Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association 1999

PUBLICATIONS OF THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Annual dues include a subscription to *POMPA*. Subscription rate for libraries is $10.00. Manuscripts are not solicited. Correspondence should be addressed to *POMPA*, Division of Languages & Literature, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS 38733.

POMPA is indexed by the *MLA International Bibliography* and by the *Index of American Periodical Verse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press).

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Acknowledgments

The editors gratefully acknowledge the copy editing assistance of J.T. Lack, Georgia Rushing, and Cynthia Williams.

We also wish to thank the Delta State Division of Languages and Literature for its support of this publication.

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Dual Perspectives of Heroism in *The Dream of the Rood*

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Although many critics have mentioned the heroic elements in *The Dream of the Rood*, they have failed to integrate the dual perspectives of heroism: the traditional Germanic heroism on the one hand and "the new Christian heroism of the martyr" (Irving 107) on the other. This failure may be either because they have paid attention only to the Germanic heroic tradition or because they have "oversimplified the relation between the Germanic secular hero and the Anglo-Saxon 'epic' saint" (Greenfield and Calder 158). According to Robert E. Diamond, "England had been solidly Christian probably for quite a long time when the poem was composed" (4). From the evidence of the poet's presentation of two perspectives I assume that when the poet wrote *The Dream of the Rood*, the new concept of Christian heroism had already developed. By blending the two heroic elements, the poem maintains a good balance between the traditional heroic figure and the Christian martyr.

Carol Jean Wolf maintains that the poet presents "Christ as a hero and the Crucifixion as a heroic encounter" (206). For Wolf, the Crucifixion is "a glorious triumph rather than a sacrifice"; in order to depict Christ's victory over Satan and death, the poet utilizes the formulaic techniques of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry (210). Wolf points out that in order to emphasize the victorious traits of Christ, the poet minimizes His sacrificial traits by attributing His sufferings to the Cross.

Diamond explains the heroic diction in the poem in a social context: the contact between two societies, the religious society of the monasteries and the military society formed on the comitatus relationship, produced poetry which maintained the traditional narrative formulas but applied them to Christian subjects (7). For Diamond, heroic diction served as a traditional way of narrative from which no poet could escape in the Old English period. However, as Wolf points out, Diamond has largely ignored the poems not written in the heroic tradition. Bernard F. Huppe explains that heroic diction was rhetorically used to accommodate audiences brought up on heroic poetry to the unpalatable Christian doctrine of humility and penance. Huppe sees the heroic diction in the poem as a "metaphor for the fortitude of penitential humility" ("Concept" 7-8).

Some critics have opposed such emphasis on the heroic character of *The Dream of the Rood*. Although acknowledging the heroic diction in the poem, Michael Swanton asserts that "heroic elements in the poem are largely allusive and a matter of mere vocabulary" and that the purpose of the heroic

diction in the poem is "to illuminate aspects of the Redemption rather than to linger on the theme of victor prince" (60). For Swanton, the poet's emphasis is put not on the theme of victor prince but on the redemption which is accomplished only by a sacrifice. Derek Pearsall denies any Germanic heroic tradition in the poem: the willingness expressed in Christ's stripping to do battle on His cross is not a new idea at all "since it draws on the well-established iconography of 'Christus miles'" (47).

Just as this debate focuses on the issue of heroic diction, so the heroic quality of Christ in the poem also needs to be examined. To be a hero, one is not simply driven; one must act heroically. In *The Dream of the Rood*, far more than being described with labels such as "the young warrior," Christ prepares himself for the Crucifixion. Although His way of preparing is the very reversal of the typical Germanic battle-scene, in which armor is worn, Christ's stripping himself plays on the typical Germanic battle-scenes in which a warrior arms himself for a battle. According to Wolf, one of the Old English poetic conventions which the Rood-poet uses is the "approach to battle" type-scene (206). Christ in the poem hastens bravely to the cross, "the young warrior" stripping himself. The image of Christ as a hero is also reinforced by the description of his heroic and military temper: he is courageous, firm, unflinching, and brave—adjectives which exhibit the traditional heroic qualities of strength, resolution, and boldness (Wolf 206). In light of these details, it can scarcely be denied that the poet uses native Germanic heroic diction and provides Christ with heroic qualities esteemed in Germanic culture.

Although it shows conventional Anglo-Saxon treatment of Christian subject matter in heroic terms, the presentation of Christ as a young warrior may have originated from the concept of the Crucifixion as a battle in patristic commentaries, in works of early Latin Christian poets and hymn-writers, and in Mediterranean visual arts (Woolf 144-45). But why did the poet present Christ as a warrior preparing for, approaching, and finally engaged in a battle? To this treatment of the Crucifixion story at least one modern critic raises the objection of impropriety: Diamond asserts that the Rood-poet "directly contradicts the story of the crucifixion as related in the gospels; but, more important, he does a kind of violence to the spirit and doctrines of Christianity" (4). However, Rosemary Woolf, with this objection in mind, suggests that the idea of military conflict emphasizes the confidence of divine victory (145).

The critics who emphasize Christ's heroic quality in the poem tend to associate the Crucifixion only with a kingly victory; that is, Christ climbs on the Cross and wins the battle against Satan. This interpretation contradicts the intention of the Gospel accounts. Christ already has repelled Satan in their encounter in the wilderness. The battle is already over. The only thing to be

done is the redemptive sacrifice. John Gardner is right in pointing out that "the good deeds which save men in the heroic code are not the basis of Christian salvation" (105). Only the sacrifice, the blood of an animal, could obtain God's forgiveness for the Old Testament people of Israel. The Old Testament sacrifice, however, could not save men, and the history of salvation could be complete only after the divine sacrifice of the Crucifixion.

Lines 33 through 41 in "The Dream of the Rood" describe Christ's ascent of the cross:

> I saw mankind's Protector
> most manfully hasten to ascend me;
> through the will of the Lord I was stayed in my wish
> to crack and bow when I saw that the boundaries
> of earth were trembling; truly I had the might
> to fell these foes—yet I stood fast.
> The young hero prepared himself—he who was God almighty—
> great and gallant he ascended the gallows' abject height
> magnanimous in the sight of many when mankind he wished to free. (Huppe, *Web* 67)

Unlike the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion, wherein Christ carries the cross with him as He is led to execution at Calvary, these lines emphasize instead the active valor of Christ, who hastens to mount a cross which has already been raised. Indeed, this militant vision of the Crucifixion departs from the Gospels on three counts: Christ advances to the Cross hastily, strips himself, and ascends it; these three actions apparently contradict the doctrine of the Crucifixion as passion. Woolf interprets this discrepancy as the poet's deliberate variation to emphasize "the confidence of divine victory and the voluntariness of Christ's undertaking the Crucifixion," "for Christ ascends the Cross of His own will" (145,147), a point of theology acknowledged by certain other critics as well. But even such interpretations of the crucifixion scene fail to reconcile it with the Scriptural account, wherein Christ does not accept the Crucifixion of His own will, but He wants instead God's will to be done, as He declares in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will but Thine be done."

While the "approach to the battle" theme is used in the Crucifixion scene in Germanic narrative terms, the "hero on the beach" theme, another traditional convention in Germanic narrative, is used in the elegiac scene in which Christ is carried down and put in the tomb:

> And they began to build a sepulchre;
> under his slayers' eyes, they carved it
> from the gleaming stone,
> and laid therein the Lord of Victories.

> Then, sorrow at dusk,
> they sang a dirge before they went, weary,
> from their glorious Prince; He rested in the
> grave alone. (Crossley-Holland 202)

As David Crowne notes, the "hero on the beach" theme describes a scene in which a hero is accompanied by his retainers on the beach with a flashing light as the hero completes or begins his journey (qtd. in Wolf 207). According to Alan Renoir and Donald Fry, "the hero need not be on a beach but may also be in a doorway, the essential condition being . . . not his specific location but his position, as it were, between two worlds" (qtd. in Wolf 207). After the Crucifixion, the apostles, as retainers in this context, put Christ in the gleaming-stone sepulchre where He rests until the Resurrection; He is between the two worlds of life and death. Wolf has explained how this theme applies in the context of the poem:

> That the poet should choose to use this theme as the underlying structure for his description of the burial of Christ suggests that the Lord remains a hero even though He is apparently defeated in His battle, and moreover, since Christ is soon to embark on another journey in His harrowing of hell ("Rood" 148a-156), that His death as man is merely the transition between the two journeys which he is making as God. (208)

Thus these echoes of two type-scenes in the Germanic heroic narrative tradition, and also the discrepancies between the Crucifixion scene and the Gospel account, give the impression that the poet violates the doctrinal view of the Crucifixion as passion. But merging his narrative with Germanic tradition does not necessarily mean that the poet intends to transmit the idea that Christ is only a hero or victor prince, for the poem essentially deals with the Christian ideal of salvation that usually transcends that idea. To find out the underlying meaning, we have to consider the poem from yet a different viewpoint.

In *The Dream of the Rood*, in addition to Christ as a heroic figure, we find a heroic figure in the personified Cross, a martyr, that embodies the new Christian heroism, the personality separated from worldly ways and joined to Christ. The poet presents this process of the transfiguration of a worldly man into a Christian metaphorically: a tree, cut off from its roots at the edge of the forest and put on a hill, becomes one of God's followers as well as a sign of the true faith. As such, the Cross must also follow the Christian code of action in defiance of worldly temptation, including the wish to take revenge on its enemies. That is why the tree in the poem does not resist its "strong enemies." In this noble behavior the tree becomes a cross worthy of co-martyrdom with Christ. Denying to itself its own great power to defeat all its foes, the Cross

stands firm, in imitation of the divine will, and suffers its own agony along with Christ.

Indeed, even more than Christ's suffering, the poet emphasizes the agony of the cross: "They drove dark nails into me. . . . I was drenched in the blood." Wolf contends that to minimize the sacrificial nature of the Crucifixion and thus to present the Crucifixion as a victory "the Rood-poet attributes these sufferings to the cross" (209). Wolf's reading of the Crucifixion as a victory is a necessary result of the one-sided perspective that he imposes on the poem. An also one-sided, but quite different, explanation on the nature of the Cross is suggested: "The suffering of Christ in His human nature the poet suggests most movingly by the suffering of the Cross" (Woolf 149). Put in this sense, then, the Cross serves only as a foil to express Christ's human nature. Similarly, Patten thinks of the cross as a surrogate that narrates Christ's humanity (390). Huppe calls Christ and the Cross soldiers together engaged in a battle (*Web* 103). But the poet, who has the two different perspectives of heroism in mind, probably intended to show the martyr's human quality in the cross and the divine quality in Christ, who could "set His spirit free."

When two different perspectives of heroism, Germanic heroism in a warrior and Christian heroism of a martyr, are applied in interpreting *The Dream of the Rood*, the discrepancies between the poem and the Gospel seem less problematical. Although the poet seemingly contradicts the story of the Crucifixion in the Gospel and even does some violence to the doctrine of Christianity (Diamond 4), his presentation of Christ as a Germanic heroic figure does not necessarily mean that the poem contradicts Christian doctrine. On the contrary, the Cross as Christian martyr can fully transmit Christian doctrine to a Germanic audience: the faithful who serve their Lord by enduring suffering for Him will be rewarded with eternal life and glory.

Although he was by no means a slave to Germanic heroic tradition, the Rood-poet made extensive use of traditional heroic narrative in describing Christ, without any discernible special purpose for presenting Christ as a hero, though. No doubt the poet was influenced by contemporary Christology, but it is also likely that he simply wished to conflate Germanic and Christian traditions in his poem to reflect the artistic thinking of his day. To both the Rood-poet and his contemporary audience, the interweaving of Germanic heroism with Christian theology of the Crucifixion would seem to have had a strong intellectual and aesthetic appeal. By casting two different ideas in two closely related personas, the poet transmits his message with perfect balance of emphasis on his dual perspectives of heroism; although the explicit subject matter of the poem is the Crucifixion, half of its message is delivered by the Cross, which is cut off from its world, experiences the Crucifixion with Christ, and is rewarded with its own eternal life and heavenly glory.

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The Role of Imagination in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*

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In a play where Shakespeare offers his audience a choice of titles and one of the choices offers a choice, one can expect to experience more than a little confusion. However, if one is familiar with Shakespeare's style, the foreknowledge of confusion will stir feelings of anticipation rather than those of dread, for it is out of the dark clouds of confusion that Shakespeare produces his purest rains of clarity. In *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, the confusion comes from the various psychological disguises the characters assume, and the clarity comes through the process of unmasking.

An examination of the characters' language reveals a pattern that allows one to recognize distinct categories defined by the different "wills" or "desires" of the characters. It is in observing the language that one discovers a difference in the element of desire. That difference is found when the desires of a character are held up to a mirror that reflects the motive. The mirror is provided through the mind of another, and the reflection is one of the heart. When Antonio says, "In nature there's no blemish but the mind; / None can be call'd deformed but the unkind" (3.4.367-68), he is identifying that aspect of a character's behavior that finds its source in the motive and its volition in the imagination.

Just as imagination is the necessary element for the audience and the play to connect, it is the necessary element for an individual to connect with himself and with others. One's imagination has the power to determine perspective. This is a play about characters whose imaginations are infected. The symptom of the infection is seen in the excessive language of the characters. The forms of that excessive language fall into three categories: Orsino and Olivia are infected with exaggerated ideas of romantic love; Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are infected with an excessive spirit of revelry; and Malvolio is infected with self-love.

Orsino and Olivia fall into a category whose definitive characteristic is language filled with exaggerated images of romantic love. Though they assume a different pose, they wear the same mask. It is a mask of veiled identity through language that reflects the ideal of a reality, and it allows its wearer to avoid reality. Orsino's language is that of a romantic lover. It is both excessive and contrived. The patterns of the images of his language reflect the very motion of his inner struggle. The audience receives its introduction to Orsino and to this play through his lines that reflect the themes and the struggles of both. He says,

If music be the food of love, play on.

Give me excess of it; that surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again, it had a dying fall;
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odor. Enough, no more,
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price.
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical. (1.1.1-15)

This passage reveals the mind of Orsino as a mind full of images of love that derive their shape from "fancy" (1.1.14). In his article "Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*," Harold Jenkins defines the mind of the romantic lover. He says, "[T]he devotion which the romantic lover bestows upon a woman as pure as she is unattainable may also symbolize the mind's aspiration towards some ever alluring but ever elusive ideal" (76). Concerning this particular passage he states, "[I]f the spirit of love is as transitory as music and as unstable as the sea, it is also as living and capacious. New waves form as often as waves break; the shapes of fancy, insubstantial as they are, make a splendor in the mind, and renew themselves as quickly as they fade" (78). Along with the transitory image of music and the unstable image of the sea, these lines also use the powerful image of the "appetite" (1.1.3). It is not an appetite that is satisfied but one that is satiated to the point of sickness. This image is one that reflects the appetites, or desires, of the characters whose language is infected. It is infected at the source, the motive, and it is reflected in the imagination.

Clearly, Orsino's imagination is infected with the excessive images of the romantic lover. It is the image "that is alone high fantastical" (1.1.15) that he pursues and not the reality. His next lines reveal the reality of the object of his pursuit. In response to Curio's question about going hunting, Orsino replies,

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!
That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me. (1.1.18-22)

He is both the object and the victim of his own desires. When Valentine describes Olivia's seclusion, Orsino turns all of those images into food for the

appetite of his own imagination. Once again he uses an image that reflects love as something that involves conquering. He says,

> O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
> To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
> How will she love when the rich golden shaft
> Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
> That live in her; when liver, brain, and heart,
> The sovereign thrones, are all supplied and fill'd
> Her sweet perfections with one self king!
> Away before me to sweet beds of flow'rs,
> Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bow'rs.
> (1.1.31-40)

This passage reflects Orsino's second use of flowery imagery. This fragile image helps to reinforce the transitory love that exists in his mind. It is also a clue to the fact that these images do not go deeply into his identity. They forecast that part of Orsino's personality that will allow him to drop this pose when he is ready to deal with reality. The same imagination that is infected with a self-distorted concept of romantic love will enable him to use the germ of fantasy as the basis for his cure. It will allow him a perspective that will permit him to surrender his image of himself as "king" (1.1.38) and relinquish the control over his heart that he now expresses in his words.

The audience is able to see the first stages of Orsino surrendering his pose when he is moved by Cesario's description of a sister's grief for love. Orsino asks, "And what's her history?" (2.4.109). To this Cesario replies by holding up a mirror for Orsino through a description whose substance reveals the shallowness of Orsino's verbosity. Cesario describes a love that suffered patiently in silence and "smiled at grief" (2.4.115). He goes on to say, "We men may say more, swear more but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our vows, but little in our love" (2.4.116-18). To this Orsino replies, "But died thy sister of her love, my boy?" (2.4.119). This quotation reflects the crumbling of a facade that has been touched by the power of a description that unites mind and heart through imagination. Though not yet totally free, Orsino's ability to respond to another represents the beginning of his shedding his disguise.

Though Olivia shares Orsino's mask of excessive language that reflects excess, her language assumes the mask of the grief-stricken woman. While she assumes a veil physically, it is the one that she assumes emotionally that prevents her from seeing herself. Her disguise is described in Valentine's lines as he returns her handmaid's reply. He says,

> The element itself, till seven years' heat,
> Shall not behold her face at ample view;
> But like a cloistress she will veiled walk,

> And water once a day her chamber round
> With eye-offending brine; all this to season
> A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
> And lasting in her sad remembrance. (1.1.25-31)

The artificiality of this pose is seen in the sheer "will" necessary to keep up the semblance of mourning long after the genuine emotion is gone. Her language resembles Orsino's in its attempt to keep death fresh. Just as Orsino hides from the reality of love by sending messengers instead of going himself, Olivia hides from having to deal with the emotion of romantic love altogether. G. K. Hunter in "Plot and Subplot in *Twelfth Night*" says, "Olivia cannot bear to be known for what she is—a healthy and nubile woman" (97).

Though Olivia and Orsino both use their imaginations to hide from reality, Olivia proves more "willing" to shed her disguise. When convincing Cesario that he is the perfect one to affect Olivia, Orsino notes the different aspects of Cesario that are feminine, yet he still cannot see beyond himself (1.4.29-36). When Feste approaches Olivia for permission to prove her folly in her excessive mourning, she agrees. She reveals a heart that is not truly committed to remain hidden from the world (1.5.56-71). When Cesario asks her to remove her veil so that he might see her face, she consents (1.5.230-49) and answers him with a wit that demonstrates the fact that she has started to lift the veil within. When she gives Cesario her reasons for not receiving Orsino's affections, she becomes a mirror that reflects a knowledge missing in his superficial image of love. She says,

> Your lord does know my mind, I cannot love him,
> Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
> Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
> In voices well divulg'd, free, learn'd , and valiant,
> And in dimension, and the shape of nature,
> A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him.
> He might have took his answer long ago. (1.5.257-63)

These lines reveal that Olivia is aware of the difference between knowing someone with your heart and knowing him in the "mind" (2.1.257). She goes on to ascribe to him worthy attributes, but they are attributes that any could know. They do not reflect a knowledge that could account for any basis of love. This passage reveals Olivia's quicker response in leaving her disguise behind. Her language reflects the same image of "shape" that is seen in Orsino's introductory lines. However, Olivia's language reflects an awareness that the shape should have substance. While this insight on her part lends greater credibility to Hunter's position that she has been hiding to avoid having to deal with her own sexuality, it also lends support to the fact that her disguise of grief is a pose. It is a pose assumed in her mind, and her mind has the ability to drop that pose at "will."

