King Dasaratha dies of grief. In the third book, the *Aranya-Kanda*, about thirteen years after the banishment, Sita, the most beautiful woman in the world and the most perfect of wives, is kidnapped by the rakshasa Ravana, who takes her to his kingdom of Lanka with the intention of adding her to his harem. In the fourth book, the *Kishkinda-Kanda*, Rama and Lakshmana search for Sita, finally enlisting the aid of Sugriva, the king of the vanaras, or monkeys, to help them locate the missing Sita, and in the fifth book, the *Sundara-Kanda,* the vanaras search all of India without success until the brave vanara Hanuman makes the leap of faith over the Gulf of Mannar to finally locate Sita in a garden where she is being held on the island that is now called Sri Lanka. Book six, the *Yuddha-Kanda*, describes the battles fought to retrieve Sita and defeat the evil rakshasas of Ravana. After the victory and the completion of the time of Rama's exile, Rama returns to Ayodhya, where Bharata turns over the kingdom to him. The *Uttara-Kanda*, an epilogue, describes the banishment of Sita to Valmiki's ashram and the birth of Sita's two sons, who later bring about a reunion of their parents (Shastri xvi-xvii).

The *Ramayana*, then, can easily be read as an adventure story about the forces of good led by Rama and his vanara army ultimately triumphing over the forces of evil led by the multi-headed rakshasa, Ravana, who feasts on both vanara and man and who will take any wife, any female of any species, as his own as long as she excites his concupiscence. The simplicity of the plot, however, belies the complexity of the battle between good and evil and the deep psychological insights into human nature that inform the narrative. Rama and Sita have long stood as models of behavior in the Hindu world while Ravana's behavior is part of a serious investigation of the nature

of evil in the world (Menon x-xi). The source of Ravana's power to do great evil lies, in fact, in the prayers and sacrifices he has made to advance his evil campaign to take over the world; his evil power is based on the political capital he has managed to obtain from the gods themselves. The fact that Rama and Lakshmana defeat Ravana with a vanara army (an army of monkeys and bears) rather than with a human army, and are aided by virtuous rakshasa (demon) warriors is also clearly of significance when the epic is read as a metaphor of the human condition rather than as the simple adventure story it is on the surface. In fact, as the narrative fills in the background information on each of the characters and each of the events that take place, it becomes obvious that no individual controls his or her own fate; rather every being is playing a role in life determined by a complex matrix of outside forces that are understandable when revealed, but so complex and interrelated that they are more easily accepted as simply "Fate." As Sita tells Hanuman, everything that happens in this life occurs "because of our karma of past births. The joy we have in this one, and the depths of grief, are wages for what we have done in lives gone by" (Menon 325).

There is much to stimulate discussion in the *Ramayana*, but the question that I wish to develop in this essay is why Rama would search the entire world for his kidnapped Sita, cross the "uncrossable" sea to Lanka to fight the formidable forces of Ravana to rescue Sita, and then, when he has rescued his long-suffering wife from an evil force that has intimidated even the gods, why he would feel compelled to send the woman he cannot imagine living without into exile. While Rama and Sita are together, she is clearly the perfect wife who is always ready to support and comfort her husband. She is willing to give up her silks and treasures to follow Rama into exile when his father sends him to the forest (Menon 89-90). When Ravana kidnaps her, she resists his attempts to have his way with her not only initially, but throughout her imprisonment in Lanka and for this earns the respect of her rakshasa (female demon) guards (Menon 316). She remains faithful to her absent husband, remains a chaste woman, much to the anger and consternation of the aroused Ravana who cannot rape her because of a curse put on him after he raped an apsara. In fact, in Ravana's experience, Sita is the only woman of any species who has not, within a few days, voluntarily decided to have intercourse with him, despite the repulsive physical nature of her captor, in order to assure herself of good treatment in the new circumstances of her captivity (Menon 307-13, 364).

The first insight into the answer to this question is revealed before Rama's first repudiation of Sita when the vanara hero Hanuman finally locates Sita in Ravana's garden prison on Lanka. Hanuman, who is the "son of the wind," offers to simply carry Sita back to her husband Rama that very day, cutting the story short and avoiding the epic battle between good and evil,

dharma and adharma, that forms the heart of the *Ramayana*. Sita does not accept the offer to take the easy way out. She gives Hanuman two reasons based on "feminine" fears—that she is afraid of flying and falling and that she would rather die at once than be recaptured by Ravana—and two arguments that show the power of her wisdom. First, Rama must come to Lanka and defeat Ravana in battle because it is part of their destiny, "and destiny must take its course" (Menon 326). The second argument is based on cultural norms of acceptable behavior. As a seeming afterthought, Sita sends Hanuman back to Rama saying, "Also, good Hanuman, you must forgive me, but I am Rama's wife and it isn't proper for me to cling to you while we cross the sea. It is true that Ravana held me as he flew through the sky; but that was by force and he will pay for it with his life" (Menon 326). Sita is acknowledging the popular belief that both men and women are nearly incapable of resisting desires of the flesh, a belief that informs many of the ancient stories collected by Summative in 1070 CE in the *Kathasaritsagara* (literally, the "Ocean of the Sea of Story") for the amusement of Queen Suryavati. Summative presents his stories of beautiful women and their fearless lovers without passing judgement on their actions. In the *Ramayana*, however, there is no respect for the unchaste.

When the war is over and the reconciliation of Rama and Sita seems to be the next logical event in the story, the *Ramayana* takes an unexpected turn. Sita starts talking about sin. She tells Hanuman, "I must have sinned in my last life, that I was condemned to suffer for a year in this one. . . . I must have sinned heinously, that I made [Rama] suffer so much" (Menon 491). Meanwhile, Rama himself is in tears at the thought of how Sita had suffered. He orders that she be bathed and dressed in silks so that her appearance will not remind him of how she suffered. He insists that their reunion be in public, despite the prevailing public opinion that women should be sequestered. He orders his guards to let the rakshasas and vanaras see Sita, saying, "A woman's chastity is her protection, not walls and weapons. Let them look at her, even as they look at me. And let her see me surrounded by those who helped me rescue her. In exceptional circumstances, the people may look upon a woman: in war, or when she is in trouble; during her wedding, or at a yagna [sacrifice]" (Menon 493). Out of these possible circumstances, Rama shocks the crowd when he continues, "There has been a war for Sita's sake, and she is in trouble" (Menon 493). Face to face with Sita, using a terrifying voice not even his enemies have heard before, Rama tells Sita that he has vindicated his honor by killing Ravana who had done him wrong. But he continues, "Do not think for a moment, Sita, that I came for your sake. Your name is a stain on our family. It pains me even to look at you. You can go wherever you like. I have rescued you, as I swore I would; I owe you nothing more. No man of honor can take home a woman who has lived in his

enemy's house for as many moons as you have" (Menon 494). Sita protests that she is entirely chaste and argues that Rama's victory is futile, for in the end he is behaving like a base hypocrite. She asks Lakshmana to build a funeral pyre for her, and when he is finished, she walks into the flames and is consumed. Suddenly, all the principal gods appear in the sky and announce to all that Rama and Sita are both avatars or incarnations of gods while Agni delivers Sita from the flames perfectly restored announcing, "Here is Sita, blemishless as she was born. . . . Not for a moment, not with a fleeting thought, has she sinned. Rama, she is purer than I am" (Menon 497). Rama and Sita are reconciled when Rama explains to her that he made her pass through a test of fire, the *agni pariksha*, so that all the world would know that she had been chaste. He was afraid that ordinary people would assume that Ravana had enjoyed her body and would not accept a king who took back a sullied woman. Now, Rama asserts, everyone knows that Sita is "purity incarnate" (Menon 498).

One would think, like Rama, that the testimony of the gods themselves would be enough to establish Sita's virtue, but that is not the case in the *Ramayana*. Shortly after Rama becomes king of Ayodhya and he and Sita have decided to have children, he hears rumors that none of his people really believe that Sita retained her chastity during her imprisonment in Lanka. "Why," they ask, "does Rama keep such a woman beside him? Doesn't he realize that we, too, will have to endure our wives straying, because the people always follow what their king and queen do?" (Menon 598). Rama, believing that his first dharma is to his people, sends his pregnant wife into exile at the forest ashram of the rishi Valmiki. He reasons that a king without honor cannot hold his head high in front of his people and honor is a matter of public opinion. It is left to Lakshmana to tell Sita of her banishment. Not understanding how she has sinned, Sita sends Lakshmana home telling him to tell Rama that she will pray for him and that "even as his Sita is pure, she still loves him" (Menon 601). At the ashram, Sita gives birth to twins. When they are grown, Valmiki teaches them the great poem he has composed, the *Ramayana*, and sends the boys to Rama to recite it. Rama then decides to end Sita's exile, but when she returns to take her place as queen, the earth, her mother, opens up and swallows her. Sita takes her rightful place among the gods in heaven, and Rama must wait until he too gives up his earthly body and is transported into heaven before he can see her again (Menon 648-50).

It is this second renunciation of Sita that needs clarification, for no really convincing explanation of it is given in the text of the poem. While it is true that nearly all of the witnesses to the gods' confirmation of Sita's purity were vanara warriors and rakshasas rather than Rama's human subjects, certainly Rama knew the truth of Sita's loyalty and witnesses existed

who could testify to her vindication. However, Rama makes no attempt to convince the people that their assessment of Sita's chastity is incorrect. The "if you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with" (Stills) assumptions about human behavior of the *Kathasaritsagara* appear to be already firmly ensconced in the moral expectations of Rama's people. While granting that this is one of the political realities of Rama's reign, it must be remembered that the *Ramayana* is part of religious history of the Indian subcontinent. It is written in classical Sanscrit, the descendant of Vedic Sanskrit (also known as *daiva vak* or "divine speech"), the oldest known member of the Indo-European language family (MacArthur 803-04). As such, the likelihood that the *Ramayana* deals with the spread of religious ideas that originated in the Aryan world, which spread Sanscrit through the subcontinent, must be given serious consideration (Childe 94-95). The primary gods of the *Ramayana* are the gods of the Vedas. These primary gods are male, and heaven is located in the sky. The plot of the *Ramayana* follows the Indo-European religious tradition of heroes engaging in ritual combat in order to renew the world, and, also characteristic of Indo-European teaching, much of the human perception of the physical world is presented in the poem as maya or illusion (Eliade 190). However, it must be remembered that Sita is the daughter of the earth and the notion of the earth goddess as real and important is a later addition to Indo-European religious beliefs, a concept syncretically integrated into Indo-European beliefs only in regions where the indigenous belief in the earth mother could not be eradicated during the spread of Indo-European culture (Eliade 190). Where the belief in the mother or earth goddess was allowed to remain in the Indo-European consciousness, it was necessary to subordinate the worship of the goddess to a secondary level of importance (Campbell 160), a task the *Ramayana* accomplishes elegantly. In addition, the *Ramayana* was written at a time when the concept of a supreme god was becoming firmly established in the Indo-European world. The significance of this development, in the words of Douglas Bullis is that

> to believers, a Supreme God bequeathed its supremacy to believers. Supremacy implied control, control implied force, force implied military, military implied state, and state implied infrastructure. Less warlike deities, especially the regenerative goddesses of mother and earth, were replaced by the judgmental male lawmaker eager to secure grazing lands for his believers and the kind of wealth that produces power and symbols of power. (10)

This is the value system of the *Ramayana*, the value system that explains Rama's second repudiation of Sita, the daughter of the earth goddess.

The repudiation is not, however, unproblematic. Rama's brothers, who are also avatars of Vishnu, stand aghast when Rama pronounces Sita's

banishment. Clearly, Rama's argument that a king's reputation is more important than family ties or allegiance to the truth is seen as too high a price to pay to maintain a king's supremacy, at least for Lakshmana and Shatrughna. In fact, Rama has to threaten Lakshmana with a charge of treason to get him to carry out his order to carry Sita into banishment (Menon 599). And in the end, Sita's banishment is not permanent: Rama himself, after he hears Valmiki's beautiful *Ramayana* changes his mind and invites Sita back to take her rightful place on the throne of Ayodhya without any consideration of the effect this action may have on public opinion or Rama's reputation (Menon 648). It is then that the earth mother reasserts her power and control over human affairs, even in a world now controlled by male Indo-European gods. She rises out of the earth glorious: "[t]he green of the world's forests was in her hair and hands, the blue of the seven seas was upon her breasts. Her skin was the soft smooth brown of the sacred earth" (Menon 650). When she takes Sita's hands to invite her to sit beside her on her throne, even the Aryan gods in the sky approve as a "petal rain of flowers" begins to fall and sweet smells fill the air, signifying the acceptance of both Sita and the earth mother into the expanded Indo-European pantheon. The earth opens up and the throne descends, taking Sita and her mother to Nagaloka, where Sita will wait, once again, to be reunited with her beloved Rama when he has completed his mission on earth.[2] Thus, Rama, whose Indo-European values made him a great hero in the eternal battle between good and evil, between dharma and adharma, ends his life being punished by the earth goddess for privileging martial arts, reputation, power, authority, and supremacy over the values of the earth goddess: peace, prosperity, love, harmony, and truth. In true syncretic fashion, then, the *Ramayana*, through the repudiation of Sita, recoups some of the ancient values of India's indigenous religions which Aryan supremacy was unable to eradicate.

Notes

[1] In Hindu thought as taught in the *Puranas*, each cycle in the existence of the world is made up of four ages or *yugas*. Each of these cosmic ages takes its name from one of the four essential dice throws: the *Krta* or *Satya,* the *Treta*, the *Davapara*, and the *Kali*. The *Krta* or *Satya* is the golden age of truth, and each of the succeeding ages in the dice game of time represents a deterioration in values. At present, we are living in the age of *Kali*, a time in which values have so deteriorated that the earth is waiting for the dissolution of the world by fire and submersion in the primal waters so that a new cycle of existence may commence (Leeming 74).

[2] "Naga" is the name of a group of indigenous people who lived on the Indian subcontinent before the coming of the Indo-Europeans (Bullis 14).

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Shiva

T. S. Eliot and the Classical Music Scene in Paris, 1910-1911

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When T. S. Eliot spent the academic year 1910-1911 in Paris, attending the lectures of the famous philosopher Henri Bergson at Le Collège de France and attempting to discover his true poetic voice in French poetry, he found himself in a culturally rich environment which provided him with experiences from which he would draw inspiration both immediately and throughout his literary career. As I have suggested in various essays, the twenty-two-year-old Eliot was eager to absorb the totality of Parisian life, and the influence of this extraordinary year, which he called "a perfect present" in its fusion of the past and the future ("What France" 94), appears in his poetry, his drama, and his essays as well as in his personal life.[1] In this essay, I will reconstruct the classical music scene in Paris in 1910-1911, specifically the music of the concert hall,[2] describing performances which Eliot seems likely to have attended, based on his interests and on evidence in his works. Somewhat surprisingly, this subject has been largely unexplored despite its amazing richness, perhaps because of the paucity of hard evidence about his cultural activities in Paris.

It is likely that Eliot would have been drawn to performances of classical music in Paris not only because of his desire to experience as fully as possible all facets of Parisian life and culture but also because he had at least a rudimentary interest in and knowledge of it, evidenced by his viewing Franz Lehàr's operetta *The Merry Widow* and Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* prior to his arrival in France.[3] Further, the two young Frenchmen with whom he formed close friendships, Henri Alain-Fournier, who tutored him in French conversation and literature, and Jean Verdenal, a medical student in his pension on rue St. Jacques, were passionately devoted to music, attended performances on a regular basis, and discussed what they had recently heard; they no doubt encouraged Eliot's own developing interests, and the three may well have gone to musical programs together. After Eliot's departure from Paris, Verdenal urged him in several letters to hear particular works and commented on his own responses to certain pieces of music (*Letters* 24-25, 31), clearly indicating a shared interest.

In the company of these friends or on his own, he had the opportunity to attend numerous concerts during his stay. The most prestigious concert series and halls are described in some detail in the 1907 edition of Baedeker's popular guidebook *Paris et ses environs*, which Eliot may have used since he owned the 1908 edition of his *London and its Environs* (Hargrove, *Landscape* 218). Under the heading *Théâtres. Concerts. Expositions*

artistiques are listed first "the celebrated concerts featuring masterpieces of classical music" given at Le Conservatoire de Musique from November to April; on Saturdays and Sundays, seats not used by season ticket holders were sold to the general public at very low prices so that a student such as Eliot could afford them. Two other concert series presented both classical and modern music on Sundays during the winter: Les Concerts Lamoureux at Le Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt and Les Concerts Colonne at Le Théâtre du Châtelet. In the winter, three other halls offered concerts of chamber music, with details available on posters and in newspapers (39). To the young Eliot, it must have been incredibly exciting to have the opportunity to attend concerts in these world-renowned halls.

In researching concerts presented in Paris from October 1910 through June 1911, I was struck by three dominant traits, all of which would have been appealing to Eliot. First, there was an astounding variety, with equal time given to young emerging musicians and to the long-established masters, a situation that must surely have been encouraging to Eliot as a young person with artistic aspirations. Further, as regards contemporary composers, the period was dominated by the French and Russians, which would also have been attractive to him, given his great interest in the literature and the culture of each at this time. Finally, the composer whose works were performed most often in the concert hall during Eliot's sojourn in Paris was Beethoven, for whom he developed a great admiration and whose works and experiments greatly influenced some of Eliot's poems; indeed, his devotion to Beethoven may well have begun at this time.

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An overview of concerts presented during the period of Eliot's residence reveals the richness and variety for which the Parisian music world was so well known, with performances of great works from the past and new ones from the present, by composers and performers who were famous and those who hoped to be.

Soon after Eliot's arrival in October, several concerts featuring the music of Russian composers would doubtless have attracted him because of his interest in Russian culture, fostered by his reading of the novels of Dostoevsky at the instigation of his new French friend and tutor Henri Alain-Fournier (see Pope 319). In the October 24, 1910 issue of *Le Figaro,* Robert Brussel, the paper's leading music critic, reviews two concerts given the previous day: Les Concerts Lamoureux featured Borodin's *First Symphony in E Flat,* while Les Concerts Colonne included in its program several "modern works that are little known," such as "the prestigious 'Cappricio Espagnole' of Rimsky-Korsakov, performed with a verve and rhythm that were dazzling," as well as Beethoven's *Heroic Symphony* and Bach's *Fifth Brandenburg Concerto* (4). Les Concerts Colonne presented another concert

of Russian music in late November, which concluded with Borodin's "Polovetsian Dances" from his opera *Prince Igor*. In a review in the January 1911 issue of *La Nouvelle Revue Française,* Jacques Rivière, the brother-in-law of Alain-Fournier, commented that this music "touches what is most primitive in us and awakens in our depths the mysterious image of Asia" ("Les Scènes" 172), conveying the emerging interest in the primitive and the orient at this time in Paris; this interest may well have been an early influence on Eliot's own fascination with both.

On November 27 the first concert of a new music association presented Saint-Saens's *Third Symphony* and "The Death of Isolde" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, both, according to Brussel, very well done even though they are "not easy works to perform," as well as Stravinsky's *Fireworks*. Having heard the Wagnerian opera in Boston the previous year, Eliot may have been drawn to this concert; if so, it was quite likely his introduction to the young Russian composer (just three years older than Eliot) whom he was to admire throughout his life, whose avant-garde music was to inspire him, especially in the composition of *The Waste Land,* and who in the 1950s was to become a close friend. Brussel has high praise for Stravinsky himself: "We still remember the triumph of Stravinsky's *Firebird* [performed by Les Ballets Russes] last spring, when he appeared with his dazzling orchestra, his mastery of composition, and his inventiveness as a type of prodigy. The personality of the young composer—he's only 25—imposed itself in serious music circles as one of the most brilliant and gifted of the new Russian generation of composers" (28 Nov. 1911: 4).

In early March, the first of a series of three performances sponsored by La Société Musicale Indépendante, an organization promoting contemporary music, presented several composers and a specific piece of music that seem directly to have influenced Eliot. This initial concert, featuring three piano pieces by Erik Satie, with none other than the young Maurice Ravel at the piano, pieces which Brussel in his review of March 9 proclaims a revelation for some but for others a reminder of the amazement evoked by the bizarre art of this composer twenty years ago, was perhaps Eliot's introduction to these two experimental performers and composers. Even more intriguing for this study, there was also a work for clarinet and piano by Debussy entitled *Rhapsodie*. Because Eliot had discovered the music of Claude Debussy while an undergraduate at Harvard (according to his essay on Gordon Craig in King's College Library, Cambridge University), it is even more likely that he attended this concert; indeed, the March 3, 1911, composition date of his poem "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" suggests the tantalizing possibility that Debussy's work inspired its title and form.

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" reflects the definition of a rhapsody as an instrumental composition irregular in form, like an improvisation, in its

open structure that traces the speaker's observations of random sights, all of which are grim and depressing aspects of the modern urban scene, as he walks the streets between midnight and 4:00 a.m., in the tradition of the French "flâneur" (one who strolls along the streets, observing the sights). The influence of his Parisian sojourn is evident in the line in French ("La lune ne garde aucune rancune," [51]); in the street-lamps, a Paris hallmark; in the prostitute in a doorway and "female smells in shuttered rooms" (66), most likely reflecting Philippe's novel *Bubu de Montparnasse* rather than personal experience; in the "Smells of chestnuts in the streets" (65), evoking the ever-present odor of roasting chestnuts at Parisian street stands in autumn and winter; and in the memory of the child stealing a toy on a quay, a probable reference to the paved bank along the Seine. This poem provides a very tangible reflection of a specific musical performance in Paris and of an array of details drawn from the Parisian cityscape.

April 1911 was filled with outstanding concerts, one of the most striking being the performance of a portion of Ravel's score for the ballet *Daphnis and Chloé*, which he was in the process of composing for Diaghilev's Les Ballets Russes for the 1912 season. "Le Nocturne," "L'Interlude," and "La Danse guerrière" were performed as a concert suite by Les Concerts Colonne at Le Théâtre du Châtelet on April 2 (Larner 122-23). Brussel in his review in *Le Figaro* the next day asserts that Ravel is one of the first to compose music for dancers which is legitimate on its own. Of the previous day's performance, he praises the first two pieces for their "instrumentation [which was] extremely ingenious and rich in striking inventions," concluding that Ravel's work has significant virtues which assure it of a warm welcome (4).

M. D. Calvocoressi's review in the April 15 issue of *Comoedia Illustré* echoes Brussel's approval of and enthusiasm for Ravel's experimentation, stating that the performance of those sections of *Daphnis et Chloé* is certainly "the most important cultural event of the last two weeks" and praising Ravel's creation of a new and original musical genre characterized by powerful rhythmic innovation: "[The] flexibility of its rhythmic elements gives it the movement of what, in language, is lyric declamation . . . , creating music that is rich in nuances and free of conventional stylizations and thus will necessitate a corresponding freedom and richness in the choreography" (449). This definition of Ravel's music with its emphasis on experimentation and on interpenetration of various art forms corresponds to the kind of poetry that Eliot was already writing (for example, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady"), and its comparison of music to poetry suggests that the two can experiment in the same ways. If Eliot read these two reviews, they must have encouraged him to continue his poetic experiments and impressed him with their support

of young talent by the Parisian arts establishment, no doubt contributing to his ambition at the time to settle permanently in Paris, give up English, and write in French (Hall 56).

Finally, Brussel's column for June 4, 1911, contains an account of a young pianist named Victor Gille, whose entire program was devoted to works by his master, Chopin. Brussel asserts that the genius of Chopin could not have found a more sensitive interpreter than "this excellent pianist" because of his "profound understanding of the very soul of the composer's canon, its ethnic origins heard in the nocturnes, the polonaises, and the fantasies that were inspired by popular Polish songs." This comment may have suggested to Eliot the possibility of incorporating popular material into his own poetry. Brussel describes the "delicacy and certainty of Gille's touch, . . . his crystal-clear trills, and the serene and majestic force of his chords" as he performed with "unequalled mastery" the *Fantasy in F minor*, a series of *Études*, nocturnes, and polonaises, and the *Scherzo in B flat minor*, receiving enthusiastic applause as "the just reward for his marvellous talent" (6).

The references to a concert of Chopin's music in "Portrait of a Lady," which Eliot began in February 1910, worked on during his Parisian year, and completed in November 1911, may have been inspired by Gille's concert, for the poem's young male persona somewhat callously describes his relationship with an older woman, noting (with what seems to be annoyance) the latter's comments about a concert they attended featuring a contemporary pianist playing Chopin's Preludes:

> We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole
> Transmit the Preludes through his hair and fingertips.
> "So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
> Should be resurrected only among friends
> Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
> That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room." (8-13)

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The composer whose works were most frequently performed at concerts during the period of Eliot's sojourn in Paris was Beethoven, to whom the French were passionately devoted at the time. As Leo Shrade establishes in *Beethoven in France: The Growth of an Idea,* he served as an ideal of moral virtue and fortitude in the face of extreme suffering in the early years of the twentieth century, a period which seemed to the French "godless and without saints and heroes" (146). To combat the pessimism of the times, Charles Péguy, a leading literary figure of high moral stature, ran a series called "Lives of Illustrious Men" in his *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* in order to inspire in the modern-day French a regeneration of the virtues of the past and thus "ward off barbarism" (146).[4] The first biography to be featured was Romain Rolland's 1903 book *The Life of Beethoven*, which had an

astounding popularity and influence that extended to World War I. Its basic premise was that the faith, courage, and energy of Beethoven allowed him to wring triumph out of suffering, indeed to gain greatness through suffering. In the Preface, Rolland asserts that "at the head of this heroic legion [of great figures from the past], we assign the first place to the strong and pure Beethoven" (156). He finds "every suffering that can occur to a human being, every extreme grief, in Beethoven. The extreme courage to live, the valor to endure, all the energy a man can raise, these too he finds in Beethoven . . ." (162). This "French apotheosis of the composer . . . kept an intellectual France breathless with excitement for a full decade" (164-65), during which his works were played constantly in performances acknowledged as the best in Europe (142). It is thus entirely likely that Eliot's own lifelong devotion to Beethoven began in this atmosphere of admiration and near-worship.

A further indication of the powerful influence of Beethoven in Paris is that he was the subject of numerous biographies in the next ten years[5] as well as works of sculpture, painting, and literature; for example, the famous sculptor Émile Bourdelle produced a series of bronze busts of the composer conveying a sense of massive strength and ferocious energy, and the young dramatist René Fauchois received great acclaim for his play *Beethoven,* performed at Le Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1909 under the direction of the famous André Antoine. This powerful and pervasive concept of Beethoven exerted an influence on the youth of France no less than on their elders, for, according to Séverine in an article entitled "Notre Père Beethoven" published in 1909, a "profound cult" grew up about him in which he served as their "supreme recourse against decadence," leading them on "a march toward sacred truth and pure beauty" (qtd. in Shrade 191). This powerful concept of Beethoven seems to have stayed with Eliot throughout his life and inspired his own work in a number of ways.

This widespread devotion to and celebration of Beethoven's genius, this near-worship of him as an ideal and an inspiration of moral strength and goodness, are evident in the extraordinary number of concerts featuring his works in Paris in 1910-1911. Soon after Eliot's arrival, Les Concerts Colonne presented Beethoven's *Heroic Symphony* (Brussel, 24 Oct. 1910: 4), while Les Concerts Lamoureux performed airs and lieder by Beethoven, Handel, and Schubert (Brussel, 31 Oct. 1910: 4). Further, according to Brussel in the November 21 issue of *Le Figaro,* Les Concerts Colonne devoted an entire program to works of Beethoven, including the *Concerto for Violin,* played admirably by the famous violinist Fritz Kreisler, and the *Ninth Symphony,* with an excellent chorus and remarkable soloists (4). L. de Crémone in the November 22 issue of *Le Figaro* announced that the next Sunday Les Concerts Colonne would present the last performance of the season of the *Ninth Symphony,* "whose success last Sunday took on the

proportions of a triumph with five hundred performers and with Mlle. Rose Féart, eminent artist from L'Opéra, singing the soprano solo"; in addition, he revealed that "the great event of the musical season" will be the concerts on December 17, 24, and 31 featuring Beethoven's sonatas for piano and violin (4).

On December 13, Siegfried Wagner, the son of Richard Wagner and the grandson of Franz Liszt, conducted a gala concert in honor of Beethoven, which may have attracted Eliot because of his interest in both Beethoven and Wagner. However, Siegfried's performance must have been dismal, for it drew this harsh criticism in Brussel's December 19 review in *Le Figaro*: "His heavy heredity weighs down the life of M. Siegfried Wagner, assuredly preventing him from being himself. The glory whose reflections surround him condemns him without doubt to a thousand virtues, of which silence is the least" (4). If Eliot happened to read it, he must have appreciated this mordant commentary, which may even have served as a model for the witty sarcasm of some of his own reviews.

The fact that in just the first two months of Eliot's sojourn in Paris there were at least eight performances of pieces by Beethoven is an obvious testament to the esteem in which he was held at the time. The winter and spring of 1911 saw more of this French adulation of their musical hero. In mid January, Les Concerts Barreau featured Beethoven's *Second Quartet* and *Fourth Quartet* as well as his sonata *Clair de Lune* (Brussel, 14 Jan. 1911: 7); in early March Les Concerts Colonne presented his *Mass in D*, "a work rarely performed" (Brussel, 8 Mar. 1911: 4); and on April 30 and May 3 Fritz Kreisler, the "admirable violinist acclaimed throughout the world," performed concertos by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Bach (Brussel, 20 Apr. 1911: 5).

But the crown of the performances of Beethoven's music in 1910-1911 was the Beethoven Festival in early May. It opened "La Grand Saison de Paris" on May 2 at Le Théâtre du Châtelet with a performance of the first, second, and third symphonies by the 100-member Orchestre Colonne under the direction of Felix Weingartner, renowned for his interpretations of Beethoven's works. In the next day's issue of *Le Figaro,* Brussel reports that Weingartner, "one of the most brilliant conductors of our time," understands the genius of Beethoven as evident in his "faithful and straightforward interpretation, stripped of all artifice." His rendition of the first two symphonies was "stupendous," while the "heroism of the third symphony under his baton attained the summits of the sublime" ("Châtelet" 4). Of the performance of Beethoven's quartets and lieder on May 5, Brussel in the May 6 issue of *Le Figaro* notes that Weingartner is equally outstanding in his presentation of Beethoven's intimate works (5). *Le Matin's* issue for May 9 reports that the concert of May 8, featuring the *Eighth Symphony* and *Ninth*

Symphony performed by the Orchestra and Chorus of Les Concerts Colonne with 1000 performers, was a triumph, with the audience which packed the hall exhibiting "the most extraordinary enthusiasm" by numerous standing ovations. So popular was this performance that the May 10 concert was sold out and an additional performance featuring the *Fifth Symphony* and *Ninth Symphony* was scheduled for May 12 ("Festival" 4). Indeed, since this Festival was so impressive, Eliot must have felt more than a tinge of chagrin that he would not be there to attend the next Beethoven Festival, a "gigantic musical project" presenting the complete works for the first time ever, slated to take place in Paris from April 20 to June 15, 1912, (see Crémone, 1 Oct. 1910: 4).

The numerous opportunities to hear Beethoven's music during his Parisian year when the celebration, indeed the worship, of his music was so intense seem to have set in motion Eliot's lifelong devotion to the great composer whose works provided inspiration for his own poetry as regards content, structure, and techniques. Further, Beethoven's daring experimentation must have encouraged Eliot to try his own radical innovations; as Donald Grout, the noted music historian, makes clear, "Beethoven was the most powerful disruptive force in the history of music. His works opened the gateway to a new world" (491). Interestingly, the same claim can be made for Eliot in terms of twentieth-century poetry.

While Beethoven's influence on Eliot is evident in poems written throughout his career, his late masterpiece *Four Quartets* reveals the most significant and pervasive influence. Its title and aspects of its content and form were in part inspired by Beethoven's late quartets, to which Eliot often listened. In March 1931, for example, he wrote Stephen Spender that he had been listening to the *Quartet in A Minor* (Opus 132), revealing a personal and deeply-felt interpretation of and response to it as well as a desire to write something similar in poetry: "I have the A minor Quartet [sic] on the gramophone, and find it quite inexhaustible to study. There is a sort of heavenly or at least more than human gaiety about some of his later things which one imagines might come to oneself as *the fruit of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering;* I should like to get something of that into verse before I die" (54, italics mine). These words, particularly those in italics, seem clearly to echo the French view of Beethoven, so prevalent during Eliot's year in Paris, as a heroic figure whose faith, energy, and courage allowed him to gain greatness through suffering. One of the dominant characteristics of this quartet and of all Beethoven's late works is their meditative quality, which Grout describes as "a feeling of assured tranquillity [and] . . . calm affirmation" (485), a trait which Eliot seems in particular to admire and to emulate in his own late poetry. A further attraction may have been the "Heiliger Dankgesang" of the quartet, which the music historian

Glenn Stanley includes among "the best-known musical manifestations of Beethoven's religious sentiments in his later life" (31).

Four years later, Eliot undertook to fulfill that goal in beginning the work that was to become *Four Quartets*. A number of passages that appear to be moving, direct commentaries on Eliot's personal suffering and subsequent reconciliation reflect his wish to "get something of that into verse," the most powerful of which are found, significantly, in "Little Gidding," the last poem. In Section II, the speaker describes with a mixture of sarcasm, bitterness, and anguish "the gifts reserved for age / To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort" (131-32), the last of which is "the rending pain of re-enactment / Of all that you have done and been; the shame / Of motives late revealed, and the awareness / Of things ill done and done to others' harm . . ." (140-43). Eliot caused emotional pain not only to his first wife, Vivienne, but also to Emily Hale, Mary Trevelyan, and John Hayward (see Menan 126-31 and Seymour-Jones), who may be the biographical figures hovering behind the general reference to those whom an individual may have hurt, whether deliberately or not, during his/her lifetime and feel remorseful about without being able to atone in any way. In Section III, however, the speaker says, with what seems to be a sense of release and relief, "See, now they vanish, / The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them, / To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern" (165-67), a moving poetic rendering both of the speaker's admission that he was limited in his ability to love them ("as it could") and of "the fruit of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering." While the latter could not, it seems to me, be described as "more than human gaiety," it does convey a simple human serenity that is confirmed in the closing passage with its notes of endurance, reconciliation, assurance, and even triumph: "All manner of thing shall be well / When the tongues of flame are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one" (258-61). Eliot's use of such highly personal material seems to reflect the highly personal nature of Beethoven's late quartets, which, according to David Barndollar, "are generally regarded as his most personal compositions, exploring far-reaching musical and emotional territories . . . " (182). Indeed, Barndollar concludes that perhaps "the best analogy between the two sets of quartets [Beethoven's late quartets and Eliot's *Four Quartets*] is their intimate, inward-looking personality" (192).

In addition to their meditative and emotionally-charged qualities, other characteristics of Beethoven's late works from which Eliot seems to have drawn inspiration for his last great work are "a new conception of the possibilities of thematic *variation*[,] . . . repeating a given theme in new guises while recognizably preserving the essential structure of the entire theme in each repetition," and "a continuity . . . achieved by intentionally

blurring dividing lines" (Grout 486-87, italics mine). Eliot adapts both of these, I would suggest, in composing *Four Quartets*. The music historian Nicholas Marston can help us to see how Eliot does so, for he points out that the slow movement of the *Quartet in A Minor* employs variation "as part of a broader scheme in which the theme and its variations are separated from one another by the intrusion of a sharply contrasting theme" (90) and notes Beethoven's "tendency to alter the conventional dynamic of multimovement works" by "his radical departure . . . from the conventional number and sequence of movements [and] his challenge to the autonomy of the individual movement itself," especially evident in the five late string quartets (94),[6] Eliot's particular favorites. These experiments with form and variation seem partially to have inspired the numerous repetitions of themes, images, and phrases in *Four Quartets*, as in the opening passage on time in "Burnt Norton" and in the varied references to roses and rose gardens, gates, children's voices, waterfalls, and music, as well as the structure of contrasting movements and passages within movements in the entire work. The second characteristic seems to be reflected in the shifts within sections of the individual poems from subject to subject with no breaks other than spaces on occasion, a technique which Eliot uses to reinforce the quiet, meditative tone.

Further, the very concept of "four" linked quartets may have come from perhaps the most comprehensive of all Beethoven's innovations, the idea that individual quartets might be interrelated in an organic and complex manner. The music historian John Daverio's description of Beethoven's last four quartets seems as well to describe Eliot's overall ultimate concept of his four interrelated poems and thus clarifies the somewhat confusing title (at least musically speaking) of *Four Quartets,* which were his last four serious poems: "Beethoven's conscious effort to forge palpable relationships among discrete works departs significantly from tradition. . . . In fact, certain aspects of the genesis of all the late quartets [specifically the four designated as op. 127, 132, 130, and 131] suggest that these works comprise a unified corpus. . . . Thus, significant elements of the finished works . . . indicate that Beethoven has replaced the traditional opus—a series of complementary but independent works—with a system of interrelated compositions, each of which was weighty enough to receive its own opus number" (149), a revolutionary development reflected in Eliot's giving each individual poem its own title and making the four a "series of complementary but independent works" (149).

Helen Gardner in *The Art of T.S. Eliot* gives a brilliant and sensitive analysis of "the debt [Eliot] owes to the art of music in his solution of the problem of finding a form for the long poem" (36), and, while she refers specifically to Beethoven only once, his compositions in particular seem to lie behind many of her references: "As the title shows, each poem is structurally

a poetic equivalent of the classical symphony, or quartet, or sonata, as distinct from the suite" (36-37). She notes that "each poem has five movements, each with its own inner necessary structure. The first movement . . . contains statement and counter-statement, or two contrasted but related themes, like the first and second subjects of a movement in strict sonata form" (37). However, this structure also resembles that of the opening movement of Beethoven's *Quartet in A Minor,* which, according to Daverio, "juxtaposes two ideas . . . [which] are open-ended, incomplete, and—at first blush—incompatible. Much of the remainder of the movement, however, is devoted to showing that these seemingly disparate gestures are or can be related" (158). Gardner's direct reference to Beethoven appears in her description of the lyrical fourth section of each poem, citing as her example "East Coker": "The repetitive circling passage . . . where we seem to be standing still, waiting for something to happen, for a rhythm to break out, reminds one of the bridge passages and leading passages between two movements which Beethoven loved" (41), an allusion to Beethoven's "blurring dividing lines," noted above by Grout.

In *Four Quartets* Eliot succeeds in achieving his poetic goal of producing poetry that is the equivalent of Beethoven's later works, described in an unpublished lecture in 1933: "I have long aimed [at writing] poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at*, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*" (qtd. in Matthiessen 90). Thus, the composer whose works he perhaps first heard in Paris in 1910-1911 was a source of multiple types of inspiration and encouragement to Eliot throughout his life, and the playing at his request of the second movement of his *Seventh Symphony*, one of his favorite works, at his funeral was a fitting acknowledgment of Beethoven's importance to him.

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Following his year in Paris, Eliot demonstrated a lifelong interest in and love for classical music, seemingly a direct influence of all that he experienced there musically. Back in Boston from 1911 to 1914, he attended numerous musical programs at Symphony Hall and at the Boston Opera House. A set of programs dated from October 1913 to February 1914 in the Eliot Collection of the Houghton Library indicates that he heard no fewer than twelve concerts and operas in that time period alone, including a concert featuring Beethoven's *Symphony in A Major* and Brahms's *Tragic Overture* on October 16 and a piano recital of Chopin's works on December 2 as well as the operas *Tristan und Isolde* on December 1, *Tosca* on December 22, and *Madama Butterfly* on January 2. In London in the late teens and twenties, he not only attended but also wrote about performances of Les Ballets Russes with scores by a host of prominent avant-garde composers, most notably the

revival in July 1921 of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, commenting in his "London Letter" in the October 1921 issue of the *Dial* that Stravinsky was the "greatest success since Picasso" and memorably describing the ballet's music as conveying a "sense of the present" by transforming "the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric cries of modern life" (452-53), qualities of the score that made it an important influence on *The Waste Land,* which he was composing at the time.[7]

Later in his life, in addition to attending live performances of classical music, he also listened to recordings of works by his favorite composers. In 1931, as noted earlier, he found inspiration in listening to Beethoven's *Quartet in A Minor* on the gramophone (Spender 54) for the poems that would become *Four Quartets,* and in the 1950s, according to Mary Trevelyan's unpublished memoir, the two listened to records of compositions by Beethoven, Mozart, and Hayden (Gordon 470). When in the mid 1950s he formed a close friendship with Stravinsky, the two discussed working together on an opera, a project which never came to fruition; however, in 1962 Stravinsky composed an anthem for *a capella* chorus entitled "The Dove Descending Breaks the Air" from "Little Gidding" and dedicated it to Eliot, who remarked that Stravinsky could "get more out of me that way than any man living" (Boaz 218). Even in death, Eliot's love of music was evident, for at his funeral two pieces important to him were played: the previously mentioned second movement of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony,* in accordance with a wish he expressed to Trevelyan in 1949, and Stravinsky's anthem (Gordon 526, 667). Less than a month after Eliot's death, Stravinsky composed a requiem which he described as "a Panikheda chorus in memory of the unforgettable Eliot" (Boaz 218).

In Eliot's 1942 essay "The Music of Poetry," he notes that "a poet may gain much from the study of music," particularly as regards "the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure," indicating that he himself has derived inspiration from music, although he modestly denies having "a technical knowledge of music": "I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself." He then specifies some of the ways that musical elements may be transposed into poetry, again implying his own uses of music:

> The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a

> poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter. It is in the concert room rather than in the opera house, that the germ of a poem may be quickened. (113-14)

That study of music from which a poet may gain much seems for Eliot to have been nourished, if not begun, in the concert halls of Paris during his 1910-1911 year in Paris. It set in motion a lifelong love of classical music and provided him with a source of inspiration both immediately and in the future for his drama, his essays, but most especially his poetry as reflected in titles, structure, musical techniques, especially experimental ones, and allusions.[8]

While the influence of music is found in a variety of ways throughout his work, among the most significant of these are the allusions in *Four Quartets,* where music itself serves as both theme and symbol in a complex interplay of meanings. In "Burnt Norton" V, for example, it is a parallel to poetry and a symbol of the immortality of art:

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.
> Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
> Not that only, but the co-existence. . . . (143-48)

And in "The Dry Salvages" V, it is one of several metaphors for the intersection of time and eternity, holding the climactic and most significant position in the list:

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts. . . . (206-12)

These last lines testify to the significance of music as a deeply felt experience in Eliot's life and to its power to convey what is clearly the supreme moment in both his life and his poetry, the intersection of time and the timeless.