It is clear that once engaged, Olivia's imagination has the capacity to redeem her. When Cesario describes what he would do rather than accept such a refusal, Olivia responds as one whose disguise has been penetrated. Cesario's words have been delivered in person with all of the power of his (Viola's) imagination, and they have touched Olivia's heart through Olivia's imagination. Cesario's words contain the substance missing from Orsino's messages. Her response, "You might do much" (1.5.276), reveals Olivia's further movement out of the veils of mourning and seclusion. Though it appears that she is responding to a girl in man's clothing, she is in reality responding to the power of an imagination that echoes the definition of love that resides within her own heart and mind. She is brought back to life through the power of imagination touching imagination. It is the power of the imagination that enables Orsino and Olivia to give up the charade of the ideal to accept the real.

Sir Toby's and Sir Andrew's language reveals that they are sick on revelry. Sir Toby's first line is "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life" (1.3.1-3). Sir Andrew says of himself, "I would I had bestow'd that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing and bear-baiting. O had I but follow'd the arts" (1.3.92-94). Though they are motivated in different ways, these two share a spirit of revelry that is excessive. Sir Toby's drunkenness is the outward aspect of his neglecting "care" too much. Feste tells Olivia that Sir Toby is in the second stage of drunkenness and that he is only mad and not drowned (1.5.137-38), for Feste sees that element in Sir Toby that allows him to still interact with others. That element is his imagination.

Although Sir Toby possesses the capacity to interact with others, he does not always use it in a healthy way. Through it he sees how to manipulate Sir Andrew's desire to marry Olivia in order to gain money for himself. He knows how to feed Sir Andrew's need for excessive verbal reinforcement. Mark Van Doren in "Sir Toby Belch and His Milieu" says, "When Sir Andrew says he is of the opinion that life consists of eating and drinking, Sir Toby applauds him roundly. 'Thou'rt a scholar; let us therefore eat and drink'" (103). When Sir Andrew states that he plans to leave and to give up his pursuit of Olivia, Sir Toby is able to quickly persuade him to stay. As evidence of Sir Andrew's own instability he replies, "I'll stay a month longer. I am a fellow o' th' strangest mind i' th' world; I delight in masques and revels sometimes altogether" (1.3.112-14). Playing on the power of verbal reinforcement to one whose identity is submerged in verbal excessiveness, Sir Toby brags about Sir Andrew's dancing ability. He says,

> Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before 'em? Are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall's picture? Why dost thou not go to in a galliard, and

> come home in a coranto? My very walk should be a jig. I would not so much as make water in a sink-a-pace. What dost thou mean? I did think by the excellent constitution of thy leg, it was form'd under the star of a galliard. (1.3.125-33)

Picking up the image of hiding, Sir Toby has the imagination to perceive exactly what Sir Andrew needs to hear. The juxtaposition of virtues and dancing reflects the confused, superficial world of this pair. When Sir Andrew says, "Shall we [set] about some revels?" (1.3.136), Sir Toby says, "What shall we do else?" (1.3.137). They will continue to "revel" because they are imprisoned by their inability to cope with reality. It is in revelry that Sir Toby hides from himself the truth that he is a parasite and Sir Andrew finds escape from the reality that he is a fool. However, they are surrounded by mirrors that eventually will force them to accept the sober reality that one cannot buy one's way into every relationship and one cannot be a proud parasite. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew give every indication that they will not die from their sickness, but they will remain infected because they cannot get beyond the mixture of fantasy and reality to find the strength to deal with the truth about themselves.

Malvolio's language reveals a person whose desires distort not only the way he see himself but the way he sees the world around him. According to C. L. Barber in "Liberty Testing Courtesy," "As Sir Toby is the spokesman and guardian of that merry world, Malvolio is the antagonist" (50). Malvolio is drunk on himself. When Olivia asks Malvolio what he thinks about Feste's wit after he has "catechized" her (1.5.62-71), he replies, "I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal. . . . I protest I take these wise men that crow so at these set kind of fools no better than the fools' zanies" (1.5.83-89). To this Olivia replies,

> O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets. There is no slander in an allow'd fool, though he do nothing but rail; nor no railing in a known discreet man, though he do nothing but reprove. (1.5.90-96)

Here Olivia holds up a mirror that reflects the truth about Malvolio, but he cannot see because he lacks the "imagination" to see beyond his own desires. Of this Harold Jenkins says, "There are signs that Olivia may be won from death to life, but the spirit of Malvolio can only be destructive" (84).

Malvolio's "self-love" and "distemper'd appetite" infect his vision of others and of his relationship to them. He is so blinded by the image of his own self-importance that he cannot see reality. He cannot see that Olivia is only hiding behind a veil that she is anxiously wanting to lift. He cannot see

the ring he delivers to Cesario as a gift of love. He is not able to look with mercy on Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in their revelries. He sees himself in Maria's note because it feeds his distempered appetite of self-love. Malvolio's imagination is so diseased that it rejects truth from all sources. He will not mend. At the end when the prank is brought out into the light, Malvolio remains in the dark. When Feste says, "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenge" (5.1.366-77), Malvolio replies by saying, "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you" (5.1.378). His inflated self-deception allows him to compare his total powerlessness to the power of time. His infected imagination prevents him from connecting with others through the experience of suffering and leaves him isolated from the rest. The play closes leaving the audience no reason to anticipate his cure. Earlier in the play Sir Toby says to Malvolio, "Art thou any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3.114-16). It is clear that Malvolio's "imagination" has given him his desires, and for him there "will" be no cakes and ale.

The common element of all of the characters is that of imagination. It is through imagination's power that Olivia and Orsino create their images of ideal love and grief, and it is that same power that allows them to let go of the images and reach out to the reality. It is the aspect of the imagination that allows them to see through another's eyes that frees them from the imprisonment of their own self-deceptions. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew too possess the power of imagination, but theirs is weakened through years of misuse. They are crippled. To let go of the image and embrace the reality would be too painful; they will just part company and remove themselves from the presence of any mirrors that remind them of the truth. Malvolio's imagination is truly diseased. While Sir Toby's and Sir Andrew's represents a mixture of fantasy and reality, Malvolio is totally void of the ability to see beyond himself. His imagination is used solely to promote his delusion of his superiority.

Though in reality it does not truly rain every day, life provides enough opportunities for the rain of reality to clear away the clouds of confusion if one possesses the type of imagination to receive its effect. Feste ends with a promise that the play will "strive to please you every day" (5.1.408). This is a subtle reminder that the power to receive that pleasure rests within the individual. Ultimately, the audience, like each of the characters, will have to use its imagination to connect with the play if it is to receive the outcome it desires.

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Bartleby-ology: Yet Another Chapter

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The story "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853) by Herman Melville is told by a narrator who analyzes his own personality and those of his employees, including the central character, Bartleby, a strange man he hires as a copyist in his nineteenth-century law office on Wall Street. Bartleby begins the job well enough but then refuses to perform some of his duties with the inexplicable words, "I would prefer not to" (854). Later, Bartleby refuses all duties; he moves at some point into the office, stays there when his frustrated employer—unbelievably—moves out, refuses advice about finding another job or anything else, does not respond to the employer's attempts to get him to explain his viewpoint, and refuses the employer's many offers of money or help, including the rather generous offer that Bartleby leave the office and move in with him. Eventually, Bartleby is jailed as a vagrant, and still the employer takes responsibility, trying at least to arrange for good meals for him. Bartleby dies in jail, apparently as a consequence of giving up eating. Afterwards, the narrator tells that he has learned that Bartleby came to him after working at the Dead Letter Office in Washington, D. C. Finally knowing something about his background, the narrator seizes upon this piece of information and attempts to glean from it an explanation of Bartleby's character. The detail provides him grist for his analytical mind and a faintly humorous and somewhat conclusive ending for the short story. The narrator is also part of the story and deeply affected by his experiences with Bartleby; in addition, his musings on Bartleby's personality and habits extend to the theological. At one point, he thinks that his troubles with the scrivener "had been all predestined from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon [him] for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence" (863), and he ends the tale with the cry, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (870) thus encouraging the reader to think of Bartleby's story as a significant parable or puzzle.

The reader is likely to sympathize at least somewhat with the lawyer who employs Bartleby, for he does display kindness and concern for Bartleby and his other workers. Critics have long debated his degree of intelligence and various character flaws (Luscher 18-19, McCall 106-07), but the story relates his systematic and rigorous attempts to think of every possible explanation of Bartleby's behavior, along with every possible alternative he has in dealing with the man at various points. He asks the others for help in reaching Bartleby; he reasons with him, appeals to his common sense, lowers the standards of the job, adjusts the duties and work conditions, makes excuses for him, gives him time to come around, tries to bribe him or buy him

off, and begs him to explain himself. Reading about the interactions between Bartleby and the narrator is painful, and it is easy, if uncomfortable, to identify with his situation. The man's role as a benevolent employer is seriously challenged, as is his conscience as a charitable person with concern for those he is in a position to help. In carrying out our own various roles toward other people, we expect society to provide certain rules or limits to guide our consciences and define our responsibilities. The narrator has no such guidelines to follow in dealing with Bartleby. To the readers, Bartleby might represent those individuals who threaten or challenge us by placing great demands on our sense of responsibility, who do not live up to their ends of bargains, who do not explain themselves in terms we can understand, who do not help themselves or care about their own well-being as we expect, who are passive or self-destructive, or who court various kinds of failure. Reading the story as a literary critic, too, one identifies with the narrator's zeal to analyze and explain all human behavior and character traits he encounters, which he has done successfully until meeting the enigma Bartleby.

The short story has inspired a massive amount of commentary, which has in fact been referred to as the "Bartleby Industry" (McCall 106). Some critics interpret the story as reflective of Melville's life and problems as an artist (Chase); others identify sources of the story, such as a newspaper article, Bible verses, or an essay by Emerson (McCall 1); others read the story as a critique of Wall Street capitalism or the individual versus society; others focus on the personalities of the narrator and his gallery of peculiar employees, but the main preoccupation of the "Bartleby Industry" is to explain Bartleby himself. The character is disturbing and unsettling; witnessing the narrator's attempts to deal with him, even more so. It is painful for the readers to imagine meeting such an individual and having responsibility for him thrust upon us. Surely at least one motivating factor behind the prodigious commentary on Bartleby is discomfort, a need to interpret, diagnose, or better yet *explain away* this protagonist. It is easier to think about Bartleby not as a person we might encounter ourselves, but as a case study of a mental condition, a personification of a philosophical or religious idea, a situation in Melville's life (Mordecai 107), a critique of Americanism (Luscher 18), or a literary prototype with various fictional brothers.

Scholarly diagnoses of Bartleby's condition include melancholia (Blake), schizophrenia (Beja), "l'idee fixe" (Laroque), infantile autism (Sullivan), and depression or "catatonic schizophrenia with overtones of homosexuality" (Bluestone 49). Other psychological interpretations refer to an incurable disorder (Joswick), or to the "fragile pageantry of the ego" (Abrams); another identifies Bartleby as the narrator's alter-ego, more specifically a projection of his death-wish (Haley). Philosophical

interpretations, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, explain Bartleby using the then-popular ideas of alienation (Bowen), exile (Friedman), and "the contemporary search for meaning" (Zink). Other studies have focused on comparisons between Bartleby and literary characters created by Melville (Moore), Poe (Wells), Dickens (Mendez, Vann), Dostoevsky (Leary 14), or Kafka (Meyer 9) or have likened Bartleby to real people, including not only Melville himself, but also Christ (Fiene), Buddha (Leary 14), Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thoreau (Busch), the latter three justified by the narrator's remark, "Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance" (853), although it is unclear in the name of what cause Bartleby resists.

To sum up, perhaps the most satisfying explanation is given by M. Thomas Inge: "It is one of those few stories . . . which will continue to defy any definitive or generally satisfactory explanation, and this may finally be its theme of course—that the inscrutable does not yield one iota to the rational categories of existence" (9). Some things can be said about Bartleby the enigma, however; notable is his lack of connection to other people. Egbert S. Oliver writes, "'Bartleby' is the story of a man who gradually withdrew within himself, cutting off, one by one, the bonds of human fellowship and association until he stood alone, completely—blank and silent" (63). He adds, "'Bartleby' is a story of the ultimate difficulty human beings have in reaching each other" (76).

Viewing Bartleby as a particularly American windowless monad, it is hard not to attribute some significance as many critics have done, to the fact that he worked on Wall Street, a symbol of the capitalist system. Bartleby and his copying colleagues were the human ancestors of the all-American Xerox machine, although the dreary office life described is nothing like the bustling, progressive, fast-paced, competitive and profit-driven image of Wall Street today. Even the narrator-boss describes himself flatly as "unambitious" (846). Nor is he particularly enthusiastic about the "bottom line"; he says of another clerk, "He was a man whom prosperity harmed" (849), and his willingness to put up with and buy off Bartleby shows that maximum profit was not his primary motivation. The story involves problems of vocation, employment, money, work, action and inaction, lethargy and energy, society and solitude, adjustment and conformity; if it is anti-Wall Street or anti-capitalist in the process, this is well within the established literary tradition of social criticism. The discomfort the story engenders comes more from its portrayal of one-on-one human interactions than from its macro-economic import.

Part of the fun of Bartleby-ology involves the search for Bartleby's literary brothers. One notable candidate is found in another isolated individual whose life story is likewise a ghastly failure commented upon by

a narrator/character. He is Jakob, the Austrian author Franz Grillparzer's "Der Arme Spielmann," translated as "The Poor Fiddler." If Bartleby is an anti-Wall Street American archetype, this character is in opposition to the glorious Austro-Hungarian Empire, which came to an end in 1918 after six centuries of Habsburg rule. Just as Bartleby seems to mock the glories of the stock exchange and the almighty dollar, Jakob sinks and withdraws from the social position of his family, by using and perverting a central Austrian pride and joy, not money but music.

The two stories were compared in 1984 by Michael Jones, who points out that Grillparzer's story appeared in 1847; Melville's, in 1853. He comments that both "have been seen by critics as the direct product of the author's disillusionment with his position as a creative artist in the society of his time, as castigations in an allegorical form of the destructively hostile attitude of an unfeeling, materialistic society towards the artistically gifted in its midst" (45-46). Although he finds no evidence of direct influence, he points out some startling similarities:

> Both stories deal with the lives and deaths of copy clerks who reject the drudgery of their working environments, subsequently opt out of society and later die in obscurity. In each case the framework of the story is provided by a narrator who, in the mode of a first person narrative, recounts the life of the clerk in question because he feels that it is his duty to preserve the memory of a humble yet exceptional individual for posterity. . . . Furthermore each narrator . . . feels that his own sense of values, his whole approach to life, has been challenged by this encounter with one of life's shipwrecked existences, and that his own position has been found wanting. (46-48)

What of the position in literary history of the two clerks? Bartleby is a well-known, widely anthologized and studied figure of American literature by a major luminary of the American canon. The Poor Fiddler was created by Franz Grillparzer, who is generally credited with nothing less than the successful founding of an Austrian literary tradition and history, distinct from the literature of its more dominant counterpart, the literature of Germany (Daviau vi-viii). While Melville cannot claim such a large role, he was undoubtedly a major contributor to the independence of American literature from the British tradition, and his obscure anti-hero Bartleby can claim some of his creator's fame and significance as well.

The Poor Fiddler criticism is also an industry, but there is a curious asymmetry here. In Germany and Austria, Grillparzer is regarded as primarily a dramatist; this short story is well-known but not generally considered a major contribution by the author. Interestingly enough, however, among

Germanists in the United States, the story has struck a louder chord and brought forth a much larger outpouring of commentary relative to studies of Grillparzer's dramas. Although by some chance John Irving's bestselling novel of 1976, *The World According to Garp*, contains negative comments on the story (88-90), American readers have a great appetite for outsider characters like Jakob and Bartleby (Bernd 20-21).

But there are differences. While Bartleby's early life is unfamiliar to the reader and narrator, and he communicates almost nothing about his own life or thoughts, Jakob relates his background and explains his philosophy to the narrator, who suggests that his interest in him is psychological or even "anthropological" (147-49).[1] Thus, the reader is encouraged to regard this character as a case study, too. This story does not confront the reader with the overt pathology, human failure to communicate, or the problem of the limits of charity evoked by Bartleby's story, but it presents a distressing picture of human failure and unhappiness. Its uncomfortable questions are less about how to treat others than about art and individual human fulfillment. Jakob is born into a wealthy family of high social status, but his academic failures cause his demanding father to gradually reject him, until he has become an outcast exiled to a bleak rented room. When his father dies, Jakob is cheated out of much of his inheritance. By the time the narrator meets him, he is living in a third of a basement room and supporting himself as a street musician. Unlike Bartleby, however, Jakob has known some happiness and love, although the love is from a distance. His sweetheart marries someone else, but he maintains a wistful thread of a relationship with her. Jakob also finds fulfillment, even ecstasy, through his own badly played violin music, and he actually dies a martyr from an illness contracted when he saves some neighbor children from a flood. Sad, poor, and obscure as he lives and dies, his life is rich compared to Bartleby's.

While the enigmatic outsider figure Bartleby poses questions about psychiatric disorders, human connections, and charity, Jakob is to a much greater extent another kind of outsider character figure, long popular among critics and part of a centuries-old literary tradition: he is an artist who does not fit into conventional society. However, he is a particular kind of artist figure who calls into question the nature and functions of art. Jakob not only supports himself through art as a performing street beggar, but he finds enormous spiritual and sensual fulfillment by playing his violin, producing music that transports him but sounds like hideous squawking to everyone else. Jakob is like Bartleby in living modestly and being uninterested in money. Unlike Bartleby, he explains why. When the narrator asks why he cuts his profits short by going home early from a folk festival, he answers, "The evenings belong to me and my poor art. Then I stay home and play my fantasies, music from my imagination. . . . The first three hours of the day I

devote to practice, the middle of the day to earning my bread, and the evening to me and my dearest God" (152-53).[2]

Both stories end with a dramatic surprise, as many short stories do: the Dead Letter Office revelation and Jakob's martyrdom. Both conclusions also have light religious auras. Jakob and Bartleby are particularly similar in the images of the dead letters and the squawking music, sent out and received by no one. The literary brothers Jakob and Bartleby are humble outsider characters and at the same time important representatives in literary history, not only of major authors, but, in their peculiar inverted ways, of powerful empires, the Old World empire of tradition and music and the New World empire of capitalism and money.