The rich and multi-faceted classical music scene in Paris during 1910-1911 offered Eliot numerous opportunities to hear works that would be important to him throughout his life and that would influence his literary production in a variety of ways. While there is little hard evidence to tell us what performances he attended, the concerts that I have discussed seem among the most likely to have nurtured his interest in established composers such as Beethoven and to have introduced him to contemporary composers

such as Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy, and Satie. With his strong desire to absorb the Parisian experience as fully as possible, the young Eliot must have reveled in and profited from the wealth of musical performances available to him during that "annus mirabilis."

Notes

[1] The translations from French are mine, with close translations in quotation marks.

[2] I discuss the subject of opera in a separate essay, forthcoming in the *Yeats Eliot Review.*

[3] According to a note in *Letters,* Eliot also was taken by his older brother Henry to see Franz Lehár's popular operetta *The Merry Widow* sometime between 1905, when it was first performed, and September 1910, when he alludes to it in the poem "Goldfish" I, and it "remained a favourite" throughout his life (54). Although the note erroneously calls it a Broadway musical, it was in fact "a new style of Viennese operetta, introducing waltz tunes and imitations of the Parisian cancan dances as well as a certain satirical element" ("Lehár" 125), all of which would have appealed to Eliot. The same poem also refers to Oskar Straus's operetta *The Chocolate Soldier,* based on Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*, first performed in Vienna in 1908; the reference suggests that Eliot kept up with current musical productions. See Ricks 148-49.

[4] It is possible that the fear of being overrun by barbarism as a result of the absence of traditional virtues, so widespread in France at this time and clearly indicated in Péguy's purpose in instigating this series, may have inspired the nightmare vision in Part V of *The Waste Land.*

[5] Shrade describes books and essays on Beethoven by Bouyer, Canudo, Pioch, Prud'homme, Bellaigue, Tiersot, and D'Indy, among others.

[6] Richard Kramer's description of Beethoven's experimental techniques in the late quartets, quoted by Marston, seems as well to describe Eliot's techniques in *Four Quartets*, further indicating his debt to Beethoven: "[In] the music of the 1820s, and nowhere more eloquently than in Beethoven's last quartets, the fragile networking of 'fragmentary' pieces together into some work whose concept depends on the palpable ties between movements . . . can be said to renegotiate the terms by which the work claims to be a sum of its parts" (94).

[7] In my essay "T.S. Eliot and the Dance," I have discussed the influence of this piece of music on *The Waste Land* in detail (80-84), as have other scholars. Chancellor indeed has argued that Eliot's musical sensibility in the poem is not that of Beethoven, as Gardner suggests, but "as distinctly a twentieth-century sensibility as Stravinsky's or Schoenberg's and, in 1922 at least, as new and startling" (122). For further information on Stravinsky and Eliot, see, for example, Boaz and Bronzwaer.

[8] Eliot's Parisian musical experiences seem to be reflected in his use of musical compositions in numerous titles of poems written at that time, more than in any other period. While such titles appear before his stay in Paris, confirming his

early interest in music, as seen in two containing the word "Song" (1907, 1909), in "Ballade of the Fox Dinner," in "First Caprice in North Cambridge," in "Second Caprice in North Cambridge," and in "Opera" (all written in 1909), they are more numerous in 1910-1911. "Preludes" I and II, "Suite Clownesque" and "Fourth Caprice in Montparnasse" were written in October and November 1910, with the influence of his French residence reflected in the words "Clownesque" and "Montparnasse," while "Interlude: in a Bar," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "Interlude in London," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Preludes" III and IV, and "Ballade pour la grosse Lulu" were written in 1911. Subsequently, musical titles appear from time to time, confirming his continued interest in music: "The Ballade of the Outlook" (1913), "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" (1914), "A Song for Simeon" (1928), "Triumphal March" (1931), "Five-Finger Exercises" (1933), "Choruses from 'The Rock'" (1934), and *Four Quartets* (1934-42). The sheer variety of musical compositions used in his titles reveals his extensive knowledge of numerous forms. A caprice, for example, is an instrumental composition in a free form, often in a whimsical style; Trombold notes that it also means "a head with hair standing on end, hence horror," thus conveying a "restrained sense of dismayed panic" in poems bearing the word in their titles (92).

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Looking Toward the Future: Examining the Tangibility of Margins in James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

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Amalgamation of the races in America was not something James Weldon Johnson wished for, but he felt it was inevitable. Wrote Johnson, "It is possible that Dame Nature never kicks up her heels in such ecstatic abandon as when she has succeeded in bringing a fair woman and a dark man together; and vice versa" (*Along* 390). In *Along This Way*, Johnson wrote,

> It appears to me that . . . the Negro will fuse his qualities with those of the other groups in the making of the ultimate American people; and that he will add a tint to America's complexion and put a perceptive permanent wave in America's hair. . . . My hope is that in the process the Negro will not be merely sucked up but, through his own advancement and development, will go in on a basis of equal partnership. (412)

In the construction, observations, and experiences of the narrator, Johnson's prediction of the amalgamation of the races and the proof that that process had already begun comes through in irony. Johnson's vision of the mixture of the races also, perhaps accidentally, predicts the change in thinking that will occur in literary theory regarding identities that are located in between established binaries.

In-between or mixed racial identity could be a lynchable offense in turn-of-the-century America. Oddly enough, even though white supremacist ideology was staked on the idea that the races were mutually exclusive, after publication of William Wells Brown's *Clotel, or the President's Daughter,* in 1853, the theme of blacks passing for white became a popular subject with African American, and some European American, authors. The "passing" character is stereotypically the "tragic mulatto caught between two cultures and ultimately unable to belong to either" (Fleming, "*Kingsblood*" 215). The "tragic mulatto" faces both practical and psychological difficulties. [1]

The distressing situation faced by the person of mixed racial heritage who could "pass" for white was often used to show the wrongness of miscegenation as well as the moral rightness of persons of mixed racial heritage identifying as black. In many "passing" novels, to reject one's African American heritage was condemned as traitorous. Heroes must claim their African American heritage to remain heroes in the eyes of the reader.

Unlike so many authors of "passing" novels, Johnson doesn't seem to be trying to show the moral racial identity choice and then praise or criticize

the protagonist based on the identity choice he made. Johnson's belief that the races would blend made it obvious to him that there was no clear moral choice in the "passing" issue. Johnson himself was not physically capable of living "passing as white" as his character did. But he did not seem to see the position of the person of mixed racial heritage as tragic. Instead, he seemed to view it as common and as destined to become even more common. In *Autobiography* Johnson seemed to question the very necessity of the narrator's having to choose, having to fit in to one of two cultures, black or white. This questioning attitude can be seen in *Autobiography* through Johnson's use of irony to point out that while the narrator is trying to make a choice, the fact that there is a choice to make concerning something seemingly so essential as race deconstructs the reality of the racial binaries of black and white.

The first clue that Johnson will not write his narrator into the false binaries is his refusal to name him. What exceeds the binaries cannot be named and so cannot be legitimate in the language of society. Being outside of a society's language can be seen as synonymous with not existing in that society, hence the tragic mulatto. However, Johnson's character is known as "the narrator," so he is designatable in discourse for as long as the book lasts, at least. Being known as simply "the narrator" seems to open up space for the narrator in language, allowing him to be pointed to and yet not named as a performative act.

Although the narrator is never named, readers do learn much about him. He describes his physical appearance only twice, once in youth and once as "Italian looking" when he is older, but he gives many clues about his personality. He is popular and generous, if a little naive at times (35). His vanity (35) and pride (45, 157) are repeatedly remarked upon, as well as his sensitivity (15). He is very dramatic and has been a little bit spoiled as a child (28). Women occupy little of his thoughts, and he has sexist attitudes (25) as well as racial and racist beliefs common for his time period (64, 112).

The narrator also has characteristics commonly described as feminine, which lead to speculation concerning his sexual identity. There are two strong possibilities regarding the narrator's excessive femininity: stereotypes and genre expectations. First, the stereotype of black men as having "real or imagined sexual superiority" was something that interested Johnson very much.

> Johnson often focused on the sexual complex that lay at the bottom of most of the lynching cases he had investigated. White men, his notes suggest, seem jealous of the real or imagined sexual superiority of Black men. White women also seem to take it for granted that Black men are more

> virile and have stronger sexual appetites than do White men. (Fleming, "James" 225)

Johnson may have desexualized his narrator to counteract this stereotype and so better reach his "double audience," that of "his Black readership and the large body of uninitiated Whites who might be brought to understand the African American point of view" (Fleming, "James" 225).

His femininity may also be partly a result of the genre. Regarding black masculinity and passing narratives, Phillip Brian Harper has argued that "the tragic mulatto has been conceived as a specifically feminine character" (103). Harper states that the scene in the narrator's youth where he reflects upon his appearance forces the reader to consider the narrator's sexual orientation: "This feminized orientation itself potentially constitutes the protagonist's personal tragedy, indicating a gender identity that is anything but properly masculine, and verging dangerously on a sexual identity that is anything but hetero" (110).

Siobhan Somerville in *Queering the Color Line* agrees with Harper, adding that

> Johnson figures the disruption of the narrator's sense of a stable racial identification through a corresponding slippage in gender and sexuality. It may be argued more precisely, too, that rather than simply "feminizing" the narrator, Johnson characterizes him through a model of gender inversion. That is, as a "hybrid" racialized subject, symbolically both black and white, the narrator is also gendered "between" male and female, like the bodies of the inverts who were subjected to the taxonomizing gaze of sexologists. In the case of the ex-colored man, his *own* gaze importantly constructs and internalizes an eroticized version of the mulatto as invert. (114)

Inversion is "the medical term used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to explain the phenomenon of homosexuality." According to Havelock Ellis, inverts could be social (that is, heterosexual looking) or sexual (homosexual looking) (Halberstam 76). I assume Somerville is describing the narrator as a sexual invert since her classification rests on a physical description of the narrator.

Somerville, therefore, reads the narrator as neither distinctly male or distinctly female, as in-between gender, or androgynous, but she makes little of Harper's assertion that the narrator is "anything but hetero" until later in her argument. At that point, she puts forth that in the description of his relationship to his wealthy white patron and traveling companion, the narrator's careful qualifying of the relationship between the two and the physical contact between the two show that there is the hint of same-sex

desire, at least on the part of the patron (121). Additionally, this desire is like the proverbial giant elephant in the room that everyone in the text is pretending not to see.

Speculation about the narrator's sexuality is not really new. Somerville notes that questions about the sexuality of the author were raised as early as 1927 when the gay white art patron Carl Van Vechten wrote the introduction to the republished version of the text (125). Apparently Van Vechten's interest in the book seemed to confirm the suspicions of many readers regarding the narrator's sexuality. What I have not found in these speculations and analyses is the connection between the "in-betweenness" of the race of the narrator and the gender of the narrator connected to the "in-betweenness" of the sexuality of the narrator.

One theory that can make sense of the sexual in-betweenness of the narrator is an aspect of queer theory called bisexual theory. Using the definition of the prejudice of "monosexism, or the perpetuation of compulsory monosexuality[,] i.e., sexual orientation toward one and only one of the two recognized biological sexes" (Nagle 306), one can draw up a parallel prejudice of monochromatism, the perpetuation of monochromia, racial identification toward one of the several recognized racial categories. Then, one can see monogenderism as the perpetuation of monogender, that is gender identification toward one of the two recognized gender categories. By refocusing our perspectives and realizing that it is not the narrator whose body does not fit, but the idea that it should fit that creates confusion, the novel can be re-envisioned not as a novel of passing, but as a novel of amalgamation, or blending identities, that tears down binaries of many identity constructions.

After the narrator in *Autobiography* first realizes and then becomes a "*colored* man," he addresses the "dual personality" African Americans have had to adopt in this country. Fleming notes that "Johnson believed that any Black author writing about America had to see things from the point of view of a 'double-raced' person" ("James" 224). Fleming and Robert Stepto both point out that this idea of the dual personality is reminiscent of Du Bois' description of the "double consciousness" found in *The Souls of Black Folk.* Stepto finds the similarity between Johnson and Du Bois less significant than the way the narrator revises Du Bois' words to say that the African American is less than human, "a *colored* man." Stepto says the narrator's pronouncement of African Americans to be barely human shows the narrator's "distaste for things 'colored'" while his misunderstanding of Du Bois shows his "displacement from the *genus loci*" of the black community (113-14).

The narrator's words, "He is forced to take his outlook on all things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being, but from the viewpoint of a *colored* man" (Johnson, *Autobiography* 14), echo Du

Bois' famous statement:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. . . . [T]he American Negro . . . simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (364-65)

However, the narrator's words in *Autobiography*, when read with Du Bois in mind, do not seem to be saying that the African American is truly barely human, but that he is treated worse and given a place lower than white men who occupy society's positions as citizens, men, and human beings. Johnson's narrator's next sentence, "It is wonderful to me that the race has progressed so broadly as it has, since most of its thought and all of its activity must run through the narrow neck of this one funnel" (14), is described by Stepto as "vapid remarks about the race's broad progress—remarks that are as shrill with false cheer as they are devoid of substance and earnestness" (Stepto 113). But read against Du Bois, it seems clear the narrator is bitterly sarcastic. The narrator seems to state plainly his understanding of the condition when he says, whites "are unwilling to open certain doors of opportunity and to accord certain treatment to ten million aspiring, education-and-property-acquiring people" (121). He is condemning the fact that while whites have a world of opportunity and constantly brag that everyone in America has a world of opportunity, blacks are refused a fair share of that opportunity so that while many could succeed, only a few are allowed through the bottleneck designated "black" created by white society. Whatever failings Johnson might have inscribed into his narrator, his narrator seems unlikely to have no understanding of Du Bois whatsoever. The narrator's educational level, social experience, and personal interests must have exposed him to the philosopher. Additionally, Johnson and Du Bois were great friends. For all these reasons, the narrator seems to be invoking Du Bois rather than misreading him.

Stepto's main point is that the narrator possesses serious character flaws, and I do not disagree. However, I would like to argue that Stepto himself is overlooking a very serious point. He points to the narrator's inability to read Du Bois' "double-consciousness" (Stepto 113). Yet Stepto forgets that in the narrator's looking at himself through the eyes of others, what the narrator sees is not a racially marked man. Unless the narrator is traveling with an African American companion, no onlooker will see him with contempt and pity. Where the racially marked person looks at the world as a person who is seen with contempt and pity, the narrator looks at the world as

a person who is usually not seen with contempt and pity, but very easily could be, depending on his words, his companions, and his location in a city. He can always control the contempt and pity, yet he is always subject to the wrath of those who give the contempt and pity when he is exposed as one who is, in the view of the society of the time, deserving of such emotions.

The narrator's unique consciousness goes unaddressed not only by Stepto but also by the narrator himself. This is an example of Johnson's technique of presenting ideas without actually addressing them. For as the narrator discusses dual consciousness and becoming racially marked physically and psychologically, the reader must notice that the narrator is using the word "we," but he is "we" not by skin color but by ancestry. Like the Northern doctor whom the narrator meets on the ship, readers are constantly called to raise eyebrows when noticing the significance of the narrator "[i]n referring to the race [using] the personal pronoun 'we'" (Johnson 110). Sooner or later during the unfolding of the novel, it must dawn on readers what this "we" means.

The unintentional trickster, the narrator does not have what Franz Fanon called the "'epidermal schema' of racial difference, [the] product of that fiction of meaning which invests skin with a primary social significance" (Robinson 717). Being both in reality white and black and in constructs of society able to pass as white or black, he can only be seen when he is passing. And to be seen, he must be observed. But it is the observer who creates the "symptoms of a successful pass" (Robinson 718). For a "pass" to occur, one must identify with one race and "pass" into the other, fooling members of the race into which one desires to "pass." A "pass" is an apparatus of deception, usually performed for gain. However, at times the narrator accidentally passes.

> I was sometimes amused on arriving at some little railroad-station town to be taken for and treated as a white man, and six hours later, when it was learned that I was stopping at the house of the colored preacher or school teacher, to note the attitude of the whole town change. At times this led even to embarrassment. (126)

He does not explain what he means by "the attitude of the whole town chang[ed]" and what embarrassment this led to. Yet those who are "fooled" obviously react negatively, as if they had been "duped." But the narrator has no choice but to "pass" as one racial identity or the other because he does not seem to *be* one or the other. In a monochromist world, he can only be seen by passing. The narrator continues, "Yet it cannot be so embarrassing for a colored man to be taken for white as for a white man to be taken for colored; and I have heard of several cases of the latter kind" (Johnson 126). The first part of this comment obviously points to the insult anyone would feel who, at the time of the novel, was treated like a "normal" African American by

European Americans in a Southern town. The second part, however, slyly points to the ambiguity of race and racial identification, the high number of people on the borders passing as "one" race or the "other," as well as how easily the narrator could be "passing" for white and mistaken for black, as Southerners were always on the lookout, and mistaking, people "passing" for the "wrong" race. [2]

Johnson uses irony in describing the narrator's experience at Atlanta University to show what "black" really means. The narrator sees people "of all types and colors . . . from jet black to pure white, with light hair and eyes. . . . Many of the girls, particularly those of the delicate brown shades, with black eyes and wavy dark hair, were decidedly pretty" (Johnson 44). From this passage it seems the narrator has accepted that all these people are black. He himself is buying into the racism that constructs one group of people as first-class citizens and the second as second-class citizens, with no middle ground. The real truth is that all of these students have ancestors who came from Africa. Many also have ancestors from other groups—European, Asian, Native American. Because these students identify with their African heritage, they then identify with the "black" race.

The narrator's lingering on the many colors of the "blacks" is an instance of Johnson's use of irony to point out that these ideas of "black" and "white" are purely constructs, with no basis in reality. Personal skin color obviously does not unite these people. Common concerns stemming from all these people being classed as inferior to the "opposite" race, whites, unite these people.

Soon after the narrator observes these multicolored "black" people, an incident symbolizing the consequences of his narrow vision of race occurs. The narrator's money is stolen, so he decides to leave school and go to Jacksonville. Had he had money, he would have had a choice of paying first- or second-class fares and riding in the first- or second-class white cars, or paying "full first class fare" and "being forced to ride in a *particular* car. . . . [The Jim Crow] car is distinctly inferior" (59). Because he has lost his money, he travels to Jacksonville in a Pullman porter's closet, which he later learns belongs to the thief.

Keeping in mind he would have originally had a choice between a clean, white car and a dirty, Jim Crow car, he is now confined in the closet. He is hunched over, standing in a basket for soiled linen, unable to rise because of the shelf for clean linen directly above his head. He is crouched in this closet for twelve hours. He says, "The air was hot and suffocating. . . . At each lurch of the car over the none-too-smooth track I was bumped and bruised against the narrow walls of my narrow compartment" (46-47).

It is not difficult to draw a parallel between his being in a closet, literally, and the homosexual term for being confined to silence in a

heterosexual world: "in the closet." This closet wherein the narrator travels is a metaphor for his being "trapped" between two racial worlds, the dark from which he can "pass" and rise in society's view, and the light, from which he can "pass" and sink in the view of society. He, however, is cramped uncomfortably in the middle. This is because he has in the text been robbed of the fare that would allow him to travel more comfortably with the rest of the passengers, either black or white. Continuing the metaphor, he has been cheated out of living comfortably, without confinement, by a monochromist society pervaded by the idea of two mutually exclusive races, one or the other of which he must fit into. It is this closet scene that also suggests his bisexuality. His sexuality is hard to pin down because critics have been looking with monosexist vision. If we see the narrator as possibly both heterosexual and homosexual, or bisexual, his relationships to his patrons and the women in his life become more understandable. The unnamed narrator is a character in-between in almost every aspect of identity.

All is thrown into chaos when the narrator falls in love with a white woman. For her, he must pass. And he begins to doubt that he can, that while all his life he has been recognized as a white man, he is now somehow racially marked. Here is another example of Johnson's irony. It must be remembered that it is not the fact of his black identity that causes the narrator trouble, even though the narrator himself "cursed the drops of African blood in [his] veins and wished that [he] were really white" (149). Rather it is the consequences of discovery in such a racist society, with so much invested in keeping blacks and whites apart and ignoring all others, that threaten his happiness. Luckily for the narrator, after much agony the white woman he falls in love with accepts him. He then remains white for the sake of his two children. So although he has flipped back and forth between races most of his life, it is when he has something invested, his children's future, in a racial identity that he continues to identify as white. The narrator ends his novel saying his children make him satisfied with his position, and yet he is fearful of being found out and thinks that he has sold his "birthright for a mess of pottage" (54).

True to Johnson's vision, the narrator is contributing to the amalgamation of race—which would be true no matter whom he fell in love with. It seems obvious Johnson's point is not, as the point is in so many "passing" novels, that the narrator has made the wrong decision that will cause him to suffer all his life. Rather, the narrator has made a decision that should not have had to be made. He is caught in a binary situation that his body proves does not exist. And because the narrator is the only voice in the text, because everything is filtered to the reader through him, Johnson uses irony to bypass the narrator and communicate to the reader so that the reader sees the no-win situation society has created long before the narrator, who is

completely inside the situation, sees it. In this way the reader is brought to greater awareness than the narrator and is able to see the problems America's mutually exclusionary vision of the races creates for blacks, whites, people who are neither, and people who are both as the narrator struggles to become white or black. The body of the ex-colored man flies in the face of monochromatism, monosexism, and monogenderism and demands justice.

Notes

[1] On the practical side, persons of mixed racial heritage "passing" for white face the fear of recognition by someone from their pasts, the danger of being unmasked if they maintain contact with their friends or relatives who are known to be black, the chance that they will be "recognized" because of traits that folklore and stereotype attribute to the black race, and the possibility of detection through their offspring. Psychological difficulties faced by persons of mixed racial heritage "passing" for white include guilt and sense of loss brought on by the abandonment of friends and relatives, the feeling that valuable parts of their cultural heritage have been left behind, the loss of self-esteem inherent in denying a part of oneself, and finally, the feeling that one has sold out or deserted under fire, leaving other members of the race to wage the war against prejudice and oppression (Fleming, "*Kingsblood*" 214).

[2] In *Along This Way* Johnson relates being arrested for being in a park with a white woman. When he was brought to provost headquarters, he addressed the provost marshal, saying, "I know there is no use in discussing law or my rights on any such basis as, 'Suppose the lady *is* white?' so I tell you at once that according to the customs and, possibly, the laws of Florida, she is *not* white" (169). Before Johnson relates this statement, the race of the woman was not mentioned to the reader (unusual because Johnson usually makes clear the race of characters he describes). Even in his statement there is ambivalence as to her racial identity. This racial ambiguity is the same found in the character of the narrator and leads me to believe that this incident may also have been the basis for the concept of the narrator in *Autobiography.* Johnson's arrest haunted him for years and caused him to realize how closely sex and race were linked (170).

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"I'd like tuh see any man put me outer dis house": Space and Place in Richard Wright's Early Work

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In the summer of 1940, Richard Wright boarded a train in San Antonio, Texas, and began a journey to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, that would take him through the South, making stops in both Natchez and Jackson, Mississippi, the sites of his birth and the greater part of his childhood. Wright had not been in the area since his flight from Memphis, Tennessee, to Chicago in 1927. In the intervening thirteen years, Wright had become a recognizable author with the publication of *Uncle Tom's Children* in 1936, and a national celebrity with the recent explosion of his first novel, *Native Son*. Now, returning from an extended stay in Mexico, Wright romantically longed to visit the South again, particularly his home state, in spite of the fact that the time he spent there was almost entirely marked by racism, poverty and oppression. The Mississippi of his childhood had filled him with nightmares that would last his entire life, and yet like many of the characters in his fiction, he could not fully deny the influence of this place on his consciousness as an adult.

In the years immediately preceding this trip, Wright created his most memorable, and some would argue his most autobiographical character, Bigger Thomas. Bigger, however, Wright explains, "through some quirk of circumstance . . . had become estranged from the religion and folk culture of his race" ("How" 439). Keeping this explanation in mind, it is significant, I suggest, that so soon after the completion of *Native Son*, Wright would go out of his way to make this tour of a still repressively segregated Mississippi—a home state that would surely not welcome him back as one of its own. Mississippi in the early part of the twentieth century was in fact one of the most violent and racist places in the country,[1] a fact that clearly would not have been lost on the racially sensitive young author (Rowley 49).

In his recent book *Turning South Again*, Houston A. Baker, Jr., describes a powerful, if illogical, pull from the South on African Americans. Baker ruminates on what he terms "an opponent composition of aversion-and-attraction, which can take form as a compulsive . . . and deeply ambivalent rehashing of the past" (18). Wright's actions suggest that he will never be like his fictional native son, *completely* alienated from either the impoverished folk culture of his upbringing or the austere familial world of his youth, in spite of the fact that he severely criticizes both of these debilitating influences in his adult life. His ill-fated attempt to reconcile with his sharecropper father further suggests the desperate nature of this attempt at finding a place mainly

composed of the memory of his own past. Wright, it can be argued, is attempting a return to the old, ramshackle cabins and folk dwellings not only of his earliest life, but also of his earliest fiction. In this context the ambiguous character Silas from the short story "Long Black Song," published in *Uncle Tom's Children*, deserves attention and can even be usefully juxtaposed with Wright's urban protagonist Bigger Thomas, as both attempt to create personal places and spaces[2] within the world each inhabits.

The fictional Silas occupies a noteworthy position in the world of Southern sharecropping as he attempts to create a place he can call home. From the text of the story we discover that Silas not only owns the house in which he lives but that he also owns a large portion of the land around it and has just purchased more land with the profit from his recent harvest. Almost certainly the descendant of slaves, Silas might well be living in the area, and perhaps even in the very house, his ancestors inhabited, and such a dramatic increase of wealth and property over the brief period of a generation or two was highly uncommon in the major sharecropping areas of the lowland South.[3] Silas would have good reason to think of his land and his home as his own personal place at the time the story opens, and his devotion to the land and particularly the house suggests a connection that cannot be diminished even by the legacy of slavery and the power of segregation. Though migration and flux did certainly occur among the lowest classes of both black and white laborers in the South, the strength of the bond to the land, and to their one-time slave homes, demonstrated by freed slaves and their descendants was strong.

This phenomenon is described clearly by John Michael Vlach in *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*. Vlach's folklore research accurately foreshadows the ferocity with which Silas attempts to assert both his property rights and human rights in Wright's story. Vlach states,

> One South Carolina freedman, after several years of service in the Union Army, did, in fact, return to take charge of a section of the plantation where he had previously lived and worked. Ignoring the protests of Thomas Pinckney, his former owner, he marched back to his old cabin and from its porch, rifle in hand, he declared, "Yes, I gwi wuk right here. I'd like tuh see any man put me outer dis house." (ix)[4]

The place where he was a slave is still his home, despite the history of incarceration accompanying it and regardless of the meager condition of the actual dwelling. This space does belong, at least in this man's mind, to him and his family. Vlach goes on to explain that

> [a]mong emancipated slaves, freedom was presumed to go hand in hand with the right to own land, particularly the land

> they had worked for so many years. In a collective petition to President Andrew Johnson, a group of former slaves living on Edisto Island, South Carolina, clearly made this point when they protested the restoration of plantation lands to their former owners, declaring, "This is our home. We have made these lands what they are." Over and over again, newly emancipated blacks expressed a surprisingly intense connection to their former places of servitude. (ix)

Some African Americans even went so far as to call for financial restitution for the past: "for years black people had kept their own mental account books in which they reckoned the value of their uncompensated toil" (Vlach ix). These former slaves demonstrated a remarkable ability to carve out some sort of a place for themselves from the austere resources existing in the South after the Civil War. Silas finds himself an heir to a similarly strong-willed attitude as he becomes both independent and prosperous as a rural Southern farmer during a time when sharecropping at an annual net loss was the rule for both poor African Americans and whites; the sharecropper shack he calls home serves as the center of his self-made world.

"Long Black Song" opens with Silas absent from his house, and while he is away selling his crop, a white salesman enters his home and rapes his wife, Sarah. This act obviously enrages Silas, but it is the violation of his house by a white man, his unwelcome entry into his space, that sends him into a violent and ill-fated rage. Silas cries, "Ah works mah guts out t pay them white trash bastards whut Ah owe em, n then Ah comes n fins they been in mah house! Ah cant go into their houses, n yuh Gawddam well Ah cant!" (145). The fact that the salesman has raped his wife seems of little importance to Silas, and he even blames Sarah for what has happened. He asserts his power over the place he has created with his own labor as he pridefully warns her, "Yuh ain comin back in mah house till Ah beat yuh!" (145). She has not prevented this unwelcome trespass, so she too has become an outsider to the space, and she now must be barred from entering until she is punished. His house is clearly more important to him than his wife and child, both of whom he abandons to what certainly will be a horrific fate once he decides to kill the salesman who has encroached into his home; he has the opportunity for this retribution when the salesman returns the next day seeking payment for the "graphophone" he has left behind (149-50).

Despite Sarah's protestations and her calls for him to leave with her before the lynching party arrives, Silas defiantly refuses: "'It don make no difference.' He looked over the sun-filled fields. 'Fer ten years Ah slaved mah life out t git mah farm free. . . . Now, its all gone. *Gone* . . . Ef Ah run erway, Ah ain got nothing. Ef Ah stay n fight, Ah ain got nothin'" (151-52). Silas is motivated, not so much by his quest for material success, but by the

fact that he invests such great significance in the sanctity of his home as a place to demarcate and to separate himself from the white world. His identity is wrapped up almost entirely with the space inside his house, and as a result, he never considers flight as a possible alternative, even though it is the only action that might preserve his life.

Silas dutifully pursues what can accurately be described as the American dream, attempting to find a place for himself in society, only to discover the arbitrary and fickle nature of such aspirations in a segregated and racist world. The purely economic relationships he has established over time quickly break down and are superseded by the ideology of white supremacy. Silas's success as a farmer marks him as a target for retribution by his envious and less prosperous white neighbors. This nihilistic dilemma for African Americans, encapsulated in Silas's final death grip on his house and land, can be read as a strong condemnation of Booker T. Washington's gospel of hard work and progress as a means to further opportunity for African Americans (Washington 100). Silas's plight instead verifies Du Bois's reservations about the problem of economic opportunity divorced from civil and legal equality (Du Bois 34).

The rural white community in "Long Black Song" is more than willing to put the successful Silas *in his place*, which in this case ironically means depriving him of his place, by lynching him. Incidentally, the community of Elaine, Arkansas, took a similar course of action against Wright's prosperous uncle Silas Hoskins; the Wright family members were forced to flee and never learned the exact circumstances surrounding Silas Hoskins' death because they were understandably afraid to ask too many questions (Rowley 24). The failure to establish a place free from outside intervention and oppression can reasonably explain the failure of Silas in "Long Black Song," and this lack of place continues to be a theme in Wright's life and fiction even when the backdrop for both changes to the frozen climate of the urban North.

Houston Baker once again offers insight into the importance of place in Wright's fiction, this time in his essay titled "Richard Wright and the Dynamics of Place in Afro-American Literature." Here he suggests that "to begin an inquiry into the dynamics of Afro-American place is to survey standard inscriptions of place in classic Afro-American literary texts" (85). In his study, Baker focuses on two of the central novels written by African American authors in the twentieth century: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. I am primarily concerned with Wright's novel here, though both texts deal with African American place and placelessness in the modern urban landscape. Wright's work, according to Baker, can be read as an extension of the oppression of place suffered by African Americans over the duration of their experience in the Americas.

Baker states quite plainly, "Afro-America was a PLACE *assigned* rather than discovered" (91). Their inability to find a suitable place for themselves forced Richard Wright and his family from Mississippi to Chicago in search of better opportunities, but Wright quickly found that the dictates of racial and spatial oppression were carried out in different but equally deadly forms in the North. The place assigned to Silas, as Vlach points out, is a holdover from the days of slavery, and the place assigned to Bigger Thomas is the squalid kitchenette apartment rented to him and his family by Mr. Dalton and "The South Side Real Estate Company" (*Native* 326).[5]

For the Thomas family in *Native Son*, life in Chicago is impersonal, oppressive and brutal. Forever on the verge of eviction and starvation, the one-room kitchenette in which they live comes to stand for the failure of the dream of freedom, and it also serves as a replica of the conditions African Americans have been forced to live in for more than 300 years. The tenement on the south side of Chicago can be viewed as an extension of the space first assigned to natives of Africa when they were brought in chains to this country. Baker points to Thomas Clarkson's early description of the conditions of such detention: "the space allotted to each slave on the Atlantic crossing measured five and a half feet in length by sixteen inches in breadth. . . . [C]hained two by two, right leg and left leg, right hand and left hand, each slave had less room than a man in a coffin" (90). Baker suggests that such cramped conditions have continued indefinitely for African Americans. Setting aside, if possible, the sheer horror of the picture painted here, I want to call attention to the lack of any possibility of differentiated or individual space; this type of accommodation and its resulting lack of place formation stands as a vital theme in African American fiction well into the twentieth century. The absence of a private, personal space, which can be transformed into a locational place or home creates in Bigger a lack of individual consciousness or identity. This void contributes greatly to Bigger's pathology and his desperate acts of murder.[6]

On the very first page of *Native Son*, the lack of private space for the individual members of the Thomas family is vividly described:

> The woman . . . rose and stood in her nightgown.
>
> "Turn your heads so I can dress," she said.
>
> The two boys averted their eyes and gazed into the far corner of the room. The woman rushed out of her nightgown and put on a pair of step-ins. (3)

Family members must avert their eyes to keep from shaming the others. The space provided for Bigger and his family is larger, but hardly more private than the cramped, incarcerated spaces assigned to African Americans in Clarkson's description. The Thomas family shares the single room with rats and uses it for cooking, sleeping and whatever else constitutes living. Bigger

feels trapped in this shabby apartment as he comes of age, as he is unable to see himself as an individual. He is also unable to fulfill his mother's expectations of becoming the man of the family.

In her work *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina*, Michael Ann Williams makes the observation that "[t]he increasing desire for individualized architectural space has been equated with the growth of individualism in modern society" (55). Bigger lacks this precise type of space. The generative spatial opportunities described by Williams only seem to exist in very limited circumstances in Wright's fiction, and they almost never materialize in his urban slums. Yi-Fu Tuan, in writing about the formation of individuals within a family unit, foregrounds the importance of space. "Space in the house becomes more segmented and specialized as the family grows older: children not only have their own places at the table but their own rooms in the house. . . . An adolescent in the house feels the need to withdraw, periodically, from his or her kin" (4). The circumstances described by Tuan suggest the way a normal individual within a family develops through the gradual appropriation of space, but when this development is blocked or retarded due to spatial deprivation, the consequences can be grave. Bigger finds himself in circumstances very different from those of Silas regarding space and place, but his reaction is predictably similar in its violence.

Boris Max, Bigger's attorney, offers this account of his client's crimes as he views them after the fact: "He is living, only as he knew how, and as we have forced him to live. The actions that resulted in the death of those two women were as instinctive and inevitable as breathing and blinking one's eyes. It was an act of creation" (400)—creation of both person and place. Bigger is ironically offered a form of individuality through the homicides he commits, but only at the cost of his life. The space he is ultimately allowed to inhabit is the cell where he is confined after his arrest, and here Bigger finds a strange sense of peace and fulfillment. Wright was convinced by editors to conclude the novel before the imminent execution of Bigger, primarily to eliminate some of the violence from the work (Rowley 267). This conclusion, however, leaves the reader with a view of Bigger waiting in his cell for execution, prepared for death much like Silas at the end of "Long Black Song." Perhaps the acquisition of this place stands as the pinnacle of spatial achievement for an African American born in the grim circumstances described by Wright.

Like Silas, Bigger is backed into a corner, and he too decides to follow the course of action guaranteed to bring about violent retribution from society, if only to briefly experience what it feels to be an individual. The impulse to portion off a space and turn it into a place of one's own is a strong if not irrepressible urge in the early work of Richard Wright, perhaps because

Wright himself was seeking to do the same. As the characters in his fiction attempt to establish individual identities based on the models and tools available to them, they find themselves denied the space in which to carry out this formative process successfully. Historically speaking, this type of repression is nothing new, but Wright traces it through the rapidly changing settings many African Americans found themselves in at the beginning of the twentieth century. While not encouraging murder as a viable act of self creation and appropriation of place, Wright makes it clear that he did not have to search very hard for the material upon which to base both his characters and his story lines in either "Long Black Song" or *Native Son*. After all, he writes, "Life had made the plot over and over again, to the extent that I knew it by heart" ("How" 455).

Notes

[1] Hale discusses this period extensively; particularly relevant to this study is her first chapter, "No Easy Place or Time: The Black Side of Segregation" (13-41).

[2] An important differentiation between the terms "place" and "space" is made by Yi-Fu Tuan in his work *Space and Place*.

[3] For a more complete treatment of this subject see Aiken.

[4] Vlach's research in this area covers a large portion of the South, and his exploration of the material culture of African Americans during this period is expanded in *By the Work of Their Hands*.

[5] When questioned by Borix Max about to whom the Thomases pay their rent, Mr. Dalton initially tries to shield himself behind his company name, but it is clear that the rent money from Bigger and his family eventually goes to Mr. Dalton.

[6] Like the character of Silas, Bigger has a model in reality, as Wright fashioned many of the details of Bigger's crimes after the circumstances surrounding the 1938 murder case of Robert Nixon.

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Ah Ain't Got Nobody: Southern Identity and Signifying on Dialect in Hurston and Faulkner

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As Edouard Glissant, Keith Cartwright, and others have noted, the U.S. South is characterized by racial-cultural hybridity, or creolism.[1] White Southerners, especially aristocratic whites, have historically worked to mask this creolism for the obvious reason that scholars have long identified: amalgamation destabilizes a society that depends on rigid class, race, and gender distinctions. These white aristocratic efforts to control and conceal creolism have created fascinating dynamics in Southern writing, one of which may be observed in the similar works of two twentieth century writers—Zora Neale Hurston and William Faulkner—who attempt to deal with racial definition and performance as they struggle with representations of Southern African American identity and its complex interconnections with Southern white identity. Specifically, examination of Hurston and Faulkner's similar dialect representations of the fundamental expression of the self—the first person singular pronoun "I"—exposes the arbitrary connection between dialect representation and "actual" speech, thereby revealing the artificiality of the portrayal of dialect and the ways such portrayal registers empowerment.

In her fiction, Zora Neale Hurston employs a rich style of dialect representation that addresses the subtext of Southern creolism by designating unique distinctions not only between black and white speech but black and white representations of black and white speech. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., explores Hurston's signifying techniques, writing that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* her "rhetorical strategy [. . . is] designed to mediate between [. . .] a profoundly lyrical, densely metaphorical, quasi-musical privileged black oral tradition on the one hand, and a received but not yet fully appropriated standard English literary tradition on the other hand" (174). Hurston also signifies on "standard English literary tradition" by experimenting with dialect. Questioning the accuracy of previous methods of representing dialect utilized and in some cases devised by such nineteenth-century writers as Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and Mark Twain, she comments in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," "If we are to believe the majority of writers of Negro dialect and the burnt-cork artists, Negro speech is a weird thing, full of 'ams' and 'Ises.' Fortunately we don't have to believe them. We may go directly to the Negro and let him speak for himself" (31).

Hurston then offers her own examples of black American dialect; one of these is the pronunciation and her corresponding dialect representation of

the personal pronoun "I." She writes that "[v]ery few Negroes, educated or not, use a clear clipped 'I.' It verges more or less upon 'Ah'" (31). Her explanation for this phenomenon is especially intriguing: she writes, "I think the lip form is responsible for this to a great extent. By experiment the reader will find a sharp 'I' is very much easier with a thin taut lip than with a full soft lip" (31). Hurston thus establishes what she considers a more authentic representation of an African American's basic expression of self and offers a biological cause. With this and other examples, she signifies on (alters and revises) the plantation/local color styles of representing black dialect: although instances of such dialect representation appeared before Hurston, neither Harris, Page, Twain, nor any other major figure of the local color era consistently made this distinction.[2]

As may be expected, Hurston transfers her ideas about dialect to her own fiction, only her "ah" for "I" operates in much more subtle ways to register African American identity than are apparent in her "biological" explanation. As a general rule in Hurston's fiction and drama, the black characters speak with the "ah" and the white characters speak with the "I." But the distinction is not always neatly determined by color and the formation of the lips. "Ah" and "I," in fact, emerge as two entirely different signifiers, not merely determined by biology but performed and thus representative of different senses of self and informed by differing levels of power, as illustrated by the fact that Hurston does not capitalize the "a" in "ah" while the white "I" is always capitalized. In a sense, Hurston's resisting the standard (conspicuously white) rule of capitalizing the "I" secures a separate and empowered realm of representation for black identity. But it is more likely that Hurston means for this lowercase "a" to represent oppression while other representations of the personal pronoun "I" mark points along a spectrum of racial performance and empowerment. This spectrum of racial identity is especially evident in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in which Janie, a black woman struggling against patriarchal oppression, never abandons the "ah" pronunciation. But Joe Starks, one of her husbands, who normally uses *ah*, appropriates the phrase "I god" when assuming the empowered white patriarchal role of mayor. Conversely, the white Doctor Simmons, who spends his time among African Americans in the swamp and attempts to heal Teacake, usually uses the white *I* but also at times uses the black pronunciation.[3]

Although Hurston's technique addresses the sense of self of those living behind the Veil, it is problematic because the very pronunciation that she assigns to African Americans is one of many traits both white and black Southerners were actually thought to share. The 1947 *Manual of American Dialects for Radio, Stage, Screen and Television*'s chapter on "The Southern Dialect" invariably represents the long *i* in Southern black and white

pronunciation as "ah." And the *American Dialect Dictionary*, published in 1944, includes in its entry for "I" examples in which both white and black Southern pronunciation is represented with the "ah" spelling from as early as 1901. It may be surmised, then, that the most influential dialect writers before Hurston did not make a distinction between Southern black and white pronunciation of *I* simply because they saw no need to, since both races were understood to utter the same sound.[4]

The significance of Hurston's dialect technique is perhaps best understood in terms of the apparent reaction to her work of a Southern white writer of her own time, William Faulkner. In 1943, Faulkner wrote a somewhat strange letter to Eudora Welty:

> Dear Welty,
> You are doing fine. You are doing all right. I read THE GILDED SIX BITS, a friend loaned me THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM, I have just bought the collection named GREEN something, haven't read it yet. [. . .] You are doing very fine. Is there any way I can help you? How old are you? [. . .]
> [Signed] Faulkner [in pencil] (Crane 223)

"The Gilded Six-Bits" was, in fact, a short story written by Zora Neale Hurston that appeared in the August 1933 issue of *Story* magazine, which also featured a story by Faulkner. In this story, a young black woman named Missie May lives blissfully with her husband Joe until she is drawn into a brief affair with a new man in town named Otis D. Slemmons because of his apparent riches (gold coins that she later finds are fake). She gets pregnant, which further strains her by then ailing marriage. When the child is born and declared to resemble Joe, the proud father goes to Orlando, Florida, and buys candy for his wife and baby with one of Slemmons's fake gold coins (left during the latter's flight upon discovery of the affair) and returns home to live happily ever after. As Joe, who speaks with the "ah," leaves an Orlando store, the white store owner says, condescendingly, "Wisht I could be like these darkies. Laughin' all the time. Nothin' worries 'em" (98).