Notes

[1]The narrator calls himself "ein leidenschaftlicher Liebhaber der Menschen, vorzüglich des Volkes," and refers to his own "anthropologischen Heißhunger." The English translation in the text, and those to follow, are mine.

[2] "[D]er Abend gehört mir und meiner armen Kunst. Abends halte ich mich zu Hause und . . . da spiele ich denn aus der Einbildung, so für mich ohne Noten. Phantasieren, glaub ich, heißt es in den Musikbüchern. . . . Die drei ersten Stunden des Tages der Übung, die Mitte dem Broterwerb und der Abend mir und dem lieben Gott."

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An Unwholy Man in an Unwholy Land: Fragmentation in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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After World War I, modern literature changed in its tone and content. Modern poetry became more negative, depressing, hopeless, and it lost its romantic themes and images. Beautiful, pastoral retreats filled with love and lovers were gone, and ugly, polluted, city settings with unhappy, uncaring couples became the focus of most poems. T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is no exception to this change in poetry. The persona of the poem is an indecisive, self-conscious, weak man who is afraid of truly living life and is afraid of dying. Prufrock lives in a modern world enveloped with disorganization, frustration, and isolation. To reflect this modern world, Eliot provides the poem with many fragmentary images that show how lost and in despair modern civilization really is. Eliot uses his character of Prufrock to represent this modern, fragmented world, and this persona's fragmentation is symbolized on three different levels: spiritual, physical, and psychological.

To acquaint the reader with Prufrock and his many problems, Eliot first shows the reader the discontinuity and disorganization of Prufrock's world, the modern world. The reader never receives a whole image in the poem, and this lack of a whole image prepares Prufrock's audience for his fragmented life. The poem begins with what appears to be a beautiful, romantic picture. "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky" (1-2). This peaceful image is abruptly stopped, though, with "[l]ike a patient etherised upon a table" (3). Eliot then continues to describe an ugly, dirty setting in the city, the setting of Prufrock's world. "Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, / The muttering retreats / Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels / And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells" (4-7). According to Joachim Seyppel, "The beginning lines may still sound somewhat 'romantic.' . . . The third line destroys the idyll" (18). Seyppel continues, "The invasion, in verse, of such things as disease, medical science, and operation moves us, immediately and forcefully, into the present age with its typical conflicts" (18). Later in the poem, there is an entire section containing images of frustration and indecision: "Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions" (31-33). The reader is left uncertain and feeling as incomplete as the images are, and organization is never found in this world of Prufrock where "[i]n a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (47-48). Eliot further presents this life of

discontinuity by disrupting the happy, contented thoughts of the persona with modern man's sense of futility.

> After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
> After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
> And this, and so much more?—
> It is impossible to say just what I mean! (102-05)

Man cannot communicate thoroughly or even complete a thought or sentence, and as Nancy K. Gish points out, "The images are all of broken things; even the days are burnt-out like Prufrock's 'butt-ends'" (4). All these partial images prepare the reader for Prufrock's life of fragmentation.

One side to Prufrock's fragmented life is the spiritual, represented by a loss of religion and a lack of faith that characterizes the modern world. The religious allusions in the poem are to men of the Bible whose communication to the world has been cut off as religion and God have been separated from modern society. Prufrock first tries to relate to John the Baptist but soon realizes he cannot compare to the prophet in faith and religious belief. "I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed, / Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) / brought in upon a platter, / I am no prophet—and here's no great matter" (81-84). Prufrock has lost all faith and hope as many in modern society have, and this poem focuses on that lack of religious faith. As John Halverson asserts, "That this is a poem of failure no one denies. But the failure is above all spiritual. . . . [Prufrock] clutches fearfully at the meaningless routines and surfaces of life; he has no faith in himself, in reality, in existence, nor has he any hope" (578). Prufrock then associates himself with Lazarus, which emphasizes his spiritual fragmentation and the world's because a dead man cannot communicate the importance of God and faith to the living. "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (95-96). The reader does not learn what exactly Prufrock/Lazarus will tell us, and, as Schneider confirms, "What have the dead to communicate that the living could understand?" (1105). There is a separation from God that makes communicating about spiritual beliefs impossible when faith does not exist as in this poem. Prufrock has no hope, and he is afraid to die, unlike Christians who believe death grants them eternal life. "And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid" (86-87). Prufrock's fear reiterates that he is not content in his spiritual life any more than he is satisfied with his physical, human make-up.

The many, incomplete, physical images in the poem represent one level of Prufrock's fragmentation. Prufrock and other members of modern civilization are never described as whole persons or whole human bodies.

Only specific body parts are mentioned to symbolize that Prufrock or modern man is no longer a whole person. Prufrock is described as a man with a "bald spot in the middle of [his] hair" (40), and "his hair is growing thin" (41). Prufrock is never fully detailed physically to the reader; the reader is merely given a description of the persona's wardrobe which includes, "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, / My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin" (42-43). More attention is given to Prufrock's clothing than to his human frame, which is almost nonexistent, as Prufrock says of himself, "his arms and legs are thin!" (44). The only other body parts mentioned with emphasis throughout the poem are eyes and arms, and these are always viewed as separate images, never part of a whole person. When Prufrock thinks he is being watched, it is the eyes that "fix [him] in a formulated phrase" (56), and when he describes a woman, he only mentions her arms that are "braceleted and white and bare" (63) as if that is all of her womanly essence. Mermaids imply another fragmented view of women in the poem. Prufrock desires a figure that is again, not a whole woman, for she is half human, half fish. As John T. Mayer points out, "The 'eyes' and 'arms,' body parts, undercut the women's attraction as lovers by their lack of humanity" (123). There are no whole images in Eliot's "Prufrock," so there can be no whole human beings, only bits and pieces of men and women.

Prufrock also begins to paint himself in partial images such as claws and a head on a platter. After invoking a desperate scene at "dusk" (70) with "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" (72), Prufrock desires to be "a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (73-74). Even his dreams do not add up to a whole image; Prufrock only wishes to be the claws, not the entire crab, and he chooses claws that are "ragged" (73) to complete the fragmented image. Elisabeth Schneider sees this image as the "grotesque central image of the poem, . . . a subhuman crustacean, doubly dehumanized by the synecdoche of claws even beyond its identity as crab or lobster" (1104). Prufrock's other vision of himself is of a man without his head. "Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) / brought in upon a platter, / I am no prophet—and here's no great matter" (82-84). This persona is so disconnected from his physical self that he envisions one of his primary and necessary body parts as being apart from his body. Prufrock is a man who cannot see himself or other people as physically whole, and that is just one of his problems.

The physical action in the poem is also related in partial or fragmented terms. Actions are often interrupted or hesitated, and most of these hesitant acts are Prufrock's. He wonders indecisively, "Do I dare Disturb the universe?" (45-46), and "how should I presume?" (61). He starts to do something but always stops short to provide the reader with useless information about his life. Prufrock has "measured out [his] life with coffee

spoons" (51), reflecting that what action does exist in his life is minimum and mundane. When the act of doing something is mentioned, it is in futuristic, indefinite terms as if it may or may not happen and as if Prufrock does not have the courage or fortitude to make things happen.

> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
> There will be time to murder and create,
> And time for all the works and days of hands
> That lift and drop a question on your plate;
> Time for you and time for me,
> And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
> And for a hundred visions and revisions,
> Before the taking of a toast and tea. (26-34)

According to Gish, "What human actions do occur appear as mere fragments, a gesture or a pose" (1). After just a brief glimmer of activity, Prufrock questions his strength and ability but never challenges himself too much. "Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, / Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?" (79-80). As Robert McNamara maintains, Prufrock has a "weakened, severely fragmented personality, one paralyzed by possibility, with virtually no capacity for effective action" (358). The physical inactivity as well as the partial physical appearances of people in the poem work together to establish one level of Prufrock's fragmentation.

Prufrock's psychological problems are also revealed through the main images of fragmentation throughout the poem. Prufrock's views of himself are not high, respectable ones; his self-image is low and damaged. He constantly refers to his balding head and thinning hair, and the images he uses to present himself to the reader are either of insects or idiots. The first of these images of Prufrock is of a bug. Prufrock feels he is being dissected and analyzed like a bug "sprawling on a pin" (57). He sees himself as he sees his life, which is as worthless as an insect, a dissected insect. "When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways" (58-60). Schneider views this image as "violent" (1105) and "the extremes of self-shattering consciousness: 'the eyes that fix,' pin you to the wall like a specimen insect impaled, to be stared at in its death agony" (1105). Next, Prufrock longs to be a creature of the sea, but he chooses to be a fragmented image of part of a crab. He does not see himself as an exotic, lovely-colored fish gracefully weaving its way through the ocean water but sinks for the bottom of "silent seas" (74) with "ragged claws" (73). Prufrock's last picture of himself is the most degrading and the saddest. Playing the part of a lowly idiot is all Prufrock imagines for his role in life. "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; / Am an attendant lord, one that will do" (112-3). He does not want to be challenged to or regarded

as in a higher position. Just getting by with a position as "an easy tool" (115) and being "[a]t times, indeed, almost ridiculous" (119) are quite enough for Prufrock. His low self-esteem only permits him to acknowledge that he is "the Fool" (120).

The earlier physical image of Prufrock's head on a platter also symbolizes his fragmented personality. Prufrock is extremely self-conscious, and his mind is split when it comes to thinking and actually doing. Prufrock attempts to assert himself and take control in his life as he says, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" (45-46), but as Gish claims, "his experience remains a movement of feeling rather than thought, his attempts at understanding only fragmented bursts of mental agitation" (10). Prufrock's split personality can be seen in the beginning of the poem as he struggles with the "you and I" (1) fighting within himself. Prufrock is at first assertive, demanding, "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?' / Let us go and make our visit" (11-12). This strong personality inside Prufrock is challenged, though, as he starts to question every thing he says and does. "So how should I presume? / . . . And how should I begin? / . . . Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" (54, 69, 123). According to Mayer, "Eliot splits Prufrock into contrasting selves, creating what he later called 'a dedoublement of personality against which the subject struggles'" (117-18). Prufrock does struggle within himself and in his attempts to communicate with others. He cannot make a complete thought through all his confusion and disconnection of mind power. The only response he thinks he will hear from another human being is "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all" (98-99). In reality, this may not be the response he receives, for Prufrock will not grant his assertive side a chance. As Schneider points out, "He is simply not all in one piece. Acute self-consciousness, furthermore, through this division of the self, paralyzes the will and the power to act and feel" (1104). Prufrock regresses to the indecisive, fearful, weak, and shy man that the reader remembers him to be as the poem progresses to its despondent ending.

> I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
> And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
> And in short, I was afraid.
> And would it have been worth it, after all,
> After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
> Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
> Would it have been worth while? (85-91)

Prufrock's psychological problems that divide him inside and out will not permit him to have a worthwhile existence. The mermaids will not "sing" (126) to him, and eventually he knows he will "drown" (132).

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot creates a persona for the poem that reflects the fragmented modern world he and his persona live in. Eliot's "Prufrock" is a typical, modern poem that may begin with hope but must certainly end in despair. To go along with the dark, desolate, modern setting of the poem is the character of Prufrock. Prufrock's fragmented personality will not allow him to be a whole person, spiritually or psychologically. He continually has struggles within himself and external battles with the outside world. Prufrock is the modern world's weak and pitiful answer to a hero.

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Ezra Pound's Adaptations of Chinese Poems

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Early in the twentieth century, Imagist poets read Oriental poetry to find new forms and techniques as fresh blood that could be injected into their poetic creations. They also began to translate or adapt classical Chinese poetry. For an Imagist such as Ezra Pound, the translation and adaptation of Chinese poetry inspired the production of his own poetry.

Pound based his *Cathay* upon "a great number of rough translations" (Eliot 177) left by Ernest Fenollosa, who drew Pound's attention from Japanese poetry toward Chinese poetry. Like Fenollosa, Pound showed a fanatic interest in the structure of Chinese characters containing images. At the time he wrote the adaptations of *Cathay*, he had not yet begun (as he did later) to dismantle the characters and artificially separate them.

While working on the *Cathay* poems, Pound was certainly inspired by Fenollosa's idea in translating the Chinese poems. "In translating Chinese, verse especially, we must hold as closely as possible to the concrete force of the original, eschewing adjectives, nouns and intransitive forms wherever we can, and seeking instead strong and individual verbs" (Fenollosa 15-16). The adaptations, chiefly those of Li Po, afforded Pound a fine opportunity to achieve direct and exact treatment and the most basic economy of poetic expression.

Pound, with a hint from his study of Chinese poetry and from Fenollosa's essay, searched seriously for new poetic forms and devices which might not have been invented but for the purpose of his adaptations in *Cathay*. For example, he invented the syntactical break to present blocks of images, employing a cinematic montage effect to show the views the observer sees pictorially rather than semantically. Consider these beginning lines in "Lament of the Frontier Guard":

> By the North Gate, the wind blows full of sand,
> Lonely from the beginning of time until now!
> Trees fall, the grass goes yellow with autumn.
> I climb the towers and towers to watch out the barbarous land:
> Desolate castle, the sky, the wide deserts.
> There is no wall left to this village.

In these lines, we follow the speaker to watch out: "Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert." The successive "shots" here present us with coexisting images, like those in a painting. Compared with Li Po's line, Pound's line is

not literally exact but expresses the tone of the whole line, the misery and grief of war. Compare:

huang cheng kong da mo
desolate castle wide desert

I would not take "sky" from Pound's line for "kong," though the character "kong" has the meaning of "sky." In Li Po's line, "kong" means "only" or "nothing but." So the original line can be paraphrased as "Watching on the desolate castle, there is nothing in sight but the wide desert." What choice was Pound to make? He adopted another meaning of "kong"—"sky"—and his adaptation was a lucky error. When we read "kong" as "sky," the line becomes three visual units. What the observer sees is not only the wide desert, but the desolate castle and the sky as well. And the syntactical break here is the best choice for Pound to render the images more striking and more powerful to dramatize a picture of desolation. His treatment is direct and visually concrete. In this way, Pound has come closer in sensibility to the original than a literal rendering ever could.

A line in "South-Folk in Cold Country" also shows his interest in using the syntactical break: "Surprised. Desert turmoil. Sea sun." Strictly speaking, this line was rendered into English according to only the surface meaning of each character. A near-exact paraphrase of this line is "Stormy sands blur the sun over the desert." Did Pound experiment with the syntactical break by using the strong verbs and nouns with Fenollosa's ideas about the Chinese written characters in mind? Or did he intend to substantiate his imagistic aesthetic and prove its efficacy by presenting images as hard and definite as gems? The syntactical break presents us a spotlight effect, but what is the effect of the juxtaposition of images? Pound was probably so fascinated with his innovation of the syntactical break in adaptation that he did not use it as effectively as he did in the line "Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert." Pound's purpose of "presenting an image, or enough images of concrete things arranged to stir the reader" connects with his use of the syntactical break in adaptation (Paige 90). And he used more in his Cantos. Some examples from canto 49 include

Rain; empty river, a voyage
Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight
. . . . . .
Autumn moon; hills rise above lakes
Against sunset.

The effect of the unusual combination of images quoted from canto 49 shows that Pound intended to present the concrete, to juxtapose the images for visual effect, and, mainly, to develop his technique of the syntactical break.

Wai-lim Yip holds that in canto 49, Pound "kept closest to the Chinese syntax. One may perhaps say that with this poem, Pound finally ordains his innovation, not only for himself, but for many others to come" (40). Yip, taking a quatrain of the Chinese poet Liu Zhong-yuan (773-819 A. D.), offers this translation:

A thousand mountains—no bird's flight.
A million paths—no man's trace.
Single boat. Bamboo-leaved cape. An old man.
Fishing alone. Ice-river. Snow.

Even though the syntactical break is an innovation in adaptation, we must understand that this is not the nature of the Chinese language in classical poetry. In classical Chinese poetry, there is an internal relationship between the images to form a coherent whole without any syntactical breaks or punctuation in a line. I do not think that the method of syntactical break can be adopted—especially in the translation of one short poem—merely to present the images in a bald and isolated way. Further, it should be emphasized that the Chinese language, when used in classical poetry, is grammatically condensed into a regular structure of word order: verb-object, subject-predicate, noun-noun, or adjective-noun. A Chinese poet therefore enjoys great freedom from the linguistic bounds of tense, case, and voice to achieve a laconic style by concentrating on words which show only objects or images without regard to the use of connectives, prepositions, or auxiliaries; yet the relationship between words in a line is implied and understood. In translation it is necessary to render the meaning in the structure of English syntax by supplying some of the missing links so as to make the work readable and understandable. To explain this point, I will use the word-for-word translation and the more readable and understandable one of a quatrain by Meng Haoran, a famous Chinese poet of the eighth century. The word-for-word one would read

Move boat moor misty island
Sun dusk traveler grief new
Wilderness vast sky touch tree
River clear moon near man

This example shows a prominent characteristic of the Chinese language in classical Chinese poetry, the frequent omission of the subject to make the poem compact and concrete with active verbs and images; but, how can a reader enjoy the poem like this? Translation aims at conveying a message to the reader; therefore, the proper use of the target language should be more important in translation. Compare the more readable one:

While I moor my boat by a mist-veiled island,
The day leaves, my homesickness arrives.
Far across wilderness, trees touch sky,

In the clear water the moon is close to me.

On the other hand, as for noun-noun or adjective-noun word orders, the syntactical break may be appropriate when the images themselves are isolated ones in a poem. "Autumn Thoughts" by Ma Zhiyuan (1260-1341 A. D.) might serve to illustrate:

Withered vines, old trees, evening crows,
Tiny bridge, sluggish creek, scattered houses,
Ancient roads, westerly wind, a lean horse.
The sun setting, a tired man traveling, far from home.

We need little orientation to notice that a series of isolated but striking images appears before us like close-ups. These visual images dramatize, in their isolation, a gloomy picture of a traveler who seems to have failed in his search of fortune.

Pound was a clever adaptor. He knew what he could get from the original texts he chose for adaptation; he had a definite intention to experiment with and develop his poetic techniques in adaptation and so enrich his own creation. To Pound, his adaptation of classical Chinese poetry was extremely valuable training. Even before Pound came into possession of Fenollosa's notes on classical Chinese poetry in 1913, he tried his hand at adapting H. A. Giles's translations because, as Pound himself said, "I read Giles' history and I wasn't content with the translation. I wanted to know how I could get some Chinese" (Bridson 177). Those poems adapted by Pound include "Liu Ch'e" and "Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord."

In these adaptations, Pound was especially interested in experimenting with the juxtaposition of images. These poems are imagistic according to his principles for Imagism. Regarding his practice in juxtaposing the images, it is useful to compare his adaptation of "Liu Ch'e" with the translation of Giles. Consider Pound's version:

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
Dust drifts over the court-yard,
There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves
Scurry into heaps and lie still,
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:
A wet leaf that clings to the threshold. (*Personae* 108)

Compare Giles's version:

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
With dust the marble courtyard filled,
No footfalls echo on the floor,
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door . . .
For she, my pride, my lovely one, is lost,
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed. (Kenner 196)

Pound's adaptation was based on Giles's translation from the original written by Liu Che (156-87 B.C.), the sixth emperor of the Han Dynasty, in memory of a dead imperial concubine. The first four lines in the original show sadness through aural images, and the last two lines are an abstract description of Liu Che's sad thoughts. Pound succeeded in rendering the original feeling contained in the images in the first four lines, but he provided a new ending in which the dead concubine is compared to "a wet leaf that clings to the threshold." Pound's adaptation changes the original with this skillful ending, which immediately strengthens the intensity of the whole poem. The juxtaposition is Pound's strong point in this poem. The incompleteness of the line "And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them" calls for the response of the last line. The sequence "silk," "dust," "leaves," "wet leaf" helps strip off the layers of memory and perception to reach the essence: only emotion remains.

Hugh Kenner analyzes Pound's "Liu Che" by pointing out that "no wet leaf clings in the Chinese, and there is no indication that Pound supposed one did; he simply knew what his poem needed" (197). But I still have a sense that Pound found something suggestive in the fourth line of Giles's version, "Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door," and borrowed the image to create a new ending. Without pondering Giles's fourth line, Pound might not have provided this new ending.

To conclude, the success of Pound's adaptations is that, firstly, with a creative hand, he skillfully rendered the charm of classical Chinese poems; secondly, he brought home to poetry the essence of classical Chinese poetry and discovered vitality and freshness that were a great stimulus to the revolution in Imagism. There is no doubt that Pound's adaptations, one of his finest accomplishments and recreations of freshness and originality in poetry, read like vivid English poems and reveal his enchantment with the diversity of poetic creation.

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Zora Neale Hurston: Social Advocate

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During her literary career, Zora Neale Hurston's contemporaries criticized her because she "challenge[d] the assimilationist politics of the era by emphasizing the cultural differences of black America" (Hemenway 206). Because she recognized that acculturation endangered the preservation of blacks' rich cultural heritage, Hurston asserted that rather than model their lives after the white cultural norm, blacks should devote their interests to developing their own heritage. She also dismissed those who postulated division within the race based on an individual's similarity to whites. For these reasons, Hurston used her literature to preserve that heritage, to illustrate the problems that existed within the black race, and to advocate social change. The mirror that Hurston placed before the blacks of her lifetime caused her alienation from other black scholars, which led to her designation as a minor literary figure of the 1930's and 1940's. The irony of this situation is that Hurston's ideas epitomize the work of Frantz Fanon, who is recognized today as a noted political analyst. His book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, is hailed as a major contribution to the fields of civil rights, anticolonialism, and black consciousness.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon warns of the repercussions faced by colonies after gaining independence from their mother countries. Fanon asserts that those colonies face poor leadership by the middle class, weak administration by self-proclaimed leaders who gain popularity during the fight for independence, and racial tensions within the state. He posits,

> The national bourgeoisie turns its back more and more on the interior and on the real facts of its undeveloped country, and tends to look toward the former mother country and the foreign capitalists who count on its obligating compliance. As it does not share its profits with the people, and in no way allows them to enjoy any of the dues that are paid to it by the big foreign companies, it will discover the need for a popular leader to whom will fall the dual role of stabilizing the regime and of perpetuating the domination of the bourgeoisie. (165)

After independence, the bourgeoisie finds itself the ruling class in these newly independent states, yet this group also finds itself unable to meet the economic responsibilities of the nation adequately. Fanon postulates that the middle class's "innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and to be a part of the racket" (150). This racket is the practice of lining their own

pockets at the price of the country's lower-class citizens. Fanon asserts, "To them [the bourgeoisie], nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (152). This group also sees no advantage to elevating the lower classes by educating the masses in the same way that the middle class was educated during the colonial period.

This failure of the middle class to elevate lower classes leads the lower classes to seek hope in individual leaders. Yet these leaders "ask the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk on the remembrance of the epoch which led up to independence" (Fanon 169). They use such tactics to turn the attention away from their refusal to increase the strength of the lower classes and to weaken that of the bourgeoisie. After independence these leaders show that their true goal is to "become general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie" (Fanon 166).

According to Fanon, this failure to improve the living conditions for all citizens of these newly independent colonies leads to racial tension within this nation. He posits,

> Everywhere that the national bourgeoisie has failed to break through to the people as a whole, to enlighten them, and to consider all problems in the first place with regard to them . . . we observe a falling back toward old tribal attitudes, and, furious and sick at heart, we perceive that race feeling in its most exacerbated form is triumphing. (158)

Fanon offers the tensions in Africa as evidence of this fact; he refers to the anti-Dahoman and anti-Voltiac troubles of the Ivory Coast, the anti-Nigerian troubles in Ghana, and the anti-Soudanese troubles in Senegal. According to Fanon, this tension begins with separation between the classes, continues through religious tension, and finally leads to tension between white and black.

Because the source of these problems is division between the middle and lower classes, Fanon asserts that the only way to rectify the problems brought on by acculturation is to serve better the needs of the lower classes. He writes, "This is why we must understand that African unity can only be achieved through the upward thrust of the people, under the leadership of the people, that is to say, in defiance of the interests of the bourgeoisie" (164).

Thirty years before the publication of Fanon's text, Hurston wrote about similar problems of acculturation in Jamaica and Haiti as a result of her anthropological studies of this region. Deborah E. McDowell suggests that Hurston's

> unstated aim is identical to Fanon's later formulation: to destroy the white stereotype of black "inculture" not by

> privileging "blackness" as an oppositional category to "whiteness" in culture, but by unequivocally showing the vitality and diversity of nonwhite cultures around the Caribbean and the coastal areas of the South, thereby dispensing completely with "white" as a concept and as a point of reference. (246)

Hurston felt that blacks idealized the white culture and abandoned the richness of their own cultural heritage. She maintains in *Tell My Horse* that "colonies always do imitate the mother country more or less" (*Folklore,* 279). This conclusion led Hurston to acknowledge the acculturation that existed in the black cultures of Jamaica and Haiti. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston writes about the transformation of Jamaican and Haitian cultures because of the influence of England and France. It should not come as a surprise that these insights led Hurston to write "My People, My People!" in 1937 while still in Haiti. In this essay, Hurston outlines the obstacles that hinder black unity (Dubey 154). She reveals her disgust with the black race for its inability to resist the "pitfalls" of acculturation. These pitfalls, asserted by Fanon, are the consequences of independence that lead to the separation of blacks rather than unification. The inability to work together, the ability to put on airs, and the inability to consider the future are all attributes that Hurston associates with the black race in this essay.

In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston shows the reader how the influence of the mother countries of Jamaica and Haiti continued socially as well as economically after independence. Hurston asserts, "Jamaica has its social viewpoints and stratification which influence so seriously its economic direction" (*Folklore,* 279). This influence perpetuated socially is the attitude that mulattoes are superior to blacks because of their white blood; consequently, for Jamaicans, color becomes the primary determinant of social status. As a result, class oppression and color discrimination are dominant themes within *Tell My Horse* (Mikell 223). Hurston begins discussing Jamaican mulattoes' "frantic stampede white-ward to escape from Jamaica's black mass" (*Folklore,* 280). Even the fact that most of these mulattoes are the illegitimate offspring of white fathers does not hinder these individuals' ascendance to the upper class. She tells the reader that "black skin is so utterly condemned that the black mother is not going to be mentioned nor exhibited" (282). She states that "it is the aim of everybody [Jamaicans] to talk English, act English and *look* English" (279). Hurston's emphasis on the word "look" stresses the importance of light skin in this culture; it is this light skin that assures Jamaicans a place as upper-class citizens. It is also this distinction that separates Jamaicans into social classes.

Of the separation within the black race in Haiti, Hurston comments that there existed, before Haiti became an independent state, the separation

between "masters and slaves," but now that Haiti is supposedly ruled by the people, there is a separation between "the wealthy and educated mulattoes and the Haiti of the blacks" (339). The introduction of education for the upper class only as a means of separating these two classes of blacks foreshadows Fanon's work where he admonishes the middle class for its failure to educate the masses (158-59). Hurston also states that when the mulattoes fought for their rights and privileges, they only fought for themselves. She informs the reader that Haitian blacks' fight for freedom was more forceful because these people had to fight both whites and mulattoes (*Folklore*, 339). She states that "their kinfolks, the mulattoes, could see no good for themselves in freedom for the blacks" (339).

Caribbean leaders also perpetuate the separation that exists within the black race. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston discusses Haitian leaders whose "greed and ambition were destroying the nation" (333). This greed and ambition associated with the administration of these Caribbean leaders is synonymous with the administration of the leaders Fanon discusses in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Hurston contends, "Even when they [Haitians] had fought and driven out the white oppressors, oppression did not cease" because these "false prophets shall arrive who will promise you peace and faith, but they are lacking in the device of peace" (331). One such leader she identifies is President Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam: "President Sam, they said, was a cheat and a fraud. He was a man of no honor. He had not the politesse. . . . He was a greedy and detestable criminal" (333). Hurston also states that the people of Haiti became so disgusted with such leadership that one peasant cried, "They say that the white man is coming to rule Haiti again. The black man is so cruel to his own, *let the white man come!*" (337). Such statements reveal the failure of the bourgeoisie and Caribbean leaders to serve the needs of lower-class citizens.

This failure led to a type of separation similar to that Fanon writes about in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In Haiti, this animosity exhibits itself in the form of "enormous and unconscious cruelty" to animals which is attributed to the fact that "no one has ever been tender with them [Haitian peasants]" (*Folklore* 347-48). Fanon also associates the lower classes' reverting to the ways of their ancestors with this separation of classes within the black race. The reversion that Hurston offers her readers in *Tell My Horse* is the practice of voodoo, which is vehemently denied by upper-class Haitians. The practice of voodoo also becomes a religious separation for Haiti, which is supposedly a "Catholic country" (358). This separation of religion reverberates Fanon's theory of racial tensions within colonies.

To Hurston, independence should be based on a genuine respect for one's own culture and not the adopted culture of one's persecutors. Hemenway argues that Hurston "repudiated those psychologically captive

blacks who thought that acquiring degrees and losing black dialect would be marks of intelligence" (206). It seems that Hurston admires those individuals who are able to make that next step toward true independence by devaluing the adopted dominant culture of "mother countries" and accepting one's native culture. Hurston finds hope in the fact that blacks in Jamaica were beginning to value themselves for who they are and not aspiring to be proclaimed white. She states, "The black people of Jamaica are beginning to respect themselves. They are beginning to love their own things like their songs, their Anansi stories and proverbs and dances" (*Folklore,* 282). Of Haiti, Hurston states, "A feeling of nationalism is growing in Haiti among the young. They admire France less and less, and their own native patterns more" (358). Here we see that these two colonies are moving away from the influence of their "mother countries" to acceptance of their native culture. This is what Hurston wanted for all blacks.

Too often Hurston is remembered as the naïve Sweetie Mae Carr of Wallace Thurman's depiction in *Infants of the Spring* because her writings focused on "the folk" rather than on the middle classes. However, careful analysis of her anthropological works, particularly *Tell My Horse*, reveals that Hurston was far from the country bumpkin that other scholars of the Harlem Renaissance would have readers believe. Careful reading of this text reveals the scholarly insight of this writer and provides evidence that Hurston did have her own agenda for this era in American literature, an agenda that sought to uplift blacks not through assimilation but rather through appreciation of their rich cultural heritage.

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A Piece of His Heart: Richard Ford's Essays and Memoirs

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There can be little doubt that Richard Ford, a native of Mississippi and resident of New Orleans since 1989, now ranks as a major figure among American writers of the post-World War II generation, and that his place in the canon of American literature seems secure. He has published five novels: *A Piece of My Heart* (1976), *The Ultimate Good Luck* (1981), *The Sportswriter* (1986), *Wildlife* (1990), and *Independence Day* (1995). Ford first gained widespread critical acclaim for *The Sportswriter*, the story of suburbanite Frank Bascombe's struggle to survive loneliness and great loss. The novel clearly struck a chord with readers and reviewers alike. The *New York Times* referred to *The Sportswriter* as "a devastating chronicle of contemporary alienation" (Kakutani 21), and *Newsweek* described Ford as "one of the best writers of his generation" (Clemons 82). Frank Bascombe's narrative continued in *Independence Day*, the sequel for which Ford, in 1996, won both the Pulitzer Prize and PEN/Faulkner Award (the first novel ever so honored). As its title suggests, that novel is unquestionably American in spirit, capturing the experience of life in America's suburbia (its landscape as well as the fears and dreams of its inhabitants) as few other novels have; yet it derives universal appeal through its deft depiction of one man's meandering journey down life's freeway. In Ford's unique version of the great American road novel, Frank Bascombe's quest for freedom and independence requires him to negotiate a labyrinthian way that is anything but free. This suburban Everyman encounters many twists and turns along his way, not to mention a loopy and confusing network of on-ramps and off-ramps as he enters into or exits from various relationships, all of which force him to pay close attention to the meaningful signs and signals, that is, the right language, that might lead him toward the important human connections that he seeks.

Born on February 16, 1944, Ford (who is also the author of *Rock Springs*, a well-received 1987 volume of short stories, and *Women with Men*, a 1997 collection of three related novellas) is now at the height of his literary powers, with a significant body of work and several important literary honors to his credit. No doubt this work is gaining an ever-widening audience; yet the author and his work remain somewhat elusive to many of his readers. Sam Halpert, after interviewing Ford for an oral biography of Raymond Carver, reported that he had "caught but a mere sighting of the exposed surface of Richard Ford" and that "the massive remainder is kept well submerged" (97). Perhaps the best way to get beneath that surface is by

examining a series of essays and memoirs which Ford has written (over the past twenty years) for various magazines. In these occasional pieces, the author provides details of his family's history and identifies the major literary influences upon his work. Ford's memoirs and essays shed a great deal of light upon his fiction and, when combined, offer a revealing glimpse of his literary journey, truly providing a piece of his heart.

I must first acknowledge, however, that Ford is a writer who resists scrutiny of this type, who especially resists all labels that might be applied to him or to his work, particularly the "Southern writer" label. Only his first novel, *A Piece of My Heart*, is set in the South; and although Ford has maintained a part-time residence in New Orleans for almost ten years, he has spent most of his adult life living outside the South—in very unSouthern places such as Michigan, New Jersey, and Montana, to name but a few. It is safe to say that Ford's near legendary nomadic lifestyle, a lifestyle viewed by some as symbolic of American rootlessness (he has been called America's "most peripatetic fiction writer") contributes to his enigmatic image. I must also acknowledge that Ford's nonfiction writings make clear that he actively resists all attempts to explain his work—or the work of any writer, for that matter—by tracing its literary and biographical origins. Such attempts, he maintains, are ultimately reductive and serve to diminish not only his work but literature in general. In a *Granta* essay called "Where Does Writing Come From?" Ford explains that "anyone who's ever written a novel or a story or a poem and had the occasion later to converse about it with an agitated or merely interested reader knows the pinchy feel that comes when the reader tries to nail the connections *linking* the story to some supposed 'source,' either as a way of illuminating the procedures that transform life to shapely art, or else of just plain diminishing an act of creation to some problem of industrial design" (253). Inquiries of this sort, Ford believes, are, in a way, seeking to "extinguish literature once and for all," their purpose being to "get writing explained and turned into a neat theorem, like a teasing problem in plasma physics, so we can forget about it and get back to watching *Seinfeld*" (250). For Ford, fiction is made up of language which inevitably alters experience, and as he explained to Sam Halpert, he remains committed to the idea of "the primacy of imagination, rather than the importance of prior experience" (166). Far from viewing fiction as an orderly arrangement of characters and events drawn from a writer's own life, Ford sees "stories and novels" as "makeshift things [which] originate in strong, disorderly impulses . . . and proceed in their creation by mischance, faulty memory, distorted understanding, weariness, deceit of almost every imaginable kind, by luck and by the stresses of increasingly inadequate vocabulary and wanting imagination" ("Reading," 65). Thus, according to Ford, "the true connections [between a work of literature and the blank mind of its creator] could never

really be traceable because they exist only in that murky, silent, but fecund interstellar night where impulse, free association, instinct, and error reign" ("Where Does Writing," 252).

Although I agree, for the most part, with Ford's views about the limitations of certain types of literary inquiry, and while I certainly have no desire to diminish in any way the art of a writer whose work I greatly admire, it would nevertheless be absurdly foolish to ignore the obvious value of what Ford himself has chosen to reveal to his readers about his own life history and his attitudes about other writers. For every writer is indebted to the forms and traditions of his predecessors; and the sensibility, if not the work, of every writer derives from his life experience.

Ford's work is best placed in the tradition of the novel of alienation—a tradition with which the author has associated himself since the very beginning of his career. His novels, short stories, and novellas explore issues of human loneliness, isolation, and despair. His characters, typically caught up in the absurd randomness of modern life, experience displacement and alienation. The writers who have served as major influences upon Ford's work clearly have included not only the trio whom the author lionized in his 1983 *Esquire* magazine essay as "The Three Kings" of modern American literature—that eminent fellow Mississippian, William Faulkner, and those most extraordinary members of Gertrude Stein's "Lost Generation," Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald—but also the French Existentialists, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and later practitioners of the novel of alienation such as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Carver, John Cheever, Frederick Exley, and Walker Percy. Ford's recent *New Yorker* tribute to his friend Raymond Carver touches briefly on the issue of literary influence:

> I was almost thirty-four when I met Ray Carver, and knew something about the perils of influence from reading Faulkner and Walker Percy, two writers who so influenced me that I can't read them now. I understood that what can never be imparted through one writer's influence on another is the whole, true complex of forces 'beneath' any story's stylistic surface. ("Good Raymond," 79)

Reviewers so often compared the author's first novel, *A Piece of My Heart*, to Faulkner's work that Ford decided never again to write another novel set in the South. More recently, many subtle similarities between *The Sportswriter*, set in the New Jersey suburbs, and *The Moviegoer*, Percy's masterpiece set in the suburbs of New Orleans, have been noted. When I interviewed Ford in his New Orleans French Quarter townhouse during the summer of 1997, I asked him about the influence which Percy's novel had upon his writing *The Sportswriter*. He readily acknowledged being "quite

consciously influenced," although he was quick to point out that "there were other books that influenced [him] as much that are less obvious" ("Conversation" 613). A great admirer of Percy's work, Ford once wrote in the *National Review* that he would "rather read a sentence written by Walker Percy than a sentence written by anybody else" ("Walker," 558).