Faulkner's mention of this story is significant in light of his 1940 story "Pantaloon in Black" (republished with light revisions in *Go Down, Moses*), which shares thematic and technical similarity with Hurston's. Faulkner's story tells of a black man named Rider and his attempts to deal with his grief over his wife's death. Rider helps bury his wife, then tries working and then drinking to extinguish his sorrow. Eventually, he goes to the lumber mill where he is employed and joins one of the nightly games of poker that have been dominated for years by the crooked white mill overseer. When the white man cheats Rider, Rider slashes his throat with a knife, killing him. Rider makes no attempt to escape the authorities and finds himself in jail. An

enormous man, he lifts the door of the jail from its hinges and attempts to carry it out, Samson-like, thwarted only by a group of inmates who manage to corral him. Later Rider is found hanged.

Faulkner uses Hurston's *ah* spelling in the story to designate black identity and, as in "The Gilded Six-Bits," uses a white voice to position the black hero as indeed a "pantaloon" or clown—or "laughing darky." This condescending white voice dominates the second part of the story in the form of a narrative by a white deputy, who speaks with the white *I* as he tells his wife about Rider's taking the cell door down. The deputy recasts the tragedy of Rider's situation as an at-the-dinner-table curiosity, thus reducing the story to one of an ignorant black who behaves in inexplicable ways when reacting to his wife's death. Even more conspicuously, the deputy *mimics* Rider's speech, including his pronunciation of the pronoun *I*. The deputy says that Rider "grab[s the inmates] up as they come in and fling[s] them clean across the room like they was rag dolls, still saying, 'Ah ain't tryin' to git out, Ah ain't tryin' to git out'" (255).

In this story, then, Faulkner in effect signifies on Hurston's signification.[5] On one hand, he imitates an African American-defined rather than the white Southern-defined method of dialect representation. Yet he alters and reclaims that method by applying white linguistic rules to Hurston's by capitalizing the "a" in Rider's pronunciation of *ah*. That white modernists utilized African American dialect in their own experiments with language has been noted by Michael North in *The Dialect of Modernism*, but Faulkner's imitation of Hurston does not represent a mere interpretation and appropriation of the principles of representing dialect but rather a direct application of dialect representation to African Americans themselves.

Faulkner's use of Hurston's peculiar version of representing dialect is striking because it affirms a difference between white and black speech where he would have realized there existed an implication of sameness. In fact, the very pronunciation he freely assigns to black identity had been applied to himself—William Faulkner, aristocratic Southern white.[6] In an interview with a reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*, published on November 14, 1931, the interviewer offers the following observations:

> William Faulkner, the Mississippi novelist, who has been called the Dostoievsky [sic] of the South, revealed himself yesterday in an interview as a curious mixture of the modern and the conservative, a Southern sage who reads scarcely at all, thinks the Negroes were better off under slavery, and votes Democratic to protect his property.
>
> Arnold Bennett said of him, "He writes like an angel." But Mr. Faulkner hates interviews, hates being asked

> questions, and "Ah don't care much about talkin'," he says. (Meriwether 19)

This instance is the first of many cases in which Faulkner could read his own dialect being represented in the very ways Hurston and then he, himself, would depict black dialect.[7] The question emerges, then, why Faulkner would represent African American expression of the self in the very manner that his white Southern expression of self had been represented. And why would an author often quick to distance himself from African American artists, not only seem to imitate a black writer's methods but do so in the very face of "evidence" to the contrary regarding a particular practice of dialect representation? Furthermore, why would Hurston assign to black identity a signifier that also represents white Southern identity?

The answer to these questions ultimately exists in the system of creolism that such a technique of dialect representation reveals and the artifice that masks it. Keith Cartwright, in *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables, and Gothic Tales*, asserts that such literary creolization was part of the foundation of Southern writing by the late nineteenth century. He writes,

> As long as literary creolism was expressive of the old paternalistic relationships and served as a pastoral, even feudal romance preservative of the status quo, Southerners could celebrate Creole identity as evidence of their connections to the soil and their noblesse oblige. . . . But if creolization became perceived as supportive of "social equality" and indicative of racial/cultural mongrelization, there could be no room for celebration of the African elements of Southern or American culture. (128)

Cartwright's observation hints at the doubleness of dialect representation among such plantation writers as Page and Harris. At the same time that dialect separates, it binds "Southerners," both white and black. Page, for example, opens his first volume, *In Ole Virginia*, with an explanatory note showing his Northern readers the *difference* of African American dialect, but in fact the very title of the book shows not clear separation but cloudy mixture: *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories* instead of *In Old Virginia, or Master Channing and Other Stories*. And in the vignettes of which the book is composed, race rarely achieves the rigidity that Page professed; instead, the reader encounters a sable and white and thus metaphorically "racially" mongrel dog, master and slave children represented as "brothers," masters appropriating the dialect of their retainers, and so on.

Faulkner and Hurston thus engage in a form of literary lying that simply extends the artifice of Southern representation of identity, especially

African American Southern identity. Plantation writers of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century made no distinction between black and white Southern pronunciation of the pronoun "I" because there was none to be made and because it was in their interest to provide common ground between former slaves and slave owners in order to propel the reconciliation romance. At the same time, white aristocratic Southerners avoided using the "ah" spelling in order to avoid Othering themselves in respect to Northerners. Hurston signifies on this practice, exposing the very artificiality and political implications of dialect representation by suggesting that African Americans have a very different sense of themselves and their empowerment than do Southern whites. Faulkner's use of Hurston's dialect representation strategy then emerges as an example of the Southern white aristocratic hegemonic impulse to mask this creolization: his action of appropriating black form, which had actually been identified with white Southern aristocracy, shows racial interconnectedness even as the white deputy in "Pantaloon in Black" stresses difference between himself and the Other.

In the end, while both black and white artists Cab Calloway and Rosemary Clooney sang "I Ain't Got Nobody" (the latter singer hinting at an "ah" intonation of *I*), Faulkner and Hurston show that "Ah" possesses a superfluity of Southern bodies. Even when the Southern African American claims the "ah" for his or her own, that signifier of identity ultimately finds itself circumscribed by Southern white control at the same time that the white aristocratic impulse finds itself compelled to pin that expression of self onto the black body and not its own. With the distinction between the respective races' depiction of this self-identifying signifier both in place and under white control, the true sameness of Southern identity is masked and its counterfeit difference is preserved on Southern white terms.

Notes

[1] See, for example, Ladd and Smith.

[2] The distinction is occasionally made; for example, in *Life on the Mississippi*. But these instances are rare and the distinction was never common. For further discussion of literary dialect representation in the late nineteenth century, see Jones.

[3] This technique appears even in Hurston's earliest work, including her first published short story, "John Redding Goes to Sea" (1921). Richard Wright also makes this distinction in pronunciation, and Faulkner may have been influenced by some of his early stories, as well. It seems practically impossible that Faulkner could have procured, read, and digested either *Native Son* (published in 1940) or *Uncle Tom's Children* (also published in 1940) before he wrote and submitted the story discussed in this essay in March of

1940, but he may have encountered some of the stories in the latter volume, which had originally appeared as early as 1936. It should be noted, too, that besides the fact that Hurston began publishing before Wright, Wright tended to use the "ah" pronunciation more often to designate uneducated as opposed to educated African Americans whereas Hurston used "ah" to signify a general African American sense of self.

[4] Dialect is, of course, much too unstable to define and order absolutely, as linguists have noted, especially in such recent studies of Southern dialect as North's *English in the Southern United States* and Montgomery and Bailey's *Language Variety in the South: Perspectives in Black and White*, both of which also discuss creolism in Southern speech.

[5] Faulkner also used the spelling in his 1925 story "Sunset" but not to signify identity, as the African American protagonist does not consistently use the "ah" pronunciation. Of course, Hurston had already published stories using this dialect style, and Faulkner may have imitated them, but that does not seem likely. Rather, he seems to have been grappling with the complexity of dialect and the ways pronunciations vary within a single person's speech patterns. It should be noted, too, that Faulkner's attributing "The Gilded Six-Bits" to Welty greatly complicates the possibility of his conscious signifying on an African American's technique because he may simply have remembered the author of the story as a white woman, despite the fact that *Story* described Hurston as "the first Negro to be admitted" to Barnard College and major "in anthropology under Frank [sic] Boas" (3). It is provocative to think that in Faulkner's mind the author of "The Gilded Six-Bits" had transformed from black to white, suggesting that the masking of Southern creolism is such an entrenched practice as to be unconscious.

[6] Faulkner might be more accurately characterized as upper middle class, but his posturing was that of aristocrat.

[7] See Meriwether. To the non-Southern interviewer, Faulkner is himself the Other. In his excellent essay on dialect, "Trying Not to Say: A Primer on the Language of *The Sound and the Fury*," Noel Polk accurately identifies the shifting paradigm of standard and variant in Faulkner's representation of dialect. Polk notes, for instance, that Faulkner "invests [Quentin] with otherness" when the Northern characters think that he "talks like a colored man" (130). Incidentally, the Northerners discern the speech of "a colored man" not from actual contact with African Americans but from "minstrel shows" (*The Sound and the Fury* 120).

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The Power of the "pleading mask":
Women and the Masculine Ideal in Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*

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In Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* (1946), the older generation of Fairchild women has established a female dynasty of sorts. The Fairchild women want to retain familial power, but they simultaneously need to feel protected and feminine; to satisfy this need, they choose from within the family a male hero who must essentially sacrifice himself to maintain their happiness. Through the Fairchild family, Welty demonstrates that the traditional Southern hero model both constrains and imprisons men, limiting choices while creating within them feelings of discontent. George Fairchild, while taught to revere an outdated model of masculinity, reacts against it. He refuses to submit entirely to family and becomes a representative of a new, healthier model of Southern masculinity. In the novel, George is a kind of golden mean, exhibiting aspects of individualistic and communally oriented identity without ultimately being dominated or subsumed by either.

The traditional Southern hero model, the master and law of his domain, is the product of plantation life. The Southern plantation was isolated, under tight control, and, as W. J. Cash points out, it "tended to find its center in itself: to be an independent social unit, a self-contained and largely self-sufficient little world of its own" (33). Although *Delta Wedding* is set in 1923, Shellmound exists largely in this manner; of course, modern conveniences have improved the standard of living, and automobiles and grocery stores have eliminated the need for the plantation to remain self-sufficient. Still, Shellmound's rural location ensures some degree of insulation. Slavery has been abolished, and now Negroes work for wages; the role of overseer is still in place, however, as is his house on the property. The Fairchilds, presided over by Battle Fairchild, "serve as a microcosm of the agrarian life—the dependence on the seasons as a regulatory force on one's life, the isolation from the world at large, the family unity, and the strong ties to the land and to a sense of history" (Prenshaw 53). We know, however, that the Fairchilds are members of a hierarchical plantation world that will eventually crumble, and the family must change with the changing world; *Delta Wedding* is a novel very much concerned with insiders, outsiders, interactions between these groups, and the consequences of such encounters, which are most often positive. As Noel Polk asserts, for Welty "change is not intimidating. For many of her characters, value lies not at all in the old verities but in new ones waiting to be discovered by folks with the courage to face the new configurations of political and social order that new

values—change—might bring about" (41). Although many older characters in *Delta Wedding* resist change, George is the harbinger of a new order, and Dabney, to an extent, follows his lead.

War widows Aunt Shannon and Aunt Mac are the matriarchs of the clan, having raised the next generation of Fairchilds after their parents died. Their governance of the Fairchild family has resulted in an interesting internal power structure that privileges females, a structure not uncommon in the post-Civil War South. As Louise Westling contends, "Combined with the influence of 'chivalry' and the historical necessity for women's self-reliance during the Civil War, that kind of strength created a hidden matriarchy behind the patriarchal Southern facade" (77). The Fairchild men are merely figureheads who submit to the wishes of their women. George's wife Robbie, who is an "outsider" because of her social class, notes, "The Fairchild women asked a great deal of their men—competitively. . . . Naturally, the Fairchild women knew what to ask, because in their kind of people, the Fairchild kind, the women always ruled the roost. . . . The women it was who inherited the place—or their brothers, guiltily, handed it over" (189-90). Robbie further implies that the women retain family property out of some ancient debt that men owe to women; the women then require their men to give up their freedom in exchange for return of the land. Despite the Fairchild women's power over men, the women are also extremely protective of them and sense in the men a certain vulnerability; even the youngest girls display maternal concern for their male family members—for men much older than themselves. While the Fairchild women both foster the desire for and participate in creating a male hero within their family, the behavior creates a subtle tension between the sexes, a tension that could never be resolved were the male-female dynamic to remain static. Even young Laura realizes that "it was the boys and the men that defined the family always. All the girls knew it" (16). As historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues, this type of tension would have been common because "[b]eneath such feminine advocacy of male valor there lay, perhaps, a hidden bitterness. . . . [I]t was the man who counted in life within as well as outside the family" (173). In *Delta Wedding,* the role of "ideal man" or "hero" is depicted as less honor than curse.

If any of the Fairchild men should be the favorite, Battle would initially seem the obvious choice. In addition to being the eldest son, Battle is also in charge of the operation of the family home, Shellmound. He seems larger-than-life and fierce—yet tender. He is described as "tremendous" in size, with "thick fair hair over his bulging brow" (13). All the Fairchild men are large, but Battle is the most physically imposing. Although he weighs 250 pounds and is "too heavy to ride his horse," he is "rushing, mysterious [and] very laughing" (13). Battle is humorous and loud, and Laura refers to him as "Uncle Battle the Fire-eater" (13). Both protective and awe-inspiring, Battle

is respected by white and black men alike: "When Negroes clear to Greenwood cut each other up, it was well-known that it took Uncle Battle to protect them from the sheriff or prevail on a bad one to come out and surrender" (14). Although he at times recites poetry for humorous purposes, Battle is less intellectual than either of his brothers and more inclined toward the physical.

Though Battle is firmly ensconced in the role of family man (and perhaps subjugated by it), he must have been wild in his youth, as people are surprised by his transformation: "'Domesticated.' People still pointed at Battle Fairchild after twenty years of married life, as if he were a new wonder" (286). Significantly, however, Battle is also described as "helpless" and childlike. He is unable to repair Dabney's unstable altar because he "is as helpless as a child with *machinery*" (142). This inability to perform manual labor could be perceived as a result of Battle's privileged social class rather than ineptitude, and, of course, the overseer Troy vows that he can correct the problem with little effort. Still, Ellen later feels surprisingly protective of her husband and remarks that she "hate[s] leaving the garden untended—sometimes as much as leaving Bluet, or Battle" (298). She juxtaposes the image of her helpless infant here with that of her strapping husband. Yet when Battle shows concern for her after she faints, Ellen thinks that "there's no reason in the world why [Battle] should have been cowed in his life by Denis and George" (250). The remark is curious. Why would an older son feel intimidated by younger brothers? Here again, though, in the fainting scene Battle appears inept. While George assumes control over the situation when Ellen faints, Battle hangs back and feels out of place. He does not know what to do and merely "roam[s] up and down the room and now and then g[i]ve[s] a touch or stroke to Ellen's shoulder" (220).

For unknown reasons, or perhaps for those noted above, the Fairchilds select Denis rather than Battle as their hero. Dabney realizes that "it was Denis and always would be Denis that they gave the family honor to. . . . Denis was the one that looked like a Greek god, . . . squandered away his life loving people too much, [and] was too kind to his family. . . . Denis could have been anything and done everything, but he was cut off before his time" (152-53). Because Denis is dead, his family celebrates his good qualities through selective memory while omitting his undesirable traits. He will never be able to betray his limitless potential, and premature death enshrines him. Although Denis rebels by marrying Virgie Lee and rejects some family dogmas, the above description implies that he submits to family control, as does Battle. However, the description might be fueled by reverence for the dead, because the words could just as easily describe George. The family "forgets" that Denis drank, gambled, and married beneath him. His "memory has been purged of every moral taint. . . . He has in effect been sainted and

established as the epitome, immune from change . . ." (Allen 36). Only his daughter Maureen can tarnish Denis's memory; ironically, the only offspring of the "Greek god" is undeniably imperfect. The mentally retarded Maureen has stopped moving and growing as Denis did in dying.

Since Denis dies, another must fill his role; as the only remaining son besides Battle, George must become the family hero. While George and Denis are "always thought of together" (46) (though George is nine years younger), George can never surpass the memory of his brother for the simple fact that Denis is dead, and although Denis is reported, as previously quoted, to have "squandered away his life loving people too much," we have no real evidence of his generosity. Dabney notes a significant difference between Denis and George, however. Dabney's recollection of George halting a Negro fight while Denis walked away laughing disturbs her. She was horrified by the incident, and "all the Fairchild in her had screamed at his interfering—at his taking part—*caring* about anything in the world but them" (46). In this one incident perhaps lies the difference between Denis and George. George is loyal to his family, yet he also shows concern for others—even young black boys. It is this same generosity and wide-ranging concern that outrages Robbie as is most evident in the trestle incident. Our difficulty in understanding George (and the other male characters) arises from the fact that the narrative is told entirely from a female perspective through female characters. We are never allowed to enter the male psyche, and "[t]he result is that the individuality of George is somewhat buried in the familial expectation imposed upon him" (McAlpin 490). We see George as his women see him and want him to be seen.

George's entrance into the novel is almost farcical. He arrives on horseback, dressed in white, the knight errant intent on restoring peace to the tumultuous household disrupted by Dabney's impending marriage. Riding on horseback from Memphis to Fairchilds seems to be the ultimate romantic gesture until George reveals that he acted out of necessity since Robbie left him and took the car. While he might play the part of the hero because it is expected of him, George seems to act out of genuine feeling, rather than out of sheer duty. He also reacts to prescribed modes of behavior and largely refuses to allow his family to dictate the terms of his own life. For example, George is the only left-handed Fairchild; he adheres to the perceived undesirable trait, while Battle breaks the habit in all of his children. In addition, George marries a woman of a lower social class (as did Denis) and leaves The Grove to his spinster sisters. Relocating to Memphis, living in an apartment, and practicing law are acts through which he flaunts his independence. George will make sacrifices for his family, but he will not sacrifice himself.

Although Battle adheres to the insular family's wishes, George acts

as liberator and example to the younger generation. Dabney in particular is aware of George's peripheral location within the family, although others mistake him as its core:

> It was actually Uncle George who had shown her that there was another way to be—something else. . . . Uncle George, the youngest of the older ones, who stood in—who was—the very heart of the family, who was like them, looked like them (only by far, she thought, seeing at once his picnic smile, handsomer)—he was different somehow. Perhaps the heart always was made of different stuff and had a different life from the rest of the body. (42)

Ellen and Robbie later seem to share Dabney's insight about George and treasure his individuality rather than attempting to mold him into the impossible ideal. All three of these women are distanced from the Fairchild matriarchal norm, and their attitudes toward George help establish their own independence and unorthodoxy. Ann Romines argues that George is cherished "because he has managed to live passionately and fully without denying his full allegiance to the family or trimming his selfhood to fit a Fairchild pattern" (228). Battle objects to George's behavior, however, and asks, "'Why isn't George here where he belongs? . . . That boy's *never* here, come any conceivable hell or high water!'" (209). Battle's misplaced anger is perhaps attributable to resentment or jealousy. Somehow, George always manages to be at the right place at the right time—although never, it seems, in obedience to externally imposed rules.