Like Faulkner and Percy, Ford has always been an astute observer of contemporary society, and his narratives of alienation invite examination in a cultural context. His works concern the impoverishment of human relationships, as well as the inner emptiness, detachment, and solipsism which characterize so much of life in the dangerous and uncertain world—the secular late-twentieth-century world—which is his milieu. Like few other writers of his generation, Ford powerfully depicts what it feels like to live in such a world. Of course, this is precisely why modern readers respond so readily to Ford's fiction. His works dramatize the breakdown of such cultural institutions as marriage, family, and community, the very institutions which give meaning and purpose to one's life, and his protagonists often typify the rootlessness and nameless longing so pervasive in a highly mobile, present-oriented society in which individuals, having lost a sense of the past, relentlessly pursue their own elusive identities in the here-and-now.

This sense of rootlessness is a feeling which Ford, perhaps, understands even more keenly than most writers today. In a series of memoirs written for *Harper's Magazine*, Ford provides details of his family's history, although he admits in the memoir called "My Mother, In Memory" that he was "forced to piece together" many of those details because, as he says, "We were not a family for whom history had much to offer" (44). A traveler from a family of travelers, Ford learned early on that "Home is finally a variable concept" ("Accommodations," 43). Ford's father, Parker Carrol Ford, was a traveling salesman for the Faultless Starch Company. When Richard was eight years old, Parker suffered a heart attack, and the family moved into the Marion Hotel in Little Rock, Arkansas, which was run by Richard's maternal grandfather, Ben Shelley. As a younger man, Ben had also been a traveler, "a boxer and roustabout" who would later work for the railroad, moving "wherever the railroad would take [him]" ("My Mother in Memory," 45). Growing up in Ben Shelley's hotel, "detached from normal residential lives" ("Accommodations," 42), provided an important formative experience for young Richard Ford, as the author explains in his memoir entitled "Accommodations." Among other things, living in the hotel taught him "a cool two-mindedness: one is both steady and in a sea that passes with tides. Accommodation is what's wanted, a replenished idea of permanence and transience; familiarity overcoming the continual irregularity of things" ("Accommodations," 39). The characters in Ford's fiction are certainly in quest of accommodation. Not only do they desire accommodation in the sense

of achieving a feeling of locatedness, that is, the sense of feeling at home in the world (In *Independence Day*, for example, Frank Bascombe, a realtor, seeks homes for others even as he searches for a "homey connectedness" of his own), but they must also learn to accommodate themselves to life's uncertainties.

Ford learned at an early age to accommodate himself to uncertainty. Life in the Marion Hotel, he says, came with the knowledge that "if my grandfather lost his job . . . we lost it all" ("Accommodations," 43). When Richard Ford was only sixteen, his father had a fatal heart attack. In a way, it might be said that Ford's adult life, the life of the son independent of his father's authority, began at that point. As an adult, Ford has been a traveler whose life has embodied the permanence amid transience that he experienced as a boy. He and his wife Kristina, to whom he has been married for over thirty years, have lived in at least fourteen different states; yet they always seem to return to the deep South where the author spent his youth. For Ford, those early years spent in his grandfather's hotel serve as a metaphor for the permanence and transience that is life itself, a metaphor that expresses Ford's own existentialist world view: "In the hotel there was no center to things, nor was I one. . . . I simply stood alongside. . . . And what I thought about it was this: this is the actual life now, not a stopover, a diversion, or an oddment in time, but the permanent life, the one that will provide history, memory, the one I'll be responsible for in the long run" ("Accommodations," 43).

Living in an age which is absent the religious faith that once served as a centering force, the alienated characters in Ford's fiction also discover that there is "no center to things," and they typically find themselves standing alongside the edge of an emotional abyss, alone and isolated, looking back at an uncontrollable life. Only by accepting some aspects of their predicament as part of the natural human condition and by gaining a sense of solidarity with others can these characters recover themselves and learn to live successful lives. In "Where Does Writing Come From," Ford quotes Wallace Stevens' comment that "in an age of disbelief . . . it is for the poet to supply the satisfactions of belief in his measure and in his style" (255). Like Stevens, Ford looks to art, rather than religion, to provide consolation and redemption in a chaotic time. Ultimately, in Ford's art, affection felt for and received from other human beings may offer the only real satisfaction, the only redemption (albeit a kind of secular redemption) possible for his characters, the only way to survive alienation.

Finally, over and over again Ford's works exhibit the author's belief in the affirmative power of language, its power to console and to heal, to bridge the gap between self and other, as well as his concern for the devaluation of language in the modern world. His fiction demonstrates that while language often fails us, when it succeeds in creating a link between two

human beings on the lonely edge of life, it can serve to reverse feelings of alienation and dislocation. In the last of his memoirs for *Harper's* (its subtitle, "One More Writer's Beginnings," is a nod to fellow Jacksonian Eudora Welty), Ford describes writing as "an existential errand" involving "dark and lonely work" ("First Things First," 76); and he explains that the main goal of writers is "to discover and bring to precious language the most important things they were capable of, and to reveal this to others with the hope that it will commit an effect on them—please them, teach them, console them. Reach them" ("First Things First," 75). In this way, of course, Richard Ford locates and connects with today's readers as they stand on the lonely edge of a new millennium.

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The Web of Music in *Music of the Swamp*

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Sugar Mecklin searches through his past to discover the reason for his present loneliness in *Music of the Swamp*. Sugar's dysfunctional relationship with his alcoholic and suicidal father, Gilbert, is a part of his childhood that controls his adulthood. His inability to form relationships establishes the mood which runs through the entire novel. It is a depressing mood, a mood that is continually reinforced through the references to music. This music of the swamp is a very versatile technique in the novel, and it ties the novel together. Lewis Nordan uses music to create the character of Gilbert Mecklin, to enforce the depressing mood, and to enhance the magical realism, all of which are all a part of Sugar's existence.

From the opening chapter of this novel, Nordan begins to establish the father's character as a part of both the Delta and its famous Blues. In the first scene of *Music of the Swamp*, Nordan introduces music as an essential part of the novel. When Sugar awakes from his dream, "there was Elvis. Until this very morning Sugar Mecklin had never before heard the name of Elvis Presley. And now here he was this Elvis person, in full uh-huh complaint on Sugar's Philco radio, and he seemed truly to be singing about the dream that Sugar Mecklin had just dreamed. Elvis told Sugar *you'll be so lonely you could die*" (4). After hearing these words, "Sugar Mecklin astonished his father at the breakfast table by grabbing him suddenly and holding onto him for all he was worth and almost actually saying, pleading, Don't ever leave me, Daddy, I'll be so lonely I will die" (5). This yearning of Sugar to find his father's love is shown through a bleak Elvis Presley song which grounds both Sugar and his father in loneliness and death. Sugar's desire to find his father's love is a difficult quest. The impossiblity of conquering the quest is shown through Gilbert's response to Sugar in which he "finally muttered, 'Good luck on your travels through life,' and then went out to the garage to get paint buckets and brushes and dropcloths and a stepladder to paint the bathroom, which had needed painting for a long time, probably" (5). With this initiation, the reader is almost thrown into the dysfunctional family as well as the melancholy of the Delta. Sugar continues to sink into this loneliness throughout his life.

To establish the character of Gilbert through the use of music, his pain and his bond with music must also be established. As the reader travels further into the story, the pain felt by Gilbert Mecklin can be seen.

> Bessie Smith was on the phonograph, so that meant that Sugar Mecklin's daddy was already drunk. Sugar Mecklin's

> daddy called his Bessie Smith records his wrist-cutting music. It was Bessie Smith singing a long time ago when Gilbert Mecklin stuck the ice pick in his chest. *my mama says I'm reckless* Bessie Smith had sung that day, and he knew just what she meant too, he was reckless too. *my daddy says I'm wild* Bessie Smith sang. Nobody knew better than Gilbert Mecklin what it meant to be reckless and wild. Nobody in this world. *I ain't good looking* she sang *but I'm sombody's angel child* Bessie Smith had been singing that day before Sugar Mecklin was even born. In a way that was the good old days, Gilbert Mecklin remembered them fondly, that day long time ago when he had let the record play to its end and then jammed an ice pick straight into his breast bone. (17-18)

In this last statement, Nordan tells of the depression that controls Gilbert Mecklin and ultimately overpowers Sugar's childhood. Sugar is haunted by his father's past and his father's inability to show affection. Robert Phillips perceptively concludes that the novel is about "[Sugar's] father's pain, the pain that is attendant in love" (421). This pain is most apparent in the symbolic ice pick. Sugar knows the secrets held by the pick and even more by Bessie Smith's Blues.

Nordan knows to truly give the reader the whole story, the main character must be able to be understood. For the reader to know Sugar, the reader has to learn about Sugar's relationship with his father and about Gilbert the individual. Music is a part of Sugar's father and he "listened to it. He had to. Nobody else knew how to listen to it" (19). To understand why Sugar is who he is, we first need to see that his father, Gilbert, lives the Delta Blues. Gilbert wants us to "listen to that clear note rise up from the muddy waters of the Delta!" (19). Music creates Gilbert and in the end is part of what creates Sugar. Music surrounds Sugar first through his father, and secondly through other characters such as Dixie, whose influence will be discussed later. Nordan uses a parental figure to show the importance of music in the Delta and in the novel.

When the character of Gilbert Mecklin is established with his musical element, the mood is apparent as the string which ties this novel together. As "the music played and Bessie Smith sang on," the music tells that "the Delta was bad, bad" (21). Through the music, Nordan shows the reader a mood of depression and despair by revealing "you couldn't resist [the music] even if you tried" (21). Its "*a-whispering come back to me*" (21) overpowers Sugar and his desire to escape the web of the Delta. James Nicosia explains that one of the "primary Southern traditions[,] a preoccupation with guilt and a preoccupation so intense as occasionally to approach the obsessive" (74), is

a large part of the mood of despair in this novel. The guilt is established through the swamp created in the novel. Gilbert is obsessed with the music that comes from the swamp and allows the music, which is the Blues, to dominate his life. Gilbert hears the swamp in his Delta Blues. "On the phonograph now there was a trombone. It started way down low, and it could have been the voice of a Texas longhorn cow at first, or an alligator in a swamp quartet singing bass, it was so low" (19). Gilbert is the only one who can hear the truth of the music, and now he gives this gift to his son. The music tells of humanity's loneliness.

It becomes clear throughout the story that music has a strong connection to the sad mood it creates. At times in the novel, the reader cannot separate the two. One example is when Sugar and Sweet come into the room while Gilbert is listening to some Blues: "Just one chord, and then her strong sad voice and then another chord, like punctuation" (23). The music speaks of the hopelessness that dominates Sugar and of which he is so aware as an adult looking back on his youth. Robert Gingher, while discussing Nordan's humor, explains that "love and death seem oddly and inexorably hinged," and through examining music and mood, one can see the same unwavering bond. Nordan uses the Blues and the singer Bessie Smith to show that music can produce the mood and the mood can produce music. In the scene where Bessie sings her Delta Blues, the reader hears "wailing now, weeping in song. . . . The muted trumpet was back and it was crying like a baby" (25). Music develops the crying and wailing which convey the melancholy mood of the story. The depressing mood of the novel is reinforced by Gilbert's statement that "the Delta is filled up with death" (53). Nordan uses music also to strengthen the magical realism obvious in this novel. From the first scene of the story, the reader hears the mice singing and the mermaid "singing directly to him as she combed her long hair with a comb the color of bone" (4). By opening the novel with such a magical scene, Nordan lets the reader know from the start to be ready for anything. Robert Gingher declares, "In Nordan's stories and novels, both in real roots and imaginative impact, eventually the magical merges with the credible." Sugar shows the reader from the start that he is not sure what part of his recollection of the past is true and what is made up. Robert Gingher explains Magic Realism as expanding "the genuine mystery and depth of what we casually, rationally, and reductively call 'reality.'" Sugar creates a realistic sense of how the imagination generates its own mystical apparitions to recreate a past that explains why the present is the way it is.

Music and its connection to magical realism is made most evident in an early outdoor baptism in which a cow is in the water with the choir.

> Just then the brown-and-white cow decided it was time to leave the water and, as the choir sang a final song—oh I'm

> tired and so weary but I must travel on—the cow, as if it had been waiting for just this moment in the music, opened its amazing and sweet old cow-mouth and hollered one long heartbreaking bellow and moan, one incredible tenor note in perfect tune and time with the rest of the choir, as if to impart some message about hope, or maybe hopelessness and loneliness. (9)

The cow tells Sugar of the truth just as the longhorn told Gilbert the truth, and they both tell humanity of the true solitude of life. This passage creates an inconceivable scene for the logical mind to believe, yet when placed within the entirety of the book, we see that Sugar must create this scene, just as he must create the one with the singing mice to attempt to understand his undesirable circumstances and dysfunctional life. James Nicosia explains that Sugar "realizes that he needs these colorings in order to gain any understanding of his life thus far" (71). Robert Gingher also says, "Reality is magical if we can only perceive it in its richness and depth." The above comments, when looked at together, give the reader a deeper knowledge of Sugar's conscious effort to change his past. Sugar, as the narrator, is a man looking back to and shaping his childhood.

Nordan uses this musical magical realism to establish the loneliness felt by Sugar Mecklin. Robert Gingher reveals that "Nordan's magical vision is a way of revealing and dealing with the inevitable loneliness at the core, the deprivation, despair, and guilt that riddle human existence." So the magical realism in this novel ties in with the mood developed throughout. Music is a perfect way to tie mood and magic together. One of the scenes where they are brought together is in the chapter "Cabbage Opera." Sugar Mecklin relates Dixie to his magical childhood through the following episode:

> I was awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of Dixie Dawn's sweet pure angelic voice in song. I said that beneath the bright stars her voice was a crisp spirit, a lyrical hopeful pause in the terrible drama of our narrow lives. I said—and even as I invented this I believed it—I said that in the foreign-language music of her song my ears and heart opened up to a world larger and more generous. (45-46)

This passage gives the reader both magic and music. In this Nordan novel, without one, the other is not completely expressed. Through the music, we can also see the mood of despair shared by Sugar and the other characters. Dixie Dawn's voice is an important part of Sugar's imagination and re-creation of his past. He cannot forget the "angelic voice." It is so strong and pure that it takes him from his sleep and moves him to open his heart to the world. This music for a moment takes him away from the despair of the

Delta. Through closer reading of the passage, we can see the magic is only the imagination of Sugar; Sugar is still stuck in the melancholy of his life.

Nordan not only uses the Blues to create a mood of despair, but he also uses opera music to continue this mood. Nordan's first reference to opera music is the chapter title "Cabbage Opera," which hints at what is to come. Dixie Dawn is the voice of opera for Sugar. She "began to sing. It was music of some operatic sort, some aria I suppose, clear and foreign and completely surprising" (32). Sugar is surprised by the song because it does not sound like his father's music, the Delta Blues of the common person. Opera carries the same despondency, but suggests a larger-than-life tragedy. Dixie Dawn is the voice of this Delta town's tragic existence. As an earlier passage indicates, Dixie Dawn's voice is the hope "in the terrible drama" of Sugar's and the novel's reality, but Nordan's choice of Dixie Dawn as this voice shows the certain hopelessness of the novel. Dixie "was overweight and wore heavy makeup and had a pathetically angelic look about her" (31). Sugar even knew that Dixie Dawn actually showed no hope, and he "grieved for Dixie Dawn and though she sang better than anyone [he] had ever known, [he] knew that she would get no closer to the Metropolitan Opera than a gas pump and a plate of cheese sandwiches at the end of a cotton row" (32). Sugar saw the abuse Dixie Dawn endured from her father and understood his own pain. Sugar saw Dixie's father "strike Dixie Dawn over the head with the side of the hoe" (33). Dixie Dawn's opera singing angers her father, and Nordan uses this opera to enforce the mood of despair through Dixie Dawn and ultimately through Sugar.

By using music in this novel, Nordan creates a character whom the reader can understand and relate to, a mood of hopelessness which endures to the last page of the novel, and magic through the reality of Sugar's life and even more through his desire to change his childhood. To truly know the character of Sugar, the reader must know Gilbert and the relationship shared between this father and son because Sugar is in many respects a reincarnation of Gilbert. Nordan develops Gilbert by showing his relationship to music and how the Delta Blues were a part of him. *Music of the Swamp* is a novel full of humor shown through the singing mice, singing mermaid, singing cow, wrist-cutting Blues, and the heart-wrenching opera that is sung by a "white trash" girl named Dixie Dawn. Nordan uses music to continue the depression that is so prevalent in the story. The Delta Blues are an easy choice and a way to show the despair of the book through music, but Nordan also chooses to use opera to show the melancholy of Sugar's life. Music is manipulated to portray the magical realism of this novel as well as to merge with the magic of the story. From the very beginning when "Sugar heard the high soothing music of the swamp" (6) to the end with "the music of the odd birds in flight" (190), Nordan creates a string of musical beauty.

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"Exploit You to Bits and Pieces": David Helfgott, *Shine*, and the Limits of Film Biography

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In 1996 the world was introduced to the extraordinary phenomenon of Australian pianist David Helfgott through the film *Shine*. Written by Jan Sardi and directed by Scott Hicks, *Shine* traces the rise, fall, and rebirth of Helfgott's life and career from his beginnings as a musical child prodigy, through his descent into madness as a youth at the hands of an abusive father, and finally to his triumphal re-emergence some fifteen years later on the concert stage as a lovably eccentric genius. Through *Shine*, audiences the world over were exposed to and delighted by this remarkable human being, falling in love with his childlike sweetness, his tendency to dispense hugs to everyone, including complete strangers, and his trademark stream-of-consciousness chatter. Introduced at the 69th Annual Academy Awards by presenter Glenn Close as a "true story" before an audience of over one billion viewers, *Shine* went on to win Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Actor of 1996. Highlights of the evening were Helfgott's solo piano performance, which earned him a standing ovation, and Geoffrey Rush's emotional acceptance speech for his brilliant portrayal of the now-famed pianist. Even before the Oscar ceremony, Helfgott had embarked on a sold-out year-long world concert tour and his wife Gillian had published an international bestseller with her memoir *Love You to Bits and Pieces: Life With David Helfgott*. Caught up in the euphoria of the film's moving reclamation of damaged genius, few critics and even fewer filmgoers suspected that *Shine* strikes a false note, presenting fiction as fact and deliberately misleading an unsuspecting public.