Despite his family's attempt to make him the "sacrificial beast," George successfully frees himself from the Southern hero model. While family members might still expect him to conform to a certain behavior, he simply refuses—and they can do nothing about it. When George considers returning to Fairchilds and reclaiming The Grove, Tempe objects and labels him selfish: "'I don't understand George, he was always supposed to be so unselfish, unspoiled, never do anything but kind things. Now listen, he's as spoiled as any of us!'" (323). Tempe wants a hero rather than a human being; she wants extraordinary gestures rather than ordinary imperfect ones. The possibility that George and Robbie will return and reclaim The Grove is perhaps a sign that the old order will be overturned; both The Grove and Marmion will be inhabited by a new order characterized by more social and gender equity, and the transplanting of new ideas and beliefs will be signified by the planting of new and varied crops. At the very least, there will be a collision of the old and new orders, with it remaining to be seen which will "prevail" over which.

By the end of the novel, there has been a discernible shift in how family members view themselves and each other—a move toward self-

definition and away from identity derived solely through association with family. George plays a significant role in effecting the change; he is by no means free of imperfections, but his very flaws will save them all. George demonstrates that individuals must reach beyond the family to find happiness and fulfillment and that it is possible to contribute to the family without being completely defined by it. Perhaps in his individuality he represents a "heart" that the family members aren't used to recognizing in themselves but could.

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In the Flesh: The Grace of "Parker's Back"

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There is something especially gratifying for a reader when a favored author's career ends on a high note. We like to speak of a writer's last great phase, those pieces that crown his or her body of work and convey a far-reaching openness to the mystery of things. In her last group of stories, "Revelation," "Parker's Back," and "Judgment Day," Flannery O'Connor achieved such a finale. "Parker's Back," the last of these to be completed, particularly warrants our attention for its superbly concrete dramatization of a long-standing concern of O'Connor's, Adamic sin and recovery in modern-day America. In the course of tracking down O. E. Parker, her last scapegrace, O'Connor extended the imaginative borders of her true country and suggested how embracing the Word is of its individual characters.

A good deal has been written on this story, much of which is appreciative and sensible. But while "Parker's Back" is generally ranked among her best stories, it does not enjoy the pride of place that comes with frequent anthologizing. The broad effects that make stories like "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and "Good Country People" so funny and devastating are here carefully modulated. By career's end O'Connor had become increasingly concerned with craft, including precise tonal pitch and narrative technique.

"Parker's Back" also covers new ground insofar as its focus is on a "vital man-woman relationship" (Desmond 78). While such a theme may be commonplace for many writers, O'Connor, with little personal experience, had habitually sidestepped or comically reduced romantic relations between the sexes. Of course, O. E. Parker and his chosen, Sarah Ruth Cates, are anything but a romantic couple. They do not even enjoy the comfortable old-shoe fit of the Turpins from "Revelation." Rather, they are opposites whose strange attraction leads to ongoing conflict. Parker cannot understand why he even stays with such a plain-looking, self-righteous, *pregnant* woman who constantly harps on his fate come Judgment Day and wields a wicked broom. However, as usual in O'Connor country, these strange bedfellows are potential instruments of grace for one another.

Parker's marriage is just the latest in a series of impulsive actions that have propelled him through life by fits and starts. His first leap comes when he attends a carnival sideshow, O'Connor's answer to the Southern tent revival. There the fourteen-year-old boy feels a surge of wonder for the first time in his slack-jawed life. The object of his awe is a man with full-body tattoos, "a single intricate design of brilliant color," offering an "arabesque of

men and beasts and flowers" (657). From the time of this revelation in the flesh Parker would be restless and driven.

> Until he saw the man at the fair, it did not enter his head that there was anything out of the ordinary about the fact that he existed. Even then it did not enter his head, but a peculiar unease settled in him. It was as if a blind boy had been turned so gently in a different direction that he did not know his destination had been changed. (658)

Parker is another of O'Connor's comic characters with wise blood, that supposed instinctual guidance system operating independent of the brain. Like the illustrated man, he, too, must realize his colorful self by accumulating tattoos. His early ones are common enough—an eagle on a cannon, a heart—but good for attracting the sort of girls who would otherwise ignore him. And when he runs away to join the navy rather than submit to his mother's anxious attempt to save him through religion, his barely conscious longing for a world of personal splendor is played out around the globe. During his five-year stint he decorates himself with increasingly exotic tattoos meant to evoke the flourishing phenomenon that is O. E. Parker, for deep down he aims not merely at "the image but the stuff of wonder in himself" (Giannone 224).

However, to his chagrin, the sum effect of the tattoos rapidly covering his available front space is of "something haphazard and botched" (659). Parker envisioned an integrated, flowing panoply of earthly powers bespeaking his own mastery as a man of diverse parts, but his dyed-in-the-skin advertisement for himself is as fragmented as modern existence itself. At a basic level the dilemma is classic, and we might recall St. Augustine's formulation of it in his rendering of the Neoplatonic tension between the One and the Many (65). Through body art Parker would display emblematic proof of consummate identity, if only his lifeless anchors reflected a real grounding force behind the miscellany of images. In current linguistic terms,

> his own life text is filling up unintelligibly, and, with no more room on his visible front for a tattoo, Parker has literally and figuratively come to an end of himself. . . . All he has been interested in is the text of himself and his own ability to write it. (Streight 3-4)

A wanderer whose growing dissatisfaction has caused him to go AWOL from the service branch ideal for runaways, Parker washes out and lands back in the Southern countryside.

When he meets his future wife, Parker is selling fruit out of his truck. Returning the next day, this Adam-as-road-man[1] comes courting with a bushel of apples, but while the woman accepts his offered fruit, she rejects almost everything else about him. His tattoos she judges "vanity of vanities"

(O'Connor 660), and she resists all physical advances with physical force. Parker concludes that he wants "nothing further to do with her" (663), then marries her in a civil ceremony because she holds churches to be idolatrous. The reader understands that Parker's involvement with this disapproving woman is an extension of his own dissatisfaction as he tries to be sufficient unto himself, a roving—that is, fallen—American original. Sarah Ruth "complements his obsession with tattoos; whereas they suggest an egoistic but spiritual potency, she reveals his need for something firm outside himself, even something to which he may sacrifice himself in opposition to his common sense" (Eggenschwiler 76-77).

But why does Sarah Ruth deign to take a man who seems to have turned himself into a hodgepodge icon? Parker debates whether she is secretly attracted to him or just means to save him. We do know that she was impressed when Parker reluctantly disclosed the full name behind his good-ole-boy initials O. E.: Obadiah Elihue. Someone of Sarah Ruth's fundamentalist stamp would take it as a sign when a man and woman, with a double-barreled Old Testament name apiece, encounter one another by seeming chance. Parker's name has been translated with slight variations by the critics, but for our purposes "the servant of Yahweh, my God is he"[2] will do. In a sense he has been running away from any such imposition that would rob him of his autonomy. Andre Bleikasten observes that Parker "rejects his given body, as he rejects his given name, because he wishes to become the sovereign shaper of his own gorgeous self" (188). Sarah Ruth, however, will have none of that peacock foolishness.

Parker's surname is also worth considering. Alfred Corn points out that Parker, as a man on the move, parks himself only temporarily along the way; likewise, each tattoo has given him only short-term satisfaction before he gets the urge for something else (115). He is a man trying to ease a spiritual itch with the carnal scratch of a tattoo needle. But he has failed to realize the park, or garden, of earthly joys in his own person. The Edenic vision of unified life that initially moved him at the fair has eluded his mechanical attempts at reclamation. Instead, the panther and the Buddha and the crossed rifles and the cobra and the obscenities and Elizabeth II all jostle one another in his tattooed carnival.

Add to this the burden of an unimpressed wife and you have a man driven to fill in any available empty space the only way he knows how. As it happens, his front is already covered, so he considers the expedient of a master image on his back. This shift out of Parker's direct sight suggests an intimation on his part that power lies somehow behind a person, beyond self-esteem. He taxes his brain in an attempt to conceive the perfect compelling picture, something religious that will get Sarah Ruth off his back and bring her to heel. Between her bad cooking and his own sleepless unease, he is

losing flesh fast.

The scene in which Parker leaps, or is catapulted, into the next stage of his journey is laden with Scriptural significance, although it also works on a natural level. While baling hay in the field of an old woman who employs him, Parker is preoccupied with possible designs for his back and runs the tractor into a tree. His impression is that the tree reached out to pluck him from his seat. Both tractor and tree go up in flames, and a now-barefoot Parker watches as his shoes burn before him. The oath that escapes his lips in mid-flight—"GOD ABOVE!"—contributes to the ready sense that O'Connor is staging a comic reenactment of Moses' encounter with the burning bush. The man who has tried to stand on self must eventually realize his mortal limits and seek a new foundation.[3]

At least the question of the right tattoo is now answered. Not even allowing himself to think, Parker scrambles to his truck and drives straight to the city. The following scenes in a tattoo parlor and a pool hall are vividly rendered, proof of O'Connor's growing command as a writer up to the very end. For this story she had done some research, drawing liberally from the Englishman George Burchett's *Memoirs of a Tattooist*.[4] The emergence of spiritual dimensions from gritty, material life had long been her artistic challenge, and in "Parker's Back" she found an ideal vehicle for grounding her sacramental vision. Her final spiritual truant would literally have God on his back, signifying what Sister Kathleen Feeley felicitously calls "God's designs upon" Parker (145).

Surrendered to his instincts, Parker has been thumbing backward through a book of devotional pictures, bypassing the modern, soft representations of Jesus. He flips past an arresting pair of eyes, only to return. While he has aimed at a kinetic effect with past images, he now settles on "the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes" (667).[5] Nothing less than the exact mosaic, complete with colored squares, will satisfy him. The tattoo artist obliges in two long sessions over the course of a couple of days, although he deems Parker crazy for wanting such a regressive, hard face on his back.[6]

At this point Parker still does not admit having undergone a religious conversion. His notion is to appropriate an image of higher authority, one that his viewers, especially Sarah Ruth, will have to respect. Others will have to face those penetrating eyes, not he. In his remaining vanity, he yet wants to consider himself more a bearer than a servant of power. However, his plan backfires insofar as the relentless eyes seem to lay first claim to him. Shaken, he bolsters himself with a pint of whiskey and heads for a local haunt where he can be old O. E. with his buddies.

At the pool hall a friendly slap on the back brings a protest from Parker, and his friends gather to see the latest veiled wonder. They must raise

his shirt themselves since Parker is being uncooperative, but they quickly unhand him once the image registers like a divine invasion. Their subsequent self-protective hoots and razzing provoke Parker because he knows that he now appears to be a walking testimonial for Jesus. Lashing out in denial, he succeeds in getting himself heaved like Jonah from the ship (a favorite story of O'Connor's). An outcast in the alley, Parker meditates on the extent to which his latest compulsion has mastered him, as if some previously unrecognized agency were involved.

In his bewilderment he actually finds comfort thinking of Sarah Ruth, whose icepick eyes are not as demanding as the ones drilling through his back. But when he returns home, making extra noise to assert his right to be absent without explanation, he finds the door blocked. His wife refuses to recognize "old O. E." (673). As he casts about for the right identification, he turns to see "a tree of light burst over the skyline" (673) at dawn. The earlier Mosaic run-in with the tree prefigured this crucifying encounter.

> Parker fell back against the door as if he had been pinned there by a lance.
>
> "Who's there?" the voice from inside said and there was a quality about it now that seemed final. The knob rattled and the voice said peremptorily, "Who's there, I ast you?"
>
> Parker bent down and put his mouth near the stuffed keyhole. "Obadiah," he whispered and all at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts.
>
> "Obadiah Elihue!" he whispered. (673)

As he confesses his appointed identity, reclaimed from the waste land of his aberrant will, Parker momentarily feels what it is to inherit the garden of original creation. The first Adam when broken can be restored to fullness through the second. Richard Giannone expresses the Christian import this way: "With the initials O. E. acquiring substance, Parker's flesh is now made word" (229). St. Augustine taught that God the Father established the Creation through the Word or Son, made flesh in time.[7] So in submitting to the reconceiving vision of the eyes on his back, Parker experiences the coherent Power behind the many marvels sampled on his front.[8]

If he is to be Obadiah, his way is that of obedience, in imitation of the subservience of Christ, who was pierced more deeply. When he is finally admitted into his own house, Parker practically makes a peace offering of his back. Sarah Ruth's response may stun him, but not the expectant reader. She can accept Jesus as inquisitor of souls; she cannot recognize a portrayal of his human face. O'Connor quoted with approval the opinion of a friend who held

that Sarah Ruth is heretical because she will only worship "in pure spirit" (1218). Her radical Protestantism rejects the sacramental image as rank idolatry, and she raises welts on the divine face as well as her husband's raw back with a broom. Parker takes the beating, possibly semi-conscious of a past self-idolatry that dies hard. He is now moving in mystery beyond his wife, who regards him with disdain as he cries "like a baby" (675) against a pecan tree in the yard. It may be a large part of his mission in life to act as an agent of grace for this adherent to the old covenant of the Law.

Struggle between the sexes—for power, accommodation, even love—may be a staple of realistic fiction, but for O'Connor, single all her days, the theme represented an attempt to extend sacramental vision into the most common passages of life. Parker and Sarah Ruth enact the woe that is in marriage while embodying the potential for mutual correction. At the same time, through her errant protagonist O'Connor graphically dramatizes the far-flung, even grotesque, devices and desires of the human heart in its quest for fulfillment. And while the anagogical sense arising from Parker's Adamic misadventures is powerful without being forced, what remains for most readers is a compellingly realized country inhabited by flawed creatures worthy of fellow-feeling. At the end of her career and life O'Connor was doing her whole artistic duty to man and God.

Notes

[1] For an extended discussion of O'Connor's opposition to the glorifying myth of the American Adam, see Ragen.

[2] This translation is a cross between the one provided by May (120) and that of Giannone (229).

[3] Among other O'Connor works, this episode is reminiscent of Hazel Motes' self-mortification in *Wise Blood* as he stuffs his shoes with stones and broken glass, and Sally Poker's mortification in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" as she realizes while basking in a spotlight that she has forgotten to change her childish brown oxfords.

[4] For an inventory of O'Connor's borrowings from Burchett's memoirs, see Westarp.

[5] The story itself seems to have had its origins in a clipping O'Connor saw about a man who had a picture of Christ tattooed on his back for artistic purposes. See her letter to Ashley Brown dated 13 February 1961 (O'Connor 1145).

[6] Compare Mrs. Flood's mocking vision of the blind Hazel Motes "going backwards to Bethlehem" (123) in *Wise Blood*.

[7] See in particular the early chapters of Book 11 from his *Confessions*.

[8] The paradoxes of back and front, past and future, thicken as the story progresses. Noting the pun in the title, May observes that Parker is indeed back (116): back to his wife, his given name, his true status as a servant of God, hence ready to undertake his authentic calling. More largely, Karl-Heinz Westarp in "Teilhard de Chardin's Impact on Flannery O'Connor" suggests that the progression of tattoos reflects an evolutionary "convergence towards Christ" (107) as the Omega of history.

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"Their Clamorous Little Species": Collective Experience of the Sublime in Fred Chappell's *Midquest*

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In his 1997 essay "'Not as a Leaf': Southern Poetry and the Innovation of Tradition," Fred Chappell remarks on continuities between what he calls the Southern modernist poets—represented by John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Randall Jarrell—and what he calls the postmodernist poets, represented by a slew of Chappell's contemporaries. These continuities are many: they include a respect for (if not necessarily practice of) traditional poetic form, a sound foundation in philosophy and/or religious faith, an embrace of European culture, an interest in Southern history, a peculiar vision of nature, a juxtaposition of regional and Standard English, and a tendency to make use of ancient myth. Having established these characteristics in the work of Southern modernists, he unleashes a long list of Southern postmodernists who share them (484-86).

One continuity Chappell mentions only in passing is an idea of poetry as "a communal as well as a private act" (486); he leaves this characteristic unexplained, implicitly attributing it to his modernist quartet but singling out no postmodernist Southern poet whose work exemplifies that attitude. If we try to speculate about his meaning, two ways of interpreting the remark immediately present themselves. First, we could point to the interest of recent Southern poets in perpetuating that most communal of forms, the ballad, and to broaden the observation we could repeat the commonplace that many Southern poets share a distinctive interest in narrative; Kate Daniels has associated Southern poets' storytelling with their assumption, unusual among other poets of the last hundred years or so, that they have an audience (70). Second, we could point to Southern poets' address of social and political issues, though most keep their distance from specific political squabbles. Certainly Chappell's own poetry is communal in both these senses: it often deploys narrative, and it often engages with social and political issues. However, there is a third sense in which we can see recent Southern poets meeting this description, and here too we can look to Chappell as an example.

A familiar scenario in English-language poetry since the Romantics is a confrontation between, on the one hand, an individual poetic protagonist who serves as the poem's speaker and is often indistinguishable from the poet him- or herself, and, on the other, circumstances that emphasize his or her smallness and his or her mortality. One of the most famous poems to adopt this scenario is Keats's "When I Have Fears." There the poet gazes into a starry sky and ponders the fact that he may have too little time left to fulfill his

hopes as a poet or as a lover. He stands "on the shore / Of the wide world [...] alone"—one man made small by the infinite night sky—left "to think / Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink" (12-14). Another example is in the fourth canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: Byron's persona Childe Harold stands before the ocean and notes that humankind's grandest efforts have often met with ruin on the seas, where ships sink "into thy depths with bubbling groan— / Without a grave—unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown" (179.8-9); similarly, in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," Whitman recalls standing at the beach as a boy and hearing in the sound of the ocean only the repeated word "death" (165-73). Twentieth-century poems that follow in this tradition include Frost's "Acquainted with the Night," in which the speaker's night-walks beyond "the furthest city light" drown him in a darkness both figurative and literal (3); Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter," in which a great storm leads the poet to consider a future when his daughter will be beyond his protection (1-16); and T. S. Eliot's World War II poem "Little Gidding," in which the poet encounters a reproachful ghost while walking alone in the dark through London's bomb-threatened streets (78-149). In these poems the poet (or a persona indistinguishable from the poet) juxtaposes himself against the infinite so that his finitude is underscored. Such poems offer an individual's experience of the sublime—that feeling aroused by what is, in Edmund Burke's terms, "vast" (124) and either "terrible" or "operat[ing] in a manner analogous to terror" (39).

Some poems by recent Southern poets perform an interesting variation on this archetypal scenario. Rather than evoke an experience of the sublime by dramatizing a confrontation between the individual poet and the infinite, these poems evoke a collective or communal confrontation with Burke's "vast" and "terrible" forces. Whereas the individual alone in such circumstances usually feels daunted, the group proves able to assert itself (and thus human life generally) against them. A fine example of this variation is a poem by Chappell titled "Hallowind," a section of his sequence *Midquest*.

"Hallowind," as its title suggests, is set during a windy Halloween night; it is 1961 in Durham, North Carolina, and Fred, his wife Susan, and Reynolds Price are visiting in the Chappells' home. The poem has a heightened immediacy: dramatic in form, its characters' speaking parts are designated as in a play.[1] Fred opens the poem by remarking on the fierce gale outside: "Listen to it skirl the roof / And tear the ragged eaves as if / The world outside weren't room enough!" (1-3). To skirl is to play the bagpipes; the poem thus begins with music, but music with a destructive aspect that threatens to overpower the house. Fred's alarmed call to attention elicits a one-word response from Reynolds: "Voices" (l. 4). When Fred asks, "What do they say?" Reynolds translates: "In, in" (l. 4). He explains,

The ghosts of stories not yet written
Lisp and whimper like dead men.
It's up to us to chronicle
Their thoughts, that death not treat them all
The way that life did, flat forgetful. (5-9)

This progress from wind to unwritten stories to dead men, glossing as it does a metaphor with a simile, a figure of a figure, almost obscures the meaning of the passage: that the wind is the source of stories—is, as it was for Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Shelley, the writer's inspiration. We have to qualify the similarity: Shelley's West Wind, though capable of destruction, does not imperil him, whereas here the three people do experience a threat large enough to make them grateful for shelter. Even so, they hardly cower: no sooner has the threat been perceived than it is countered by a human claim to mastery over it, Reynolds' insistence that a writer must "chronicle" the potential stories blown about.

When Reynolds goes on to declare that the number of stories is infinite, Fred asks, "Why couldn't a single story tell it / All?" (14-15). Reynolds answers,

Ah, that's the helpless poet
In you, the need to generalize
From yours to all men's destinies.
For fiction, those are pompous lies
Which try to stretch the single stories
Into laws akin to physical laws. (15-20)

The rest of "Hallowind" is cast in rhymed and slant-rhymed triplets, so the five-line run of rhyme here hints that something pivotal is going on. It is: with this exchange the wind is forgotten by the two writers, who become wholly caught up in an argument about the respective aesthetic concerns of poetry and prose fiction. Fred, as the poet, argues on behalf of symbols and archetypes, which he and Reynolds both associate with poetry; Reynolds, as the novelist, argues instead that the particulars of character and plot are too valuable in themselves to be subordinated to such structures. The two men lay out their cases in pithy fashion, and the poem formally suggests that each is genuinely listening to the other: the rhyming triplets are sometimes split between speakers, thereby underscoring a sense of exchange. That said, neither man convinces the other.