With the 1998 publication of *Out of Tune: David Helfgott and the Myth of* Shine, written by David's older sister Margaret Helfgott, Scott Hicks' claims to a decade of "meticulous research," and indeed the film's accuracy and integrity, were seriously called into question. Hicks' brilliantly-acted, multi-award-winning film appears to be an extreme example of revisionist film biography. Touted almost unanimously in the world press, as well as in dozens of interviews with its director, as a "true story," *Shine* portrays piano virtuoso David Helfgott as a tortured young genius driven to a complete breakdown by a combination of a monstrous father's abuse and the supposed terrors of mastering Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto (the "Rach 3") but ultimately rescued by the love of one good woman, his present wife, Gillian. If Margaret Helfgott's thoroughly researched and highly persuasive book is

to be believed, *Shine* is not only a highly fictionalized account but a deliberately slanderous one as well.

By far the aspect of the film most disturbing to the Helfgott family is the depiction of David's father, Peter. To their minds, and the minds of many who knew him, the film "is a terrible misrepresentation of a generous and decent man, who was both loving and much loved" (Helfgott 3). In virtually every review of *Shine*, Peter was erroneously described as "a Holocaust survivor" or "a concentration camp survivor," whereas in fact the Polish-Jewish Peter immigrated to Australia in 1933, six years prior to World War II. This aspect of his past, as depicted in the film, supposedly gives rise to his cruel obsession over keeping his family together at all costs. What *is* true is that Peter lost all his immediate family to the death camps, and his wife Rachel lost her two sisters in like manner. Played with intense passion by the superb Armin Mueller-Stahl, *Shine's* Peter is a massively conflicted man, capable of great love for his son as well as great cruelty toward him. When violinist Isaac Stern offers the fourteen-year-old David the chance to study in America, Peter vehemently refuses his musically gifted son this golden opportunity. And when the nineteen-year-old David defies his father who opposes David's going to London to study at the world-renowned Royal College of Music, Peter gives him a savage beating, proclaiming, "You will never be anybody's son. . . . You will be punished forever!" Henceforth, Peter severs all ties with David, burning his press clippings and returning his letters from London unopened.

Although a handful of critics could see the complexity and pathos of Peter's character, most dismissed him in one-dimensional taglines, such as "cruel," "threatening," "violent" (qtd. in Helfgott 3), "destructive," "domineering" (Maurer 1), "oppressive" (Mohl 1), "overbearing, over-protective" (Jones 1), "crushing" (Gliatto 1), "a miserable, tyrannical dreamer" (Keogh 1), "vigilant dictator" (Guthman 1), and "destructive Daddy Dearest" (Byerley 1). Particularly distressing to the Helfgott family, given their history of personal loss, were critics' descriptions of Peter as "Gestapolike," "Fuhrerlike," and "slightly less lovable than Himmler" (qtd. in Helfgott 3). Clearly, Peter Helfgott stands condemned as the villain of *Shine* who permanently damaged his son.

The reality would appear to be quite different. As to David's having been denied the opportunity to study in America, Isaac Stern has strongly denied ever having made a firm offer to David and is reportedly "furious" over *Shine*'s misrepresentation of the incident (Helfgott 61). Not only had the teenage David exaggerated this event, but he had even convinced himself that he had been invited to live in Stern's home (Helfgott 62). Further, Margaret Helfgott asserts that at about twelve or thirteen, David underwent a personality change, becoming obsessed with germs and exhibiting physical

cruelty toward "his beloved animals" (56). Not only this, but at fourteen David was unable to tie his own shoes or use a knife and fork. Clearly, such a boy was not ready to be sent halfway around the world without parental supervision, even if Peter had been able to afford the venture. Moreover, Margaret denies that there were ever any beatings or threats of violence in the Helfgott household. Nor did Peter throw David out of the house, burn his press clippings—these are still in existence and in David's possession—or return David's letters. The many letters purportedly expressing love and affection between father and son are held in copyright by David's wife Gillian, who has threatened legal action against the Helfgott family should they be published. After David collapses in London and returns to Australia, *Shine* has Peter turning his back on the desperate boy, whereas in fact David immediately moved back home with his family. Peter Helfgott reportedly devoted the last five years of his life to taking care of his disturbed adult child. After the release of *Shine*, numerous friends and acquaintances contacted the Helfgott family to express their anger and dismay over the film's treatment of Peter. Their collective views were well expressed by Frank Arndt, called Ben Rosen in the film, David's first piano teacher whom the cinematic Peter treats with contempt. Arndt expressed himself "extremely upset" over the film's depiction of Peter, adding, "He was one of the most gentle, nicest, and charming men I have ever come across" (qtd. in Helfgott 50).

But laudatory testimony to the contrary, let us say, for the sake of argument, that *Shine*'s portrait of Peter Helfgott is a true one—that he did in fact abuse his son both physically and psychologically. Could such abuse cause the type of mental breakdown, with its subsequent attendant physiological and emotional manifestations, that is portrayed in the film? What *Shine* does not not tell us is that David Helfgott "has been diagnosed as suffering from schizo-affective disorder, a form of psychosis related to schizophrenia" (Helfgott 234). Not only this, but the film fails to reveal the mental illnesses of Peter's sister and aunt—illnesses similar to David's that resulted in the institutionalization of both women, for schizo-affective disorder is genetically influenced, "exist[ing] independently of [the sufferer's] environment" (Helfgott 235). "Such biological disorders . . . commonly begin to manifest themselves in adolescence and then gradually develop, as happened in David's case" (Helfgott 235).

So inaccurate and harmful is the film's portrayal of the causes of David's mental disorder that a number of medical organizations—among them the World Schizophrenia Fellowship, the Schizophrenic Association of Australia, and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill—as well as numerous independent physicians—have written letters, articles, and special briefings refuting *Shine's* portrayal of mental illness (Helfgott 237). In his paper

"Schizophrenia, Schizo-affective Disorders and *Shine*," Dr. Leonard Frank's comments represent the general view of the medical establishment:

> A film, of course, is never reality. But Geoffrey Rush's presentation of David Helfgott in *Shine* looks a lot like a disorganized presentation of schizophrenia. The character in the film has the typical jumbled thoughts, wildly inappropriate emotional responses, and lack of social judgment characteristic of the disorder. Fortunately for him, it all translates into a lovable zaniness that everyone finds appealing. . . . It is a pity that the film chooses to seek out a villain in David Helfgott's father as the cause of the disorder. . . . It seems quite clear that [the cause of schizophrenia] is not the result of faulty upbringing. To blame a family for the illness is to double their pain. Not only must they bear the loss of their often promising and delightful children to this merciless illness, but they stand accused by others and by themselves of being the cause of the catastrophe. (qtd. in Helfgott 239-40)

Other manifestations of schizo-affective disorder are manic depression and paranoid delusions of persecution, which helps explain David's belief that his father caused his illness. One reviewer has noted that *Shine* "is really less about music than about healing the scars of childhood" (Hopp 478-79). Or, as stated less eloquently by Geoffrey Rush, who portrays the adult David, "The film isn't about a guy playing the piano; it's about how easily you can f— up your kids" (qtd. in Helfgott 201). However, reviewers and actors cannot be faulted for passing on the kinds of untruths promulgated by *Shine*'s makers. Why did Sardi and Hicks create such myths when they easily could have interviewed doctors or even the Helfgott family about David's illness? The answer seems obvious: an aberrant gene is not as cinematically compelling as is a father viciously beating his cowering son. Or as Peter Rainer of the *New York Times* has noted, "*Shine* blames Peter Helfgott because physiology doesn't play as well as Freud" (qtd. in Helfgott 243).

Another myth of *Shine* culminates in the film's most dramatic scene, an immensely effective montage sequence in which the young David, wild-haired and sweating profusely, triumphs in his magnificent performance of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto, only to collapse spectacularly on the Royal College of Music concert stage. To this day, the real David's 1969 performance is remembered by those who were there with excitement and awe. But the stage collapse, as well as the succeeding scene in which David is given electro-shock therapy, is entirely fictional. The mundane reality of what really happened—David took his bows, then went home, "threw some clothes into a bag and set off for the launderette" (Helfgott 119)—justifies

Hicks' use of dramatic license in this case. The process of David's mental deterioration in London took some four years and is fairly skillfully if not entirely accurately encapsulated in the middle section of the film. What is ridiculous in this segment, however, is *Shine*'s treatment of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto. Played by ninety-one-year-old Sir John Gielgud, Cecil Parker, David's music tutor at the Royal College of music, exclaims, "No one's ever been mad enough to attempt the 'Rach 3,'" to which David replies, "Am I mad enough, Professor? Am I?" It seems that "the infamous 'Rach 3' . . . in the film's slightly overheated rhetoric, crushes pianists beneath its technical demands and that (as Hicks presents it) helped drive Helfgott mad" (Kosman 1). This is patent nonsense, as anyone who knows classical music can judge. Gielgud seems particularly hammy when delivering such lines as "Don't you just love those big fat chords" and "the piano is a monster; tame it or it will swallow you whole." Such dotty histrionics are unworthy of any professor of music, let alone the late, renowned Cyril Smith, upon whom Gielgud's character is based. Furthermore, the film implies that David first tackled the "Rach 3" in London, an experience that precipitated his breakdown, whereas in fact David had performed the same piece at numerous concerts in the five years prior to matriculating at the RCM.

I have touched on a handful of the myths and distortions created by *Shine*. There are numerous others: for example, the elimination of David's first wife, Claire, so as to focus on Gillian in the role of first love and savior, the failure to mention David's years of alcohol and valium abuse in London, which would have exacerbated his deteriorating mental condition—this would have detracted from Peter's baleful influence on David in the film—and David's homosexual encounters with numerous strangers, also while in London, which would have made him seem less innocent to certain segments of the moviegoing public. Scott Hicks' failure to seriously interview any family members during the ten years he spent researching David Helfgott's life, as well as his refusal to allow them to see the script, despite their repeated requests, leads one to suspect that his concerns lay more with creating an appealing, marketable myth than with presenting a reasonably accurate portrayal of a remarkable man's life. Though beautifully filmed and brilliantly acted, *Shine* far exceeds the bounds of biographic dramatic license by deliberately distorting the facts and by slandering an apparently good man in order to create a plausible villain to oppose and maim its hero. The dishonest result is a triumph-of-the-spirit film that became the "feel good" movie of the year.

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The Interplay of Past and Present in Margaret Drabble's *The Witch of Exmoor*

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Many years ago, I dedicated a chapter of my dissertation to a discussion of the novels of Margaret Drabble. I began that chapter with the following sentence: "Margaret Drabble's novels all ask the same pertinent question: How can anyone raised on Bunyan structure a satisfying life around moral values which have positive relevance in the world in which we are all now living?" (189-90). From her first novel, *A Summer Bird Cage*, which dealt with a young woman's attempts to learn who she really is as an individual as she struggles with her emerging sexuality, through her marvelous trilogy of novels exploring the 1980's, *The Radiant Way*, *A Natural Curiosity*, and *The Gates of Ivory*, Drabble has expanded her fictional explorations of the moral self into the adult world of fully actualized women living in Margaret Thatcher's London.

From the beginning, Drabble's novels have assumed a universality of time and a cultural continuum with continued relevance to the present. The *Bible* is ever-present in *A Summer Bird Cage* as is the copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost* which Sarah, the protagonist, carries with her to parties to protect her virtue (91). With a mass murderer and several severed heads, *The Radiant Way* (1987) explores the Robert Graves version of the Perseus/Medusa myth with Margaret Thatcher cast in the role of Perseus. *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) follows the same characters into the post-industrial, post-colonial world of mid 1980's Britain with the ancient Celts and their religion never far from the center of action so that they can provide a running commentary on the evolutionary state of contemporary civilization and culture. *The Gates of Ivory* (1992) completes her trilogy by taking Drabble's characters into the killing fields of Pol Pot's Cambodia, where Drabble contrasts the reality of trying to live a moral life with the reality of the amoral present. In the novel, the myth—that the distinction between right and wrong, between moral and immoral activity, is as clear as the distinction between black and white—disappears as the world is shown to be a place governed not by a god, but by people with a pornographic lust for power and profit. Thus, one of the major purposes of that novel is to debunk the myth of simplicity, to show it as "superimposed blindness, an exclusion of truth" (421). Each of Drabble's many novels has advanced her investigation of contemporary morality in clearly visible, satisfying increments. It was with great expectation then that many readers, I among them, opened Drabble's latest novel, *The Witch of Exmoor*.

Though I do not share their response, many of the novel's reviewers are, to say the least, disappointed. In an article entitled "Drabble on the Skids," the *Toronto Sun's* Heather Mallick begins her review by saying, "I am so sad and sorry to report that Margaret Drabble, once one of the best novelists on earth, is past her best," and she ends her review with the comment that *The Witch of Exmoor* "doesn't approach the greatness of which Drabble is capable. This is nothing less than tragic." Writing for the *New York Times*, James Wood complains that "Drabble's wild story has no purchase, because it has no actual people in it," and it is so flawed that it "seems to represent a genuine confusion about how to write fiction at the end of the century." Frances Stead Sellers, reviewing the novel for the *Washington Post*, seems to enjoy the novel but ends her review with the comment that *The Witch of Exmoor* feels "more like an intellectual exercise" than a novel—and, like James Wood, she complains of Drabble's "irritatingly imperious narrative voice." This criticism is joined by the Australian critic Jayne Margetts, who complains that the novel requires "large amounts of concentration" and sails "dangerously close to being pedantic." Few critics are not put off by Drabble's playing of intellectual games. An exception is Kyrie O'Connor, whose review in the *Hartford Courant* celebrates the novel as an example of Drabble's mastery of literary gamesmanship. Even Margaret Drabble admitted to Nicholas Basbanes that *The Witch of Exmoor* is an example of the type of socially relevant novel she likes to write, but that it is not necessarily the type of novel that she herself would choose to read. Instead, she argues, it is a type of fable full of characters who seem little more than caricatures to lend them universality. It is a novel, satirical in its approach, which is designed to investigate the slowness of cultural change in what superficially is a rapidly changing world (Basbanes).

The novel begins in a familiar Drabble setting, at the dinner table. The extended Palmer family, minus Frieda Palmer, the family matriarch, have gathered in the comfort of Patsy and Daniel Palmer's middle class home to talk about their mother, Frieda, an eccentric scholar who is the source of the family's wealth. While her children are concerned that she may be playing games with her will, they are not so concerned that they cannot themselves play a parlor game called "The Vale of Ignorance." The game, which is based on Harvard professor John Rawls's theory of justice, requires the players to investigate the basic principles of social justice by forgetting their present social position as they design a society that they would be willing to live in without knowing in advance what social position they would have in the new society (4, 79). This game, of course, introduces social justice as one of the themes of the novel, but upstairs the grandchildren are enthralled by another game which they find "frightening, exciting, wicked and seductive" (13). The children call this game the "Power Game" and although the action of the game

is controlled by Patsy and Daniel's son Ben, the rules here are also fluid and develop as the game proceeds. So the house becomes a microcosm of our world where the simple will to power competes with the perhaps impossible task of establishing a stable, just society.

As the story develops, Frieda sells the family home to purchase a derelict hotel adjoining Exmoor National Park and overlooking the Bristol Channel in order to remove herself from society so that, in her retirement, she can write her memoirs. Her children are concerned, so Daniel, Patsy and Ben visit Frieda on their vacation in Somerset where Frieda, though clearly eccentric—she greets them wearing an expensive midnight-blue designer ball gown which she had purchased to wear once at a state function in Sweden—reveals herself to be clearly in control of herself and capable of continually upstaging the family. Late in the novel, Frieda disappears after a visit from a young man, Will Paine, who had worked in her daughter Patsy's home. Will, a convicted drug dealer who is the British-born son of a black Jamaican immigrant mother and a white English father, disappears at the same time as Frieda and is the chief suspect in the possible murder-mystery which ensues. At the end of the novel, we learn there has been no murder, only an accident picking mushrooms on the steep bank of the Bristol Channel, which caused Frieda's body to be washed out to sea. In her will, Frieda has left the bulk of her estate to her grandson Ben, but Ben is not fortunate in receiving this legacy. Despite Frieda's best intentions, Ben's new-found wealth, the pressure his parents have put on him to excel, and his as-yet-undefined personality have combined with his tendency to abuse drugs to make him attempt suicide and force his parents to seek professional help for him.

That is the story, as it is told by an extremely intrusive narrator, more intrusive and annoying than Drabble's usually intrusive narrators. This narrator is frequently very judgmental. But, too frequently, in a kind of power game with the reader, after a long description of a person or event, the narrator irritatingly withholds information while overtly inviting the reader to speculate on the identity of the individual or the actuality of the event based only on the narrator's partial description. For example, when Lily McNab, Ben's psychotherapist, is introduced on page 222, her description is put off for eight pages while Rosemary Palmer, who suspects she has health problems, squabbles with her husband Nathan Herz, who considers suicide after making a financial blunder. Then, on page 230 the narrator addresses the reader directly:

> Now we may return to Lily McNab. You remember the name of Lily McNab, child psychotherapist? We have not yet been introduced. We have several possibilities with Ms McNab. Is she a scholarly grey-haired owl-spectacled Scot

> with an Edinburgh accent? An imported American from New York? A Belsize Park matron who walks regularly upon the Heath with a small dog? A lipsticked lesbian from Leeds? She could be any of these characters. We had better take care, in our choice of attributes for Ms McNab, for . . . we do not wish to be sued for libel if Lily McNab should fail. (230)

This introduction, which is typical of the way characters and events are introduced in the novel, is followed by the narrator taking time for a short editorial criticizing the British health plan for not subsidizing the training of psychotherapists. Though this introduction of Dr. McNab clearly bridges the gap between the fictional world of the novel and the real world of the reader, the style is deliberately annoying, so annoying that Heather Mallick cited this passage in her review with only the angry comment "You tell us, Drabble; you're the novelist." But Drabble has always used her novels as fictional laboratories to test the viability of proposed reforms in our social system based on the theory that a change which does not ring true in a fictional world has no chance of being actualized in the real world, while a change which does work out in a realistic fiction has, at least, the possibility of actualization.

Though it is obvious to nearly everyone that the fictional world of the novel is a world constructed by a human imagination, it is less obvious that the real world we live in is also, to a great extent, of human manufacture. It is an historical construct in which the past influences the present just as much as the present attempts to rewrite the past in its own image—while at the same time doing its best to shape the future into something better than itself. "Time is everywhere linking everything," writes the namesake of Albert Wendt's novel *Ola* ["Ola" is the Samoan word for "life" (14)]. "To alter it in one place is to change the whole of it. There is no time past or time future. Only an ever-moving present" (307). And that present is a live interface with both the past and the future of the cultural continuum. For this reason, at one point in *The Witch of Exmoor*, Frieda comments, "I must read the past because I cannot see the future" (117), and there is a lot of the past to read, for Drabble fills the novel with the cultural history that has shaped it. More subtle and therefore more significant than the intrusive narrator, the interplay of past and future pervades and controls every aspect of the novel, including the intrusive narrator. Everything has a cultural context; nothing can be understood unless its context is also understood.