The dispute heats up when Reynolds insults Yeats (calling him "crazy" for "fall[ing] in love with rocks and he-goats" [67-68]), and, just as Fred rises to the bait, Susan enters with tea and cakes and chides both men for approaching incivility. She also directs their attention back to the weather, which has become even more unpleasant than before:

Boys, boys,

I'm surprised you make such dreadful noise.
—Reynolds, your Oxonian poise!
Old Fred never had a grain
Of couth, but you're a *gentleman* . . .
Don't you-all hear how the wind's brought rain? (70-75)

This only inspires the two writers to continue their debate: the poem gives them each a final, three-line remark. Fred, mindful of the weather's destructive potential, says, "The most symbolic line there is, / And fullest of hard realities, / Is Shakespearean: 'Exeunt omnes'" (77-79). Reynolds counters, "Your poet's a foe to love and laughter. / Here's the line one gives one's life for: / 'They all lived happily ever after'" (80-82). Susan, exasperated, gets the last word, or at least the last human word: "I wish I weren't a writer's wife. / I'd live as harmless as a leaf / And cuddle up in a dear warm life" (83-85). Chappell often affects a modest pose toward his work and his writerly interests; Susan's closing speech here is a characteristic poke at himself, and it is easy to sympathize with her. Yet the two writers' argument has kept the violent wind and the rain at bay—insofar as it has kept that weather beyond the perimeter of consciousness.

"Hallowind" concludes with a single exchange between the elements themselves. The rain wittily suggests to the wind, "What say we work us up some brio / And drown this silly wayward trio? / *My* favorite line is 'Ex Nihilo'" (86-88). The wind gets the poem's last word. One voice, not the many Reynolds claimed to hear, it begins by stalling the rain's destructive intent: "Leave them in peace, if peace there is / For their clamorous little species" (89-90). It continues,

This night at least they have their say
Together; and the force of Time
Upon their arts, upon slant rhyme
And paragraph, delays for them.
It's soon enough that we dissolve
Their names to dust . . . (94-99)

Although these people are ultimately at the mercy of the natural world they inhabit, Chappell depicts their social gathering as—to modify a phrase from Frost—a momentary stay against oblivion. The wind concludes,

We'll let them sit and sip their tea
Till midnight, then I'll shake the tree
Outside their window, and drive the sea
Upon the land, the mountain toward the Pole,
The desert upon the glacier. And all
They ever knew or hoped will fall
To ash. . . . Till then, though, let them speak
And lighten the long dim heartache,

And trifle, for sweet trifling's sake. (104-12)

Henry Taylor calls the wind's speech a defense of the humanities, and it is not hard to see his point (79). "Hallowind" begins and ends by invoking a violent wind, and by so bracketing his poem's human commentary, Chappell admits the inevitable victory of death over life; Peter Makuck cites the conclusion as evidence that "Chappell's imagination is haunted by emptiness and nothingness" (181). As Makuck goes on to assert, though, "oblivion [only] seems triumphant" (185): the main point of "Hallowind" seems to lie less in its admission of death's power than in its dramatization of the power of human community to make sense out of chaos, to find meaning however inhospitable the circumstances. Even the wind itself is made to recognize a degree to which human community can counter the forces that would overwhelm it—its ability to "lighten the long dim heartache." The poem becomes "a communal as well as a private act," in the sense that it testifies to a communal experience of the sublime, and one that is altogether happier than the archetypal individual experience: not only does the group resist feeling dwarfed and threatened, but in mastering the threat they reinforce their bonds to one another.

Looking at the poem from this perspective illuminates one way Chappell pursues his goal, stated in the preface to *Midquest*, of reacting against the mainstream of contemporary poetry: he says we live in a time of "brilliant autobiographical lyric" but indicates that this mode has been pursued to the exclusion of other possibilities (x). In "Hallowind" we see him expanding that too-narrow focus on the individual by representing communal experience. This perspective should also be valuable for those interested in Southern poetry more broadly, because "Hallowind" is hardly the only recent Southern poem to adopt this kind of scenario. Robert Penn Warren's late poem "Three Darknesses," Miller Williams's "Love and How It Becomes Important in Our Day-to-Day Lives," Dave Smith's "New Orleans Engagement," Kathryn Stripling Byer's "Angels," and James Seay's "Where Our Voices Broke Off" all depict groups of people whose social interactions help them defy settings and forces that awe and threaten to engulf them. The autobiographical lyric, brilliant or not, continues to dominate contemporary poetry, but there are poems by Southern poets that divert the old, isolating sublime confrontation into something that celebrates the ties between us.

Note

[1] Each part is designated with the speaker's first name; in following the text, I refer to "Fred" rather than "Chappell" and "Reynolds" rather than "Price."

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POETRY

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Deliveries

Eileen Ford, you have mail.
Twice a month or so it comes
to a house you never lived in, visited only once—
and twelve years ago at that.
Through the vagaries of the postal service,
you're asked to join AARP
sponsor a Hopi orphan
win a free adjustable bed.

You've been dead two years,
so by now these deliveries seem
a tired joke,
a kind of postal dementia,
matching your loss of language,
your frustrated incoherence,
with a meaningless stream
of pointedly automatic words.
Routinely, casually, we toss your letters
away.

But, oddly, sometimes you too show up,
haunting our house.
When your mail is delivered
we come upon you,
stopped dead in the dining room,
caught in the sudden disorientation
that marked for us (though only in hindsight)
the beginnings of Alzheimer's.
We trace from that point the progress of the disease:
your wild gaze of fear replaced
by seemingly permanent wonder,
then vacancy.

You don't stay long, but the memories linger.
We open up our guilt, our fears of future dislocations.
We push away our moments of lexical loss

and errant substitutions.
We wait for the mail to come,
wait for the message to come,
wait to be delivered.

Fashioning

Head Angel in the second grade Nativity play,
I wore my mother's best housecoat,
her short puffed sleeves extending below my elbows,
a layer of filmy sky over silken blue
flowing round me to the floor,
held by a button of fluted plastic,
a rhinestone at its center.
Around my head she crimped a tinfoil halo,
a double circle precariously rising.
I floated carefully into my lines: *Behold!*

Later, for our first Scout project, a fashion show,
girls pored over the handbook,
studied the *Dress of Many Lands*,
marched home to tell mothers what
we required. Verna chose Ceylon.
Her mother fashioned a gown of cool white crepe,
its fluid folds hinting at heat, at other climes.
Mine, unschooled, she claimed, in domestic science,
turned to what she knew: bulletin boards.
You can be a Walking Art Gallery, she said.

From Sharon Stationery she purchased
a roll of paper meant for packages,
measured my nine-year-old form,
cut, from the stiff brown paper, garments
to wrap me in. Together we
searched through *Time* and *Life*,
chose colorful pictures for my plain surfaces.
Lowering the brown casing around me,
she threaded
red ribbon left from Christmas
through the waist,
curled it awkwardly with scissors,
and gently pulled.

Among petticoats pushing bright skirts
upward into peasant garb, kilts topped
by jaunty vests, a grass skirt
from an aunt's trip to Hawaii, I stood,

a true exotic,
then walked, arms extended, unable
to sit or bend or hide, displaying
my mother's confidence
and love.

For years it hung at the end of my closet,
maintaining its shape among jumpers and skirts,
collecting dust, but formidable, durable,
the red curl of ribbon descending.

Steven P. Deaton
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A Lesson in Finishing Sheetrock

My father joins the beveled edges on the stud
and holds. I balance a coarse-thread screw
on the tip of the drill and gently move to the pencil
mark. On his command, his "There she is,"
I will spiral it through paper and gypsum,
deep to the good wood—secure and flush.

"There she is," and I pull the trigger
and the metal sinks and I'm satisfied
with the sound of the drill ratchet.
Then Father says, "Shit, I let her slip."
We rise from our knees and survey the gap.
"What you say? An eighth?"
"Hell, more like a quarter." After a silence,
Father utters the day's mantra—
"It'll cover with mud."

Next week we will press the mud
into the cracks and let it dry—two days.
Then we will sand it down and tape
over. Mud again and smooth it down
with the corner tool and the taping knife.
Two more days—we sand again and sand
again and roll it with a thin coat.

My father and I have let her slip
a thousand times, left gaps a canyon
wide. Sometimes you wonder
if there's enough mud in the world
to cover our sins. Forgiveness
is messy business.

Uncle Carter Meditates on the Death of Moses

Not many years into the wandering time
the Hebrews knew God would keep
Moses from Canaan. Moses' petty crime
was using a stick. God said to speak!

But Moses tore into a water-rock, and they
knew it was mostly their own damn fault—
for bitching about manna day after day
until God sent a quail storm for spite.

And those quails were tasty for a while,
but gluttons as they were, many soon
died like Red Sea Egyptians, and they cried
to Moses about the quail shit and the menu.

Griping in a desert will rub a prophet
powerful sore, coming from a tribe
charmed by grace—bull-worshiping harlots
wanted more water—and Moses was tired.

Poor Moses was surely piss crazy beyond
reason when he took a stick to that rock—
Don't seem fair, but he should have known
better than anyone that oftentimes God

gets real particular on the details.
So they all knew that God would curse
him, and they did feel guilt. But one day
Moses took sick and got worse and worse.

And deep down they were tired of snakes,
and the sand in their asses, and often in secret
they wished him dead, but dared not pray—
weary of plagues, they knew God best not hear it.

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Solitaire

Because I know what to do with the old Bicycle deck—
its sheen lost to years of licked thumbs—
I prefer cards to the computer's false *avoirdupois*,
even though mostly, these middle-aged days,
I know how it'll come out with almost the first card played
but continue dealing with a loser's detachment,
watching as the odds stack up against me,
if only for the sake of the game.
I've come to appreciate the Machiavellian subtleties
of chance; the integers' mysteries of allegiance and
destiny; even the drained-dry realization
that options are getting scarce as June bugs
in September. So I can afford to feel
as friendly to the black ten that should be red
as to the two and nine that fall into place like happy recruits
falling into ranks through the expected early flurry of hits
followed by less frequent and so more desirable matches.
By the second run, I sense a rhythm, the rush
of laying things down without thinking too much, of finding
the inevitable: no tricks to play or be played on
and so none of more social games' messy relations.
Dealing through by ones requires diligence,
but I like the way my attention drifts to the trivial—
returning unruffled to the eight I missed—
and the possibilities lost with a simple oversight:
so what if I have a sneaking suspicion
that greater care would be rewarded.
So what if the red queen won't turn up again.
We never really got along.

40-Watt

In the house alone in the fields,
at the kitchen table, we used to eat by kerosene;
now, since they run lec juice in here, we eat by pull chain,
the evening air yellow from hard work on the eyes,
dingy bulb like this little light of mine I'm gonna hide
under a bushel of Hickory King on it there;
the banty-chicken drumstick fried poor in spirit,
all us sullen eaters slumped over pickles and grease,
fork-stabbing juice and sop across the flowered oilcloth
at another chance at salvation tomato on it there,
Lily Dixie biscuit, Fordhook, cornpone, home brew, Barlow knife,
poke salad, leather-bound Bible, plenty of peas and lard,
one broke down mule, dinner on the grounds,
and nookie till there's enough fieldhands.
Gimme that ole time hambone on it there,
Lord, gimme plug or twist, a gallon of white corn liquor
once every two weeks, and five grateful, shut-mouthed chaps
who don't get hateful after I whip 'em
and don't grow up mad at *me*, at least,
and who take it like I took it
from Momma and Daddy who did the best they
knew not knowing anything
but days and years reading a mule's-ass gospel on it there
or hoeing cotton at daylight with a sore back
or, later, bouncing John Deere in circles
up and down aisles of dirt in the temple of this world.
Praise be you couldn't prize me with a crowbar from
living off working in and lying under this dirt
for the work here on earth. Praise be
hog slop, well pump, fried pie,
laws of child-whelping on it there, God-given
wisdom that's enough without no dang education.
O bless this house and all, that I might live long enough
to stay home from church and sneak to the bottle
in the barn. O diesel. O fish bait. O chicken shit.
O good woman who cooks and don't say nothing.
O black backy spit hiding my Dickel breath
and running down my grizzle
while the ball game plays on the new RCA.

Robert Collins
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Apparitions

I'd seen all the movies and perused
the picture books about the multitudes
at Fatima kneeling in the rain, the crowds
of *campesinos* besieging Guadalupe, hoping
to glimpse a vision of the Virgin and be saved.
In *Song of Bernadette*, I watched the sun spin
like a pinwheel as it backed across the sky,
and dabbed my pockmarked face each night
with water from the sacred font at Lourdes,
trying to cure a terminal case of acne. In an
alcove off the altar, I knelt for what seemed
hours before the Blessed Mother's statue,
longing to see her bleed or weep profusely
or, better yet, to see her smile or hear her speak
as she had to foreign children in those films,
entrusting them with secrets so shocking
they would share her whispered admonitions
only in private audience with the Pope,
undoubtedly revealing, as Sister once insisted,
the very hour in the not-too-distant future
when this vale of tears would immolate itself.

The more I fixed my gaze on Mary's face,
the more distant and indifferent her visage
seemed as coolly unapproachable as the girls,
who, toward the end of sixth grade, started
shimmering on their side of the classroom
as they began to blossom, sharing the secret
of that mystery only with each other in the girl's
room after school. Watching from a distance,
I wondered how to get one of them to love me,
what act of piety I might perform, what offering
place at her feet, how many ejaculations I might
make so I'd be singled out as one of the elect
whom heaven had chosen to speak through
and convey its message of woe to the masses.
I wondered how many more lonely hours

I'd have to kneel in prayer or prostrate myself
to further mortify the flesh, too uncertain
in my agony of what my naked eye beheld,
before she'd gaze on me and smile and tell me
everything a suffering schoolboy needs to know
to keep the world from bursting into flames.

The Day Hell Freezes Over

On the day they finally disembark, the temperature's already dropping, much to their dismay, since they haven't come prepared for such a drastic change in weather. At first, on the ferry across, despite the sudden gale scalding their cheeks, there seemed to be no reason for alarm. In fact, many seem to find the falling temperatures refreshing; but, by the time they reach the outskirts of the city, their final destination, heavy snow is falling and starting to stick on major bridges spanning the abyss. Arriving in the capital, labeled Pandemonium on maps until a recent *coup d'etat* called eternal torment into question, they find a newly elected council of elders, following ambiguous orders from below, has declared a state of emergency and invoked martial law. All nonessential personnel are ordered immediately to cover. For the only time in memory, business as usual is suspended, and all illicit commerce ceases. Owned and operated by Charon Shipping, Inc., enormous barges of lost souls, riding low in the water, the very essence of corruption and fuel for Satan's quickly waning fires, are crushed in the ice-choked harbor, spoiled cargo never to be unloaded or delivered. Without any warning, all earth-bound demons are grounded from their ordinary routes, their battered wings icing up and snapping from the burden. By dawn, the major boulevards are slippery and impassable, and gale-force winds blast abandoned alleys unabated, keening loud as the vast Satanic choir, which decides to cancel practice till further notice. Unaware of the disaster going on around them, the unshriven children of hell, Belial's spawn dismissed from school, skate backwards on treacherous stretches of ice, which just the day before were cauldrons of fire, and erect demonic snowmen, using thick icicles for penis and horns. Days turn into weeks and weeks to months with no relief in sight, yet hell has never seemed more beautiful to the damned, the roar of its enormous furnace silenced, everything muffled and glazed with frost, the cold no worse than the fire they've always known or the absence of God.

Patricia Waters
Athens, TN

Persephone

Give me your hand as though
you were a child entering,
passing through strange rooms
lived in by relatives you don't know.
They know you
from the day you were born,
and your parents before.
You will remember these rooms,
familiar as the smell of clean cotton
dried on a clothesline,
mystery of the medicine cabinet,
camphophenique bottle
green as a beetle, dusty roses talcum powder.
By the basin lavender soap
makes soft and sweet the sad old flesh.
In this house the hours are
neatly laid out on the dressing table,
nothing touching, rows precise,
brushes, combs, silver-backed mirror,
fruitwood glove box like a reliquary
among bottles of perfume, alluring as liqueurs
too fine to open, scent enough for this past
already present, already lost,
although you have touched as many things as possible,
and broken nothing,
before you've even asked for anything to eat.

The Fifth in This Time, This Place, This World

We were in the country,
do you know what that was,
in those days?
White clapboard, no air-conditioning or television,
a well in back, stone cover, bucket on the ledge,
henyard, outdoor toilet, raw wood and tarpaper,
earthen smell, always damp,
bucket of scraps by the backdoor for chickens and hogs,
two front doors along a porch, swings, rockers, slat-back chairs,
front yard trees, big oaks, a showy maple dense with green,
on three sides fields high with corn.

Was it a funeral? Sunday time, long, long hours
adult talk, no one my age, only little kids.
I go lie down in the Ford's front seat,
turn on the radio, perfectly clear all the way from New York City,
a big name, heavy with Russia,
Shostakovitch.
The announcer says The Fifth,
that's all and it begins, I recognize it, not the music
but the feeling.
Daddy and I watch Walter Cronkite, the Twentieth Century
every Sunday,
on my lap the Life Magazine Book of World War II,
Uncle Jimmy and Gang-Gang saved pennies for,
while Daddy was in the South Pacific,
siege of Leningrad, battle of Stalingrad,
thick, thick layers of coats, bodies, the cold
and Daddy telling me it was the Russian winter
that beat Napoleon, then beat Hitler.
But for me it is this music,
how it makes me cry,
as I lie on the front seat of the Ford,
looking up at green trees, and me not 10,
this twentieth century just half over
and maybe it isn't the worst yet,
these big trees knocked down by tanks,
this little house in the country outside Rickman, Tennessee,
burning, cattle shot, these bodies, all my family,
no one to bury them, the convoy moves on,
faces turned east, certain, to the inconceivable.

Theodore Haddin
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Now It Comes Over Me

Now it comes over me
here at the kitchen sink
turning over a few dishes
the plates of an evening meal
I remember those things
I did wrong I don't know why
but seen from here they
flame up again and say
to me shame and where
were you then
You don't have to be alone
in your life to know
the moment comes
when you think you are
the only one left
in the world
something has summed up
when you weren't looking
and today at the sink
you look for the first time

Something Letting Me Hum

Something letting me hum here
scrubbing the floor dirt off
the wall pine-sol deep in my lungs
I'm getting in the christmas spirit
at last slosh in the garbage pail
pick out the crumbs old leaves grease
from a week ago all those throat lozenges
in their tiny yellow wrappers
that didn't do any good
and now stale bread and egg shells
haul to the landfill let birds
in their new year pick like me

Yvonne Tomek
Delta State University

Anne

My Mother-in-Law

She had her radio set to the station of the Crooners,
To the music that the bobby soxers swooned to. All day long it
Played—the velvet voices of Tony Bennett, Dean Martin,
Vic Damone, Frank Sinatra. It helped that they were of Italian
Immigrants, born in Jersey, and famous in New York and that
It could be said Sinatra often returned to Hoboken, there where he was
Born, there where she had been young once and had given birth
Herself to her last born.

By the kitchen window she washed the dishes, dishpan hands
Deep in suds, pulling out one by one, utensils, glasses, and cups. She
Did not hate the task, as it blended in with her memories of honeymooning
On the Boardwalk to the song

"I'll Be Seeing You in All the Old Familiar Places."

No Saturday afternoon was lonely when Dean Martin was pining, "Return to me." And "everybody loves somebody sometime" or Tony Bennett was confiding,

"I want to be around to pick up the pieces when somebody breaks your heart."

We have a photograph of her on a street, talking to Frankie Lane.
Her black hair, her shawl, she is moving toward him and he toward her,
Locked in the frame as on the Grecian Urn—

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on."

But it was Sinatra who really had the goods. That syncopated voice rehearsed to hit the note with a half beat delay. His gift to sound poetic, intimate, and in love even while singing his bad-boy Mafia song,

"That's Why the Lady is a Tramp."

Sometimes I go into shops and places that play Retro music and I think of her and her waltzes with Romance. In the kitchen I always think of her. We are washing dishes together again after a big evening family dinner. We are talking small-talk, hardly listening, and Sinatra comes in a step behind us, on low volume, at her other ear, and it all starts up again with,

"Lovely,
Keep that breathless charm, because you're lovely
just the way you look
Tonight."

Robert Bunce
Northwest Mississippi Community College

Golden Mice

During the time when Eli
Was the prophet of God
When Samuel was learning
His trade
Right after he and God
Had their first talk
The Philistines killed in combat
Thirty-four thousand Hebrew warriors
And captured the Ark of the Covenant

It proved to be
An inconvenient victory
Everywhere they took the box
Their people mysteriously
Died
Dagon himself could not
Be in the same room with it
In desperation they
Asked their wizards what to do

They consulted the omens
Felt the universal pulse
The Hebrew God they said
Wanted golden mice
One golden mouse for
Each Philistine city
Walled or unwalled
And send the God
Back to his people

The Philistines no doubt
Heaved a sigh of relief
As the cow
Against the advice of her
Bleating calf
Pulled the cart
Laden with Ark and Mice
Toward the horizon

Kendall Dunkelberg
Mississippi University for Women

Funeral Train

All I remember is a black train that steamed
cross country all afternoon on the black and white
TV set I had pulled around to face the wall,
while my brother practiced piano in our living room.
And later, a two-wheeled cart that carried
the flag-draped coffin behind two black horses
and a full honor guard. I was too young to know
if this was Robert Kennedy or Martin Luther King.
Maybe I've combined both funerals in my mind.
What I thought at the time was that Abraham
Lincoln had been shot. What I knew even then
was that a terrible grief had been born.