Context is everywhere in *The Witch of Exmoor*. Chapter one ends with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (23) while chapter two replays scenes from Shakespeare's play as Frieda serves hot water, rock-like, no-meat burgers, and years-out-of-date frozen peas to her children who are plotting to take control of her wealth [just as Timon serves warm water and

stones to his gold-grubbing guests (3.6.84)]. Then, like Timon, Frieda retreats to her cave near the sea, the cavernous old house on Exmoor's smugglers' coast (40-43). Later, Frieda plays the role of Lady Macbeth to her Guyanese son-in-law David's ambition (51). And, when Frieda works on her memoirs, she discovers in herself the powers of the witch of Endor to raise ghosts out of the past to terrify the living (66). Even the game, the "Vale of Ignorance," cannot be played without reference to Bernard Shaw and More's *Utopia* (46). The "Elgin Marbles" and their history, we find, still have the power to distract David (7), and he cannot think of his connection to his family's past—his ancestors were Guyanese sugar barons—without reference to the entire history of British colonial practice beginning with Sir Walter Raleigh's comment that Guyana was "[a] country that hath yet her maidenhead" (56). Guyana itself cannot be separated from Jim Jones and the events that occurred that fateful day in Jonestown (216) just as it cannot be separated from its fictional existence in the novels of Wilson Harris (214-17). Frieda cannot collect seafood for her dinner without being reminded of the drowned pilot in Virgil's *Aeneid* (83) while Nathan Herz cannot characterize England under the conservatives, a country which he believes has chosen materialism over faith in God, without reference to *Ecclesiastes* 12:5 which advises, "Do good to a humble man, / give nothing to a godless one. / Refuse him bread, do not give him any, / it might make him stronger than you are" (189).

Thus, the past informs the present of the novel just as the old story of Lorna Doone (85), the memories of the unidentified cat-like "Beast of Exmoor" that savaged the region's sheep in the 1970's (85-86), the witch-like formation in the cave at Wookey Hole with its accompanying Cave of Gloom (92-95), and the "dinosaur backbone of the clapper bridge at Tarr Steps and the smugglers of old" (97-98) have shaped the tourist industry of present day Exmoor. Dickens (220), Wordsworth (260), and Turner (226) haunt our cultural imagination just as the detritus of Corinth, the "Egyptian sphinx-lions," the "caskets and chalices," and the "ziggurats and phalluses" of the ancient world haunt the halls of that temple of consumerism, Selfridge's Department store (226-27). Olduvai Gorge and *homo australopithicus* live on in our memories (214). St. Paul's looms across the water and Nathan can still see Ben Jonson drinking rounds with Shakespeare in the local pub (126). Stonehenge lives on, not only in our collective memory but also in contemporary partisan politics, and knowledge frees the meaning of Icelandic runes just as passwords connect us with e-mail (243-44). Long-gone Vikings figure in Frieda's present (204), and, by the way, there is no actual witch in *The Witch of Exmoor*, only the historical association of the stone "witch's circles" which are still in use in Exmoor today (Morgan). This is the association which unconsciously inspires Rosemary to call Frieda the "Witch

of Exmoor," a term of derision tinged with humor which spreads among the siblings (9).

In *The Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble's characters, no matter how ill-defined or cartoonish they may appear, have an active interest in rewriting the past: it is their way of getting some control over the present. When Frieda tells her grandson Ben about a box of old hand-carved animals he has found, she rewrites history by telling him that her father carved them for her when she was injured as a child while playing in a mill (107). Missing from her fairy tale account is what actually happened: the now dead sister, Hilda, who had sent Frieda into danger to investigate certain "scufflings" and "vanishings" heard in the mill and the fact that her sister had run off in fear, leaving her to limp home with a badly gashed leg (115-16), because Frieda did not want to discuss her relationship to her sister or her role in her sister's suicide (248-49). Later, Frieda's Guyanese son-in-law David conceals the fact that his ancestors were sugar-barons in order to enhance his chances of becoming a Labor MP (38, 53-58), and from chapter one it is clear that Frieda's children do not really want her to write her memoirs because they want to conceal the fact that their entry into the middle class is as recent as it is (20).

More to the point, Drabble's characters are only unconsciously involved in collectively constructing the future through their individual actions. They may play parlor games like "The Vale of Ignorance" or "The Power Game," but the game that really matters is an unconscious one, a game of mundane daily choices, with each choice leading to the unpredictable effects which shape future reality. Frieda writes books (30) and challenges England's tax laws to shape her world (27). She also works to educate her family about matters of social justice through the manipulation of her will (279-80) and more immediately by demonstrating, muckraker-fashion, the need for vigilance in the consumer marketplace (40-44). Granddaughter Emily decides to save a deer from hunters only to become the pawn of a journalist eager to advance his career, and in addition, she becomes a political pawn of the League Against Cruel Sports (254-58). Frieda, with all good intentions, leaves her money to her grandson Ben, only to have the inheritance figure in his suicide attempt (279). Decisions are made, for whatever reason, and the future is created.

Among the decisions Margaret Drabble made in writing *The Witch of Exmoor* were the ones which so many of the novel's reviewers attack: the annoyingly intrusive narrator and the fact that, in large part because of the intrusive narrator's interference, the characters are never allowed to become fully developed, independent personalities on their own terms. Unlike most of the decisions made by the characters in the novel, these were consciously made decisions on Drabble's part, decisions through which Drabble hoped to advance her art. And "art" is the key word here. Art does not need to please

us the way that entertainment does. Picasso's *Guernica,* Goya's painting of the French executing civilians in Madrid in 1808, the Marquis de Sade's novel *Justine*, or Swift's "Modest Proposal" stand as evidence that portrayals of brutality and injustice, however ugly on the surface, are artistically effective precisely *because* they are disturbing. What is important in works of satire or angry protest is that they somehow capture the truth of the matter in a structurally coherent way, even if that coherent structure is a clear reflection of a chaotic reality. That is the effect that Drabble was trying to achieve in *The Witch of Exmoor*. The intrusive narrator, whom we would like to control, to change, to at least make shut up—and it is so frustrating that we cannot—actually reinforces the frustrating effect generated by that pervasive intrusion of the past which makes it so difficult to shape our selves, much less change the world in the least little bit. As Frieda writes her memoirs, attempting to make sense of her life, she realizes that much of her personality came to her from the past. She realizes that even her ambition is an inheritance passed on to her by her mother (135) and that she had not even loved the man she married; he had been passed on to her by her sister Hilda, replete with his historical signifiers of romance: so handsome and heroic he seemed in his R.A.F. uniform (136-37)!

In *Being and Nothingness*, John Paul Sartre argues that a great deal of what we call ourselves is, in fact, not of our own making, for the individual is not at the center of human meaning. We are born into a world, he argues, where meaning already exists in the physical objects which surround us, the buildings, highways, rivers, forests, and even the weather. Meaning also pre-exists in the culture we discover we have inherited including its attitudes towards gender, physical beauty, race, and religion (239). Our "selves" are shaped by the world we live in to a far greater extent than we wish to believe, and the power that outside forces have to shape our personalities is far greater than the power of the individual to shape the world. Thus Drabble's novel is full of characters who are unable to control their lives and who do not even understand themselves because they operate under the *illusion* that they are in control. Drabble's intrusive narrator makes this obvious as she plays with the characters as if they were the toy soldiers in the "frightening, exciting, wicked and seductive" (13) "Power Game" played by Frieda's grandchildren.

How easy it is to just go with the flow, to be passively pushed around like a leaf in a storm, but such a life Drabble finds devoid of meaning. It is true—to continue Ola's meditation on time in Albert Wendt's novel—that our interactions with others define us, that the only way to be ourselves is to be linked to everyone and everything else in the "Unity-that-is-All and now" (307), but such a self is an agent interacting with other like agents in the field of experience. As Sartre argues in philosophical terms, the decision to act is in itself the guarantee of our personal existence even if we cannot foresee the

effects of our decision to act (452-55). Our only choice is to move forward, to explore the unknown, the new world as Frieda's grandchildren Emily and Ben do at the end of the novel. In their explorations of Exmoor, Emily and Ben find natural marvels mixed with the trash of civilization (274-76), but Ben's willingness to interact with Emily, to "Jump for it!" as the tide rolls in, whatever "*it*" is at the end of the novel (281), demonstrates a newfound willingness among the characters of the novel to confront the *status quo* and to possibly emerge, in a future novel, as full-fledged characters, active agents creating their world, rather than the cartoon stick figures that star in the shadow puppet show put on by Drabble's intrusive narrator in *The Witch of Exmoor*.

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Ellen Douglas the Storyteller: Both Bearer and Barer of Truth

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With a first novel that won her a Houghton-Mifflin prize, Ellen Douglas began her remarkable career more than thirty-five years ago. Since then, she has published five more novels, a novel-like collection of stories, a retelling of fairy tales in an edition with Walter Anderson illustrations, individual works in various publications, and most recently a volume of non-fiction, *Truth: Four Stories I Am Finally Old Enough to Tell*, which was a finalist for the Robert F. Kennedy Foundation Award for a book concerned with a civil rights issue. The body of her work is remarkable for many reasons, one of which is the evolution of her narrative presence.

In the first three novels—*A Family's Affairs* (1962), *Where the Dreams Cross* (1968), and *Apostles of Light* (1973)—and in the first story in *Black Cloud, White Cloud* (1963), Douglas writes as a limited omniscient narrator, delivering stories reflecting the complicated ways families get along with each other and survive in a changing world. In the other three stories in *Black Cloud, White Cloud*, she expands questions concerning personal accountability and appropriately shifts to first person, using for two of the stories the voice of an adult Anna, to whose childhood and family she has already introduced us. For the remaining story she uses a woman's voice as comical and revelatory as that of Sister in Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O."

In her fifth book, *The Rock Cried Out* (1979), Douglas gives novel-length attention to the questions about self and responsibility that she raised in the previous books, this time using the voice of twenty-nine-year-old Alan McLaurin as her perspective. Alan's confession of how he is coming to terms with truths about himself and his community builds a multi-layered structure in which Douglas successfully embeds other highly individualized voices. These other voices deliver stories within Alan's story, stinging him, and us, with truths—whether familial, historic, or mythic—that alter preconceived ideas about self and the world.

Douglas's next novel, *A Lifetime Burning* (1982), is also a first-person narrative. But here the concern lies not in hearing truth, but in telling truth. Corinne, a sixty-two-year-old woman, resolves to share the secrets of her life with her children so that they may better know who they are. Douglas again uses first-person as a frame for delivering stories within a story. Through Corinne's false starts and self-consciousness which cause us to question her reliability, Douglas makes us aware that the story-teller, even one trying to be objective, faces choices—and that choices that involve truth are difficult and even painful.

In *Can't Quit You, Baby* (1988), once again Douglas layers stories within a story as she presents the parallel lives of two women bound by an unlikely friendship. But here the narrative technique takes an even more self-conscious turn than it did in *A Lifetime Burning*, for Douglas renders the story in several ways. At times an omniscient narrator sets scenes and presents Cornelia's life. Other times, that narrator introduces Tweet and deliberately steps aside for Tweet to tell her own story in her own voice. Then at still other times the narrator intrudes on the story she is telling to raise questions about narrative presence and objectivity. Douglas's purpose for making us aware of the storyteller is revealed in the narrator's own words:

> So far . . . the narrator of this story has maintained his—or rather, her—anonymity. . . . I begin to wonder what you take for granted about this taleteller. I am honor bound, I think, to call your attention to her. I want you to believe her, but there are pitfalls in the path of her narrative that I must make you aware of. . . . It's as if she has some buried connection with these lives, a connection she must explore and understand. But then, she may misunderstand. And besides, she has the power to distort, if she chooses to exercise it. (38)

And a few paragraphs later, she continues, "I encourage myself that, although it is difficult, it's perhaps not impossible for the tale-teller to rise above her limitations . . . to give the gift of truth" (38-39).

That the storyteller has some buried connection with the lives she writes about and that in every tale there is truth to be uncovered are perhaps what has motivated the evolution of Douglas's narrative technique from conventional and first-person narrators to intrusive narrators who are consciously concerned with objectivity and choice and who are aware of their listeners.

But Douglas's evolving fascination with intrusive narrators has not stopped with fiction. In her most recent work, she boldly steps from behind imaginary personae to sound her own voice in a collection of nonfiction stories. The dust jacket of *Truth: Four Stories I Am Finally Old Enough to Tell* introduces the content of her newest work this way: "A novelist revered for her storytelling, . . . [Douglas] crosses over into the mirror world of historical fact to tell stories in which she seeks the truth—about herself, about her white Mississippi forebears, about their relationships to black Mississippians, and ultimately about their guilt as murderers of helpless slaves." The jacket introduction continues by quoting Douglas, who describes the volume's content in an entirely different way. She says the volume is "about remembering and forgetting, seeing and ignoring, lying and

truth-telling. It's about secrets, judgments, threats, danger, and willful amnesia. It's about the truth in fiction and the fiction in 'truth.'"

Douglas's comments reveal that she intends for these stories to be about more than "the mirror world of historical fact." Indeed, as we read *Truth*, we become aware of what Douglas has described: we learn that she is writing not simply to report or record her life, but she is writing to uncover and discover so that along with her we may observe, participate, and understand something of the process as well as the product. She has achieved this by approaching these stories as a teller who is as conscious and careful of shaping her materials into truth—or "a" truth—as a sculptor is of carving a figure from a block of marble. Her narrative approach itself is as important and interesting as the new stories she tells.

Published in the fall of 1998, *Truth: Four Stories I Am Finally Old Enough to Tell* is classified as nonfiction, and as the title indicates, Douglas writes in her own voice. In the four stories—"Grant," "Julia and Nellie," "Hampton," and "On Second Creek"—her narrative presence is not simple, however, for she moves freely both inside and outside them as a way to find perspective and meaning. Constantly aware of herself in relation to her materials—that is, to the stories, their sources, and her treatment of them—she demands likewise that we be aware, not
only of her as teller but also of ourselves as listeners.

To make this happen, she employs some conventional first-person techniques such as speaking to or questioning the reader or anticipating questions the reader might raise, but as she did in the last three novels she goes beyond the conventional to draw attention to the struggle that telling the truth—and recognizing the truth—actually is. Brief comments like "let me tell you about . . ." (30) or "[n]ever mind about that" (72) barely intrude on the telling of the story. Likewise, questions are often brief and unintrusive, and at times we do not know if they are addressed to us or are her way of keeping herself on track.

But there are times her questions become intrusive and actually briefly stop the narrative. For example, in "Grant" she steps outside the story to pose questions that invite us to speculate about how we would react in circumstances similar to Grant's:

> Now I ask you, no matter how much younger you were than your husband, no matter if he'd had a coronary, would you leave everything away from him? Wouldn't you think he might by chance survive you? You might get run over by a truck or stung to death by hornets or drown or get trapped in a burning house, or God knows what. Surely you would mention in your will the name of your husband of forty years. (6)

Passages such as this illustrate how Douglas stretches first-person narration. Douglas is not just asking idle questions to see if we are listening but is deliberately involving us in the narrative process; she is asking us what she has been asking herself as she thinks about her story.

Anticipating that involving us this way may cause us to want to question or challenge what she is saying, she makes efforts to keep herself credible, especially since she presents these stories as truth. When her details come from personal memories and second-hand sources that she deems reliable, as narrator she makes such statements as these:

> How do I know this? I know it only because my mother chanced to tell me. (79)
>
> This is what happened, my father said. (174)
>
> Here is one of the first stories I remember hearing as a child about my uncles. (104)

When her information is based on first-hand research such as visiting cemeteries and libraries, or reading letters, legal records, journals, or conducting interviews, she makes that clear as well:

> The envelope in the LSU archives containing Lemuel Conner's account of the 'proceedings' had written on it . . . (184)
>
> I have dipped into Dunbar's papers and letters occasionally over the years, interested in his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, his survey for the Spanish . . . (200)
>
> One of the last black people I talked to of these matters was Gold Smith, Jr. . . . We made an appointment to talk. (204)

And, as she feels it necessary, she reinforces her credibility by admitting when she is unsure of details, or by qualifying them. She frequently comments, "I know, or think I know" (30) or "I seem to recall . . ." (32). She even acknowledges limitations: "There is no way, unless some other archival information comes to light, to know certainly who Benny was" (187).

Such brief qualifications hardly intrude on our acceptance of her account of people and events, any more than brief questions do on the flow of the narrative. In striving to be truthful, to prove herself credible, she reminds us again that all stories—even true ones—are ultimately shaped by what the teller chooses to include.

Awareness of her fallibility and of her tendency and desire to invent gives Douglas another reason to step outside the story she is telling. As she does so, she involves us even further with the narrative process. In "Hampton," she admits, "But although I call up these memories, although they are my own, I have reservations. I know that I put words in the mouths of people who did not speak them. I imagine scenes at which I was not

present. I know that this is my world and no one else's—my stories, my history. Or myth" (90). In "Julia and Nellie," she reminds us even more boldly of the dilemma of choice a writer faces: "As I gather the fragments of this story, I have a choice: I could invent—I am a novelist, after all, accustomed to inventing" (66). When she cannot factually unravel certain situations in Julia and Nellie's friendship, she openly indulges in inventing explanations. It is almost as if she is teasing us, making us want to ask her to explore other paths, even untrue ones. She admits that, by her own nature, she struggles with considering possibilities, that imagining is "seductive" (66). "You see?" she cries, "I almost can't resist it" (66). But she does. Douglas reorients herself, and us, to her intention to be truthful, and for "Julia and Nellie" she affirms this intention,

> I must resist making up their story. (79)
> All I know is that . . . (66-67)

From a narrator avowing to be telling the truth, such admissions and explanations—which are meant to clarify truth—drive home the reality that the boundaries between truth and fiction are actually, and always, easily blurred. But that is what her comment printed on the book jacket tells us: these stories are about "the truth in fiction and the fiction in 'truth.'"

In "On Second Creek," her narrative presence is at its strongest and boldest as she struggles with the limitations that nonfiction imposes on her:

> It is impossible to make sense out of stories that purport to be true. Something is always missing. To give them form, extract their deepest meaning, one has to turn them into fiction, to find causes, or if, as is usually the case, causes are unfindable, one has to invent them. (175)
>
> All these silences, all these unfinished tales, these lacunae in the evidence, are intolerable to me. *What kind of people are these*? I keep asking myself. No. Not *What kind of people are these*, but *What kind are we*? (176)

This probing question—"*What kind [of people] are we?*"—addressed to herself and to us strikes at the heart of what she has been seeking in all of her writing, not just in these four recent stories. In uncovering and examining truths, whether they be familial, historic, or mythic, Ellen Douglas is looking for that "buried connection with [other] lives" as well as for a way for "the tale-teller to rise above her limitations . . . to give the gift of truth" (*Can't* 38, 39), truth that will alter our preconceived ideas about self and the world.