Peter R. Malik
Alcorn State University

Midnight in Manhattan

My life depends on certain girders in the ground,
Iron at angles that trestle the earth,
I walk the dark city and hear the sounds
Of trains screaming through the underworld.

The engines of hell do not sleep,
They ply their tunnels all the night.
The dead souls in them find a peace
Born of absolute certainty.

Why not join them, join them now?
Descend those footworn steps to hell?
Then I need not cope with consciousness
Forever safe with the devil.

Amish Man Sinning

On a gray Wisconsin June afternoon,
An Amish man in black and white
Walked quickly down the concrete street
With a yellow bag of potato chips.

Glowing like a sun, iridescent, begging to be opened,
His one hand held it tightly.
The other stroked his Lincoln beard
Contemplating the sin of it.

Did he tear it open, smell the salt, oil, potato
All in one glorious hale?
Feel the crunch, the bits between teeth,
The grease on fingertips and home cloth?

Or did he toss it into the next trash can
Proudly defeating the Evil One?

Marth Minford Meas
Rockport Center for the Arts

Wind on Water

Wind on water: waves sue, ensue, pursue,
stroke, splatter, shudder, push, push, push
themselves to shore; give, shelve, whisper,

take, address, redress. Subsets cushion
others, sweep, muster embedded affinity
with sea. Season's laps present brushed
prints on restless minds, ceaselessly increases

calm. Finding aqueous detours, flushes
brain itching, allows stonewashed praise.
"Wind, leaves and love," a mantra, preserved

mantle, presumes streams, ripples and bays,
a headwaters somewhere, and bias for search.
Supported by shimmering echoes of rushing
water, wind on leaves weaves luminosity.

Joe Amoako
Delaware State University

Home-Sweet-Home Home-Sour-Home

These are agonizing days
These are days of mixture of thoughts
These are thoughts of optimism and pessimism
We are required to go home
Yes home-sweet-home
But unprepared going home
Makes home home-sour-home

Days have become sorrowful days
Nights have become sleepless nights
Because of future uncertainties
Are we going to get stuck
Where home-sweet-home
Will become home-sour-home

Written December 30, 1999, 8:15 a.m., in anticipation of going to Ghana because of immigration issues.

Take Me Home and Bring Me Back

Ancestors
Let luck smile on me
Angels
Let happiness beam on me
Immortals
Move goodness towards me
move me home
And bring me back safely

Written January 9, 2000, 10:15 a.m., in anticipation of going to Ghana because of immigration issues.

FICTION

The Hunt

Robert Galloway and Jo LeCoeur
University of the Incarnate Word

Not yet dawn. We are moving slowly. Single-file through hard rain and heavy vegetation. Our footsteps cushioned by mud and spongy jungle mat. We follow a faint footpath winding up into the highlands. There are three of us—me in the middle in more ways than one.

The day after the Huey dropped us, the weather turned ugly. Driving rain. Frequent, prolonged lightning that washes out all color. Two days now no let up, though bad weather is our ally. It covers our movements and erases the signs of our passing. Our friend is also a thief. A hunter develops a curious nose, sharpened senses. The storm dulls these edges. Steals our alertness to birds taking off, frogs shutting up, the smell of humans, their bodily wastes and their fish-diet sweat. The storm drowns out the whisper of leaves at the elbow, the brush against ankle or thigh. It erodes the sense of danger that drags at our feet. This weather makes us sloppy. Not just slogging through mud sloppy, but the sloppy thinking that comes of feeling insulated. The illusion of moving through the trees unheard in the rain. Unseen.

We carry CAR-15s. Our hands and faces camouflaged with mud and grease paint. Some of our equipment taped to our bodies to minimize sound. We move slowly. Only in the hours around dusk and dawn. Covering very little ground. We stay in the practical. Focused on fact. Did I say we carry CAR-15s? Personal preference. M-16s not that much heavier, but I like what I've got. Top and I also carry M-14 bayonets he scrounged off a supply sergeant in CuChi. These are the old bayonets the Marines brought into the country when they first deployed to DaNang. The blades strong. Resilient. We keep them honed sharp as razors. I also carry a bolt-action heavy barrel sniper rifle. Top also carries a Winchester 12-gauge shotgun. Our scout carries the radio. He is ex-Cong, though ARVN now, our ally. Top does not trust him. My dad used to say you can always trust a man to serve his own best interests. For now, I trust our scout's best interest is us.

We are a three-man team—spotter, shooter, scout—here to reconnoiter a spur off Uncle Ho's trail leading up into these mountains where the American people are told we do not go. Officially, Cambodia is off limits—Washington cultivating the illusion of Cambodian neutrality, the brass cultivating Washington. So they can sneak over and attack us, then scoot back across the border. And we can't chase them down. It's like calling King's X in a kid's game. Only the bullets are real.

Top's got the instincts of a seasoned hunting dog. He leads us up a

serpentine footpath that runs parallel to a larger trail. Did I say Top has taken our scout's turn walking point? Top does not trust him. I am in the middle, staying close enough to keep Top in sight through the tangle of vegetation, staying far enough back so anything gets him won't get me too. I've got an unusual number of either rods or cones in my eyes. I've been told which, but the information refuses to stick. I can see well enough in the dark to hang back a good ten or twelve feet from Top even in this rain, these trees, this dark. Middle position feels safer, though that's illusion too. Top says sappers let the point man pass and pick off number two.

I have forgotten sappers. I am thinking about home, the kids and Mary, when a lightning flash shows the silhouette of a man under a tree. Training takes over. We go to ground slowly, no quick moves, no sound. The man is NVA (North Vietnamese Army) or VC (Viet-Cong). Has to be. Who else would be out before dawn in this storm? I don't know if he saw us. He must have heard something because he leaves his post and starts toward us down the trail.

I am lying flat on my belly. I can't see Top lying on the trail ahead, but I know where he went down. The man has stopped, his upper body twisted around. Looks like some sort of business reaching back over his shoulder. He is not unslinging his weapon; it is already cradled on one arm. A catch in his shoulder? A signal for back-up? Freeing himself from a wait-a-minute vine? Behind him I can see a hundred shades of black and gray and jungle dark.

He comes on now, down the trail, passing it must be within inches of where Top has melded with the ground. The man seems to sense no presence at his feet. I am trying to breathe through the pores of my skin.

The man's sandals are no more than four feet in front of my face when he stumbles. And then I see he has not stumbled. Top has risen up behind him and clamped his forearm across the man's throat. A call would be futile in this downpour, but right now Top is not operating on logic. He is pure training with the man pulled up against him, the man's feet off the ground.

My eyes stay on them as I stand up slowly. I know what is going on behind the man's back. Top has spent the last few months training me, so I know he is driving his bayonet into the man's lower back. The butt of the blade next to the hilt and the man's own flesh serve as a fulcrum. The blade acts as a lever. Its rotation up and down ensures maximum damage and shock.

The pair of them jump out at me in intense illumination. And time just stops. A red scar slants crooked through the sentry's eyebrow. He is just a boy. Fifteen. Sixteen at most. Young enough to have been forced into guard duty by his older peers. Or conscripted maybe from his village. Where

the Huey dropped us was not too far from where a M'Nong village was two months ago according to the sit-reps (situation reports) sent in back then by another team who was not over here either, just like we are not here. I say where the village *was* because sometimes the M'Nong move on after harvest. Sometimes they get overrun. Or driven out by the Cong, their *maangs* of rice stolen, their sons and daughters turned into involuntary soldiers, or sentries, or forced into labor gangs.

This boy has on a U.S. Army camouflage poncho. He is holding an old bolt-action rifle in one hand, as if he has forgotten to drop it. The M'Nong are mountain people. Tough. Scrappy. They build small thatch-roofed huts on pyramid-shaped hills for the crest's natural protection. They fence their villages with wire and bamboo spikes. They dig deep trenches around the perimeter and hold off the Cong with American guns. For now, we are the M'Nong people's best interest too. Unless they get conscripted by the Cong.

Even after the lightning flash goes dark, I can still see Top's arm around the boy's throat, Top's eyes and teeth shining white, his camouflaged face side by side with the boy's pale face, the boy's eyes large and dark with surprise, his mouth open, as if he has just said, "Oh."

Somewhere far away right now a small boy wants to pull the quilt over his head until morning. But if he cries, he knows he cannot take his place with the men. Shoulder to shoulder. With the men. Top will hold the boy I know, just as he has trained me to do, until he feels the warmth of the boy's urine on his thigh and can smell the faint odor of excrement even in this rain. Top is already lowering the boy to the ground before I get a whiff of the boy giving up, emptying himself, casting off the wastes of this world.

We drag the dead man from the trail and off into the deeper brush. We push him down through the jungle mat into the soft mud, scooping up more mud and rotting foliage to cover him as if he were a sleeping child that might get cold. The longer before he's found, the further away we'll be before they know we're in the area. If this storm has monsoon staying power, it and the jungle smells will cover the odor. Well, for a little while. Maybe.

We move on slowly, very slowly through the rain, me walking point now, giving Top a chance to settle, a chance to get away from—or come back to—whatever he does in his mind. This is his third tour of duty. His talk stays on the practical. For months now I have known him, but he has never even said where he is from. I search for somewhere safe to put my mind, somewhere not too far away so it can still stay focused on the jungle, alert to what is up ahead. I will not think about the kid with the red scar through his eyebrow. Not until I am an old man sitting by the fire with Mary will I think about this morning. I will get me a big red Irish setter. Trained to fetch the paper. Trained to cock his head, and listen. Trained to lick my hand.

I am still an old man dozing by the fire when I catch the smell again of the boy giving up. He has gotten up from beneath the mud and is trailing me. All that youth and energy just won't lie still. He taps my back. I jerk around to kill him myself this time and see that it is Top. His "You crazy?" face registers. And brings me back to now.

I have led us to the edge of a clearing so large it must have been made by an arcolite strike. The sky has turned a lighter gray, though dawn is still a little way off. Top yanks me back at the same time that a burst from an AK explodes the air at the same time that I realize this area is being used as a latrine and that I am the one who has walked us into this shit.

Running back the way we came from, we are low-running shapes moving through heavy vegetation and hard rain. Top and I run alternating positions to provide covering fire. Running and firing. Targets invisible even to my eyes. If the rain stopped, could I see them? If the day dawned bright and pretty? We run, trusting our scout's best interest is to get us to where the sit-reps said the village was, the M'Nong our allies, armed with American guns.

We run and fire at the sound of shouting back and forth—directions maybe, trying to flank us?—falling back, closing in. The sound becoming smell—what the deer must smell when it is on the run. The same tree trunks over and over. What the deer must smell when it goes down, eyes wide open in the rain. I run and run, but the smell stays with me as if my feet had not touched down, as if I ran on thunder. The same jagged leaves, the same straggling vines.

The White Kitten

Dorothy Shawhan
Delta State University

The kitten trembled and opened his mouth in a silent meow as Jaymee handed him to her mother Lou. His fur could have been white, but now it was grey and bedraggled with dirt and burrs hanging in a tangled fringe. He had one blue eye and one green. The green one was pink around the edges and swollen. He tried to look up at Lou with his blue one.

"Old man Drew was fixing to drown him," Jaymee said. "I got there just in time."

"Lord, girl," Lou said, "the last thing I need is another mouth around here hollering for something." They were standing in the kitchen where Lou had been looking in the almost empty refrigerator wondering where supper for the four boys was coming from. The kitten nestled against Lou's breast and began to purr. "Well, he's still got a little motoring left in him." Lou stroked his dirty little coat gently.

"I just went up in the back yard and took him right out of his hands. Pissed him off too, the old dirt bag."

"How was he gonna drown this kitten in his back yard?"

"You don't believe nothing I say, do you? He had him a big old zinc tub, and he had done drowned three others, thrown their little bodies in a garbage bag, but I saved this one."

Jaymee smiled in a way Lou had not seen in a long time. She was a slender, pretty girl with smooth, brown skin and bright brown eyes. Her face was her father's. He had left Lou nothing but the five children when he went. He had taken her monthly paycheck to a casino in Tunica, lost it all, and preferred not to come home. The last they heard he was living in Tampa under another name, spreading his seed there too. Lou tried not to think about him, and the fact that her children had his genes, Jaymee clearly more than her share of the risk-taking ones.

Unlike her father, the deeper Jaymee's addictions clawed into her, the more sensitive she got about cruelty to animals. She had been an animal collector since childhood. She was forever dragging some homeless cat or dog in for Lou to feed. Once a ferret. They never lived. They were always too far gone with distemper or feline leukemia or just plain starvation. Lou thought that was why Jaymee had lost her mind. You can't try to save every abused animal you come across. It will run you crazy.

At least most of the time Lou thinks Jaymee is crazy, but sometimes she thinks it's the drugs talking and that down underneath the crack, her daughter's brain is as sound as anybody's. Crazy or not, she's smart.

Anyway her teachers used to say so before she dropped out in the ninth grade. She can write a pretty letter and can draw anything, mostly animals. Her room is papered with pictures she's drawn of everything from dogs and cats to lions and sharks, some with poems attached. She's shrewd too. Even Lou can still be fooled by the games she runs.

"Mama, can I have a little money? Ten dollars? Please? I need Tampax and a new deodorant. Then I won't ask again. I promise."

"Girl, every time I give you money you don't do nothing but hit the streets hunting drugs."

"I need you to trust me, Mama. I been home two months now. I changed. You got to trust me."

She'd look so earnest that Lou, wanting desperately to believe her, would hand over the money, but not before she preached and threatened. But sure enough, Jaymee would disappear for weeks at a time. Who knew where she was? Even in a small, quiet Mississippi Delta town like theirs, a person could find trouble if she wanted to. Likely she was in some crack house. She's a pretty girl. Men love her. No problem in turning tricks for drugs. Nothing any worse than a shrewd crazy person. They'll wear you out. And Lou was worn out with Jaymee.

"What you think I'm running here, a animal shelter?"

"He just need a little love. I'll take care of him. You won't have to do nothing." As she talked, she was making the kitten a bed from Lou's best dish towel folded in a broken bureau drawer she had brought in out of somebody's trash. She put the bed in front of the stove and reached for the kitten. "Give him to me." She took the little limp cat from her mother and placed him on his side in the drawer. He lay as still as if he were already dead.

That cat ain't long for this world, Lou thought, but she didn't say that. She didn't want Jaymee to get started up. Every time they had an animal disaster, Jaymee went on a spree. The first was when she was only fourteen, and Bounce, the black dog with the white trim that they had had since Jaymee was a baby was hit by a fast Mercedes that didn't even slow down. Bounce had come to the school house to walk Jaymee home like he always did. His body was thrown up into the school yard, his back broken and blood pouring from his mouth. He struggled up to Jaymee, who held his head and screamed and cried as he died.

Jaymee never went back to school again. And two weeks after Bounce died, she walked out into the middle of Highway 61 and lay down. A Wal-Mart truck barely missed her. The driver pulled over, stopped traffic, and called the police on his cell phone. Jaymee was still lying on the yellow line when the police got there, looking at the sky and singing to herself. The police had to pick her up screaming and kicking to get her in their squad car and bring her home. They called Lou to come from the catfish processing

plant factory where she cut the heads off catfish eight hours a day, overtime if she could get it.

"What did you do that for?" Lou asked her when the police told what had happened.

"I felt like laying down," she said, and that was the only explanation she ever gave.

"Keep that girl off the streets," the police said. "Next time she may not be so lucky." She didn't lie down in the road again, but the drugs and the men started. And the vegetarian thing, which was just as well because Lou could never afford enough meat to go around anyway.

Jaymee stroked the little white kitten gently and then covered him with the next best dish towel. She went to the bathroom medicine cabinet and came back with a medicine dropper from a prescription one of her little brothers had had. She washed it good and poured a cup of milk from the gallon jug in the refrigerator. Then she sat on the floor and began feeding the milk drop by painful drop into the kitten's mouth. Lou couldn't tell if he was swallowing or not.

How could a girl capable of such violence have such patience with an almost dead kitten? Lou believed Jaymee would be more touched if that kitten died than if Lou herself passed. She had more than one reason for thinking so. When Elmo died, one of the stray cats who had survived and lived with them five or six years, Jaymee tried to stab her mother with the butcher knife. She believed that Lou had poisoned him because the voices told her so. Besides, she had seen Lou make secret signals with her hands as she opened the can of Friskies. That time the social worker got in on it, and they sent Jaymee to the insane asylum down at Whitfield. They didn't know what to do with her down there either, though, and within three weeks she was back home with a bunch of pills, which of course she didn't take. You can't count on a crazy person to take pills that make them feel bad. Not when crack cocaine is so easy to get in the streets.

"Look, Mama. He's swallowing. See."

"What you doing with a ole dead cat up in the kitchen?" Jamal dribbled his basketball through the back door and stopped short at the cat's bed. Jamal was thirteen, in the throes of early adolescence.

"You shut up," Jaymee said. "He ain't dead. I've saved his life."

"Why?" Jamal said. "Look like a pitiful excuse for a cat to me."

"Cause you don't have any imagination," Jaymee said. "You can just quit bad mouthing my cat."

"I ain't studying your cat," Jamal said, and dribbled on into the living room where his younger brothers were watching "Police Chases."

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Sure enough, the little cat did seem to be showing some signs of life.

Jaymee moved him into her room, and for the next two days faithfully fed him every five hours—even getting up through the night. Despite Lou's convictions that this was a hopeless case, she began praying for that cat.

After Whitfield, the shoplifting started. Always something silly and unnecessary, like ceramic picture frames or computer disks when they didn't have a computer to their name. These petty thefts added to her past escapades brought Jaymee to the attention of the law. The law don't make a lot of distinctions in crazy, sane, and criminal. It hadn't in Jaymee's case anyway. Maybe that's because the law don't know any more about what's going on inside that girl than Lou does.

So when Jaymee undid the three-foot chain on the Burgess's pit bull because the temperature was 95 and he had no water and no shade and then poured gasoline around the Burgess house and set it afire, she went to jail for three years. She's not a criminal, Lou pleaded with the judge. She's crazy is all. But the judge didn't want to hear it. Three years and that's final. You have to be desperate to place your hopes in jail time, but Lou did. Maybe they will find out what's wrong with her, she thought. Maybe they will teach her a trade. Maybe they will get her off drugs. *Rehabilitation* was a word people sometimes used when they talked about jail. She liked that word. She thought it spoke of a fresh start. She imagined that Jaymee would come home changed, that she would get a job and help raise her little brothers.

When Jaymee came home she did seem different for a while. She had gotten her GED in prison, and her parole officer lined her up with an interview at Burger King. When the manager found out about her past, though, he refused to hire her, and after a couple more rejections, she quit looking. The men started coming around again, and the first thing Lou knew, she was back in her old life.

"Tough love," the substance abuse man kept telling her. "Put her out once and for all. She'll have to hit rock bottom before she comes back. You're enabling." So Lou would put her out for a while, pack all her clothes and put them on the street, but in a few months Jaymee would be back, claiming this time for real she was changed. And Lou would take her back. Tough love sounded reasonable for anybody but your own child.

The third day, the white kitten stood up and licked Jaymee's hand when she came to feed him. This was the happiest she had been since she got out of jail. She took Lou's sewing scissors and cut the burrs and tangles from his hair. She brushed him with her own hairbrush and made him a litter box. "He's gonna make it, Ma," she said to her mother as Lou cooked the beans and rice for supper. Lou looked at the pathetic little animal, his hip bones poking through the gaps in his hair, his eyes seeming bigger than all the rest of him. She hoped her daughter was right.

For the next few weeks Jaymee stayed close to home watching over

her kitten. She named him Casper because he was white as the little ghost in a book she had as a child. His eye healed, and his coat became so white and thick that he looked much bigger than he really was. He loved to pounce on anybody's foot who came around and played for hours with one of the little brother's rubber balls. One early morning Jaymee came into the kitchen while Lou was cooking breakfast for all of them before work. She stood in front of the window holding the kitten up to her cheek. The sunrise touched the kitten's fur with fire and made Jaymee's brown skin glow. Lou turned around from the stove and caught her breath. How lovely they were.

"Mama, I need $15," Jaymee said.

Lou's heart fell. "What for?"

"I want to get Casper a little collar and a catnip toy, and I need some make-up myself."

Lou looked at her daughter, still with the dew of youth even after all she'd been through. Why was it so much easier to believe in change for the worse instead of change for the better? Why couldn't she believe that this time Jaymee was telling the truth? But the harsh words she might once have said when Jaymee asked for money stopped in her throat and instead she reached for her old black purse which waited for work on a kitchen chair. She took out a ten dollar bill and then she counted out five ones. She smoothed the bills into a neat stack and put them into Jaymee's outstretched palm.

The kitten batted at the money with his paw, his fur a halo in the morning sun.

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