The title of this collection indicates that Ellen Douglas is bearing (bringing) us four true stories, but perhaps it is true that she actually bears us five, for in "bare-ing" (exposing) "the truth in fiction and the fiction in 'truth'" she places herself and us in yet another story—one that is not over,

one in which we too are characters—one that seeks to answer "Not *What kind of people are these*, but *What kind are we*?" And she leaves us, for now, in the silence of an unfinished tale.

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Literature and the Looking Glass: Analyzing the Beauty Myth in an Introductory Literature Classroom

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"Mirror, Mirror on the wall, true beauty's not found here at all," read the signs on the bathroom mirror. In a "Day Without Mirrors," mirrors were symbolically covered with this saying which encouraged the King's College community to go the day without looking in the mirror. As English professors involved with programming for the Women's Resource Center on campus, we borrowed the initial idea from the University of Rochester and expanded upon it. In an afternoon program we explored the ways literature has defined and reflected social standards of beauty throughout the ages.

After the success of the Day Without Mirrors, we wanted to expand the scholarly investigation in a classroom environment and so thought about its application in an introduction to literature class. We wanted to provide students with an intellectual and historical framework of the beauty myth and to demonstrate how it is embedded in our culture. This application would enable students to see current social relevance of the literature they are reading and would allow them to explore our culturally encoded ideas of beauty. Thus we devised a week-long literary unit on social constructions of identity that would enable students to explore a variety of genres: poetry, short story, autobiography/non-fiction.

To begin the unit, we assign the following readings:

Excerpts from Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face*
Grimms' "Snow White"
Marge Piercy's "Barbie Doll"
Thomas Campion's "There is a Garden in Her Face"
Shakespeare's Sonnet 130
Spenser's Sonnet 64 from his *Amoretti*
Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"

We begin with Lucy Grealy and use her autobiography as a framework for our unit because hers is a contemporary approach to questions of beauty. Diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma in her jaw at the age of nine, she underwent numerous surgeries and chemotherapies that left her face disfigured. Later, she would undergo more than twenty reconstructive surgeries. "I spent five years of my life being treated for cancer," Grealy writes on the book jacket of the first hardbound edition, "but since then I've spent fifteen years being treated for nothing other than looking different from everyone else. It was the pain from that, from feeling ugly, that I always

viewed as the great tragedy in my life. The fact that I had cancer seemed minor in comparison."

For the first day of the unit students focused on two passages from Grealy. In the first, she tells of a belated post-surgical epiphany; her face, she suddenly realizes has changed:

> One morning I went into the bathroom and shut the door, though I was alone in the house. I turned on the lights and very carefully, very seriously, assessed my face in the mirror. I was bald, but I knew that already. I also knew I had buck teeth, something I was vaguely ashamed of but hadn't given too much thought to until this moment. My teeth were ugly. And, I noticed they were made worse by the fact that my chin seemed so small. How had it gotten that way? I didn't remember it being so small before. I rooted around in the cabinets and came up with a hand mirror, and, with a bit of angling, looked for the first time at my right profile. I knew to expect a scar, but how had my face sunk in like that? I didn't understand. Was it possible I'd looked this way for a while and was only just noticing it, or was this change very recent? More than the ugliness I felt, I was suddenly appalled at the notion that I'd been walking around unaware of something that was apparent to everyone else. A profound sense of shame consumed me. (111-12)

To begin the class session, we ask students questions that probe Grealy's epiphany and the import of it:

> What is Grealy's perception of beauty?
> What is she seeing in the mirror and what is she not seeing?
> Why is her ugliness so shameful and consuming to her?

These questions drew students into a discussion of the centrality of physical appearance, not only in our social interactions, but in our self-perceptions. We then move on to ask, "How do we hide behind that which we don't want to be?" and "How do we mask what we don't have?" These questions generally usher in a discussion of what Grealy does and what we do, to strive toward an idealized sense of beauty.

In our discussion, usually beauty aids such as concealer, cover stick, and lipstick are named. In addition, students often make mention of a host of other beauty "tricks" for both men and women, including foundations, "shaping" hose, body shapers, Propetia/Rogaine, Grecian formula, baseball caps, and beards.

While many of these items mask our faces, Grealy's refuge was in a hat. Donning a hat to cover her baldness, she soon refused to take it off. She writes,

> My hat was a barrier between me, and what I was vaguely becoming aware of as ugly about me and the world. It hid me, hid my secret, though badly, and when people made fun of me or stared at me I assumed it was only because they could guess what was beneath my hat. It didn't occur to me that the whole picture, even with the hat, was ugly; as long as I had it on, I felt safe. Once, on television, I saw someone lose his hat in the wind and I immediately panicked for his sudden exposure. It was a visceral reaction. (106)

Soon she literalizes the mask with a childhood story. She remembers finding safety and self-assurance as she hid behind her costume one Halloween night:

> For the last couple of years I had been too sick to go out, but this year Halloween fell on a day when I felt quite fine. My mother was the one who came up with the Eskimo idea. I put on a winter coat, made a fish out of paper, which I hung on the end of a stick, and wrapped my face in a scarf. . . . We walked around the neighborhood with our pillow-case sacks. . . . I felt wonderful. It was only as the night wore on and the moon came out. . . that I began to realize why I felt so good. No one could see me clearly. No one could see my face. For the end of October it was a very warm night and I was sweating in my parka, but I didn't care. I felt such freedom: I waltzed up to people effortlessly and boldly, I asked questions and made comments the rest of my troupe were afraid to make. I didn't understand their fear. I hadn't realized just how meek I'd become, how self-conscious I was about my face until now that it was obscured. My sister and her friends never had to worry about their appearance, or so it seemed to me, so why didn't they always feel as bold and as happy as I felt that night? (119)

We end the class asking the students how they would answer the final question that Grealy poses. They are quick to realize that the beauty myth is so strong in our culture that it takes far less than a physical disfigurement to cause feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Consequently, we ask students to follow up this discussion in their homework assignment, answering the question, "What are the components of beauty?" What attributes are necessary for physical attractiveness? We also ask them to read the Renaissance literary selections for the next class. Having done so, they come to class with lists of both the Renaissance and Modern components or traits of beauty. In addition, they bring in photographic examples of these traits, cut from magazines (preferably, not from the library!). During the next class

period we create collages of these "beauties" for the Renaissance and for our day.

To begin the next class meeting, we explicate the poems, first asking students to share the Renaissance components of beauty they have found. Reflecting on standards of beauty, John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing* that "Dürer believed that the ideal nude ought to be constructed by taking the face of one body, the breasts of another, the legs of a third, the shoulders of a fourth, the hands of a fifth—and so on. The result would glorify Man. But the exercise presumed a remarkable indifference to who any one person really was" (62). With clippings in hand, our students perform just such an exercise. Some groups create Renaissance beauties, while other groups create contemporary beauties. Campion's and Spenser's Renaissance poems compare the beauty of women to nature, a cultivated nature, a garden; however the garden they create and the "beauty" these describe seem neither beautiful nor real. And so it is with our students' projects.

We compare our creations and find that what we really have created is something more like Frankenstein's monster. We also note that while working with different social standards, Renaissance and Modern, in both cases the beauty prescribed by society is really ugly when literalized. The Renaissance held some of the same objections we have today regarding literalizing our beauties. To show how some reacted against, satirized and commented on such expressions of beauty, we distribute the portrait from *The Extravagant Shepherd*, a drawing that literalizes the "beautiful" traits the poets esteem. (See figure on page 79.) As the illustration shows, this "beauty" is far from beautiful. Further reactions to standards of beauty come from Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, which challenges the beauty myth and praises a "real" woman rather than one "made." While some students laugh, others are angered that the poem breaks our still-held conventions that love poetry must be filled with hyperbole. In our culture, we have come to expect hyperbole in verbal constructions regarding beauty and love; however, we fail to recognize our own physical standards as being exaggerated as well. Consequently, we raise the following questions about our own social standards:

> What impossible standards are we asked to fulfill?
> Where did we get these ideas?
> Do we still want red lips, rosy cheeks, possibly fair skin?
> What impossible standards does society ask of us?
> Have you heard this before?

To end the class, we remind our students of the fairy tale of "Snow White" and of its rendition of these standards, which functions almost like a mantra: "As white as snow, and as red as blood, and . . . as black as ebony"

(65). We ask them to read the story for the next class period with this framework in mind.

In our class on "Snow White" we ask students to answer these questions:

> Why is the queen punished and what does the voice in the mirror represent?
>
> Why is the queen punished if all she's doing is following the rules of society set by the voice in the mirror?

The main points we want to emphasize are that (1) the absent King is, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the voice of social norms; (2) the voice and these norms construct the expectations and standard of beauty; (3) while the queen has embraced one norm, she has not accepted everything since she's an active woman not a passive one, and society desires a passive female; and (4) the gifts she offers Snow White are the accoutrements of female beauty or sexuality—which accoutrements kill women (36-44).

Gilbert and Gubar talk of women "kill[ing] themselves into art" in this tale (36). Thus the story features a framed mother at the beginning; Snow White is encased in her casket. Even the story's language points to objectification here: the prince wants "it," grammatically referring to the casket, but clearly objectifying and dehumanizing the woman visible within (Gilbert and Gubar 41).

Gilbert and Gubar's idea of "killing people into art" leads us to a pair of poems, Browning's "My Last Duchess" and Marge Piercy's "Barbie Doll." Through discussion we want to emphasize that a modern woman and a nineteenth-century man—Piercy writing in 1973 and Browning in 1842—are writing about the same inclination to kill women into art. The voice in the mirror, so to speak, for Browning's Duke is a voice of power. As he molds his duchess, and when she fails to be what he wants her to be, she is "killed" and recreated into art, something he can control:

> That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive. I call
> That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
> Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
> Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
> "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
> Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
> The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
> But to myself they turned (since none puts by
> The curtain I have drawn for you, but I). (1-10)

Writing over one hundred years later, Piercy presents in the subject of her poem a woman who has internalized beauty standards so much that she

kills herself into art. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Snow White and her stepmother are two sides of the same woman. In Piercy's poem, they have been merged into one. Piercy's nameless character is unable to reconcile her physical self with the standards of beauty society dictates, and, consequently, turns on her own body:

> The girlchild was born as usual
> . . . . . .
> Then in the magic of puberty a classmate said:
> You have a great big nose and fat legs.
>
> She was healthy, tested intelligent,
> possessed strong arms and back,
> abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
> She went to and fro apologizing.
> Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.
> . . . . . .
> Her good nature wore out
> like a fan belt.
>
> So she cut off her nose and her legs
> and offered them up. (1, 5-11, 15-18)

In the poem's ironic conclusion, she has literally killed herself into art: "In the casket displayed on satin she lay / with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on, / a turned-up putty nose, / dressed in a pink and white nightie" (19-22). Here, enclosed in her casket, she finds social approval denied to her in life: "doesn't she look pretty? everyone said" (23).

From this perspective we return to Grealy to end our unit. Grealy also wrestles with the problem of self-acceptance and is able, as she puts it, to journey back to her face. As her memoir draws to a close, she realizes that, her reconstructive surgeries done, her face is now "complete," and she begins to reconcile her internal sense of self with the face in the mirror that she has been avoiding:

> The journey back to my face was a long one. . . . I didn't tell anyone . . . that I had stopped looking in mirrors. I found that I could stare straight through a mirror, allowing none of the reflection to get back to me.
>
> Unlike some stroke victims, who are physically unable to name the person in the mirror as themselves, my trick of the eye was the result of my lifelong refusal to learn *how* to name the person in the mirror. . . . It was easier to think that I was still not beautiful enough or lovable enough than to

admit that perhaps these qualities did not really belong to this thing I thought was called beauty after all.

Without another operation to hang all my hopes on, I was completely on my own. And now something inside me started to miss me. A part of me, one that had always been there, organically *knew* I was whole. (220-21)

Finally, Grealy writes of her journey's culmination:

One evening near the end of my long separation from the mirror, I was sitting in a café talking to a man I found quite attractive when I suddenly wondered what I looked like to him. What was he actually *seeing* in me? I asked myself this old question, and startlingly, for the first time in my life, I had no ready answer. I had not looked in a mirror for so long that I had no idea what I objectively looked like. I studied the man as he spoke; for all those years I'd handed my ugliness over to people and seen only the different ways it was reflected back to me. As reluctant as I was to admit it now, the only indication in my companion's behavior was positive.

And then I experienced a moment of the freedom I'd been practicing for behind my Halloween mask all those years ago. As a child I had expected my liberation to come from getting a new face to put on, but now I saw it came from shedding something, shedding my image.

I used to think truth was eternal, that once I *knew,* once I *saw*, it would be with me forever, a constant by which everything else could be measured. I know now that this isn't so, that most truths are inherently unretainable, that we have to work hard all our lives to remember the most basic things. Society is no help. It tells us again and again that we can most be ourselves by acting and looking like someone else, only to leave our original faces behind to turn into ghosts that will inevitably resent and haunt us. As I sat there in the café, it suddenly occurred to me that it is no mistake when sometimes in films and literature the dead know they are dead only after being offered that most irrefutable proof: they can no longer see themselves in the mirror.

Feeling the warmth of the cup against my palm, I felt this small observation as a great revelation. I wanted to tell the man I was with about it, but he was involved in his own thoughts and I did not want to interrupt him, so instead I

> looked with curiosity at the window behind him, its night-silvered glass reflecting the entire café, to see if I could, now, recognize myself. (222-23)

Grealy talks, too, about the doubleness inherent in the beauty myth, the difference between what's on the inside and what society says should be on the outside, but her discovery takes her to the last paragraphs of her memoir. In these selections she accepts herself and finds through internal and external confirmation, that she is o.k. Society's view, represented in her male companion, is secondary in this picture Grealy paints at the end of her autobiography. What's more important is that she finally recognizes and accepts her own reflection.

We return to mirrors and our own reflections at the end of our unit. "What does your mirror say to you?" we ask our students and hope our work has prepared them to read the world around them with a critical eye and to question the effect of these cultural standards upon them. For many of our students, this movement from detached, impersonal analysis to critical self-inquiry is the hardest connection to make. Some, though, make the connections. Struck by Piercy's "Barbie Doll," one young woman wrote movingly about her own experiences as a small-framed, 180-pound teenager. Her painful memories, coupled with her subsequent weight loss, gave her profound personal insight into the effects of these social norms. Through readings, discussions and assignments, we hope to have fostered in our students a similar sense of selfhood, apart from cultural norms and constructs, so they may find beauty not in the mirrors around them but within themselves.

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POETRY

Theodore Haddin
University of Alabama at Birmingham

How Trees Go Down In Alabama

(For Thomas Brown, December 1998)

We look toward the hill where there was
no light and we find them after fall
when leaves are gone
and they the ones went down in leaf
a lightning stripe still cast in bark
and mold already white and cold and damp
or the long-standing pine attacked
by beetles has finally fallen
from years of weight it can no longer hold
or some woodsman has tested his strength
against a harmless temptation but missed
and pushed a tree upon a fence
and then there are those we find
after storms wrecks of oaks and poplars
twisted and thrown up by gusts and the tornado
that just missed the house
like the neighbor's thoughtless clear-cut
I saw a wind one day turn
a whole hillside to splinters
a strange light in a wild storm
and one winter I heard ice in forms
snap a hundred trees all night
till none were left but broken trunks
and treetops clogged the still streams

Telephone

Death comes creeping
where you cannot see it
she said the trees are darker
in the evening and the sun comes up
late in the morning and something
begins to lurk around the windows
Ruthie her sister died in March
and she called to tell me
I held the phone to hear
and then Richard went her brother
taken down finally with cancer
and I listened with another ear
a month later my wife went too
an eye piercing our souls
as it scanned the room
making us look one last time
and I called mother then
to tell her and she held
the phone to hear me say
how it is to watch someone die
and I listened for her
and waited in the silence
and held the phone a while
for an answer I would never hear
and then I knew I was alone

Father to Daughter

We listen for each other now
sure our voices remember her
who is gone who still lives
in this house by silence kept
and the blue curtains her color
for everything she believed in
and the shamrock that blooms
profusely now at the kitchen window
that had only dark leaves before
I count those sounds in the night
tap or shuffle of a bathrobe
as if she were still traipsing
the front room or a hallway getting
used to the darkness she would finally know
so we call each other you and I
and we talk eagerly here over lunch
looking for her in our eyes and faces
when we meet and speak but don't say
as if to answer for the full life
that she did not have with us
that we would have had with her

Hatfield Auto, Birmingham

An old plot of ground
beside Hatfield Auto Parts
so beaten in
hard slag and bricks and stones
tinctured pieces in cold grime
a neoprene ring like an old condom
a steel connector clogged with dirt
in the shape of a heart
a heavy kingpin embedded for good
earth its own magnet
rusted steel screw and iron bolts
a piece of real tin
probably from a roof over someone once
pieces of composite linoleum shot off
from the back of some pickup truck
workers had been here
they sweated their bellies got fat
on hamburgers and soda pop
here green in gravel a flattened
mountain dew chunks of the old glass coke bottle
beside the door iron filings fill the wind
fiddle sand and dirt from the yard
an iron lamppost chewed and battered
from someone backing into it
behind the building long grass many big blades
keep hidden iron bars embedded in stone
old orange and red walls flare up
like light from a jail that once was
this town has its secrets sifting slow
a fat man comes with his weed eater making show
pretense to trim some grass away
he leaves bottles broken glass and cans
to decay with all the other things
human want has left behind
when I turn to go I find one large dark
oil spot in the shape of a man
in the earth
and towards the middle a white porcelain sparkplug
like a single star cast in the dark

Patricia Waters
University of Tennessee

Work, For the Night Is Coming

Your hands smelt of the barn,
you hated it,
how it wouldn't wash off,
it was on you at school
and when you wanted to touch her.

You can't wait to leave the place
you wish in hell, the fields
your rage at your father's terror,
the way one storm changes everything.
Your mother looks at you, your strangeness,
what you want, she cannot, will never understand.
Do you forgive her? They die year by year,
that crowd, your kin. Not much to say,
you are the one with all the words. For you
the university, the buildings ordered, Greek,
the lawns idle with grass, the polite flowers,
your first restaurant where you pay at the table.

You never look back,
learn how to talk to town girls
with their soft sweaters,
their lifetime of running water, indoor toilets.

There are moments now, in the library,
you are impatient: the sound marriage, the books
with your name on them, your children in their professions.
You watch the light, how rich it is,
gold and heavy with motes,
one clear path to the sky,
impossible blue, still big with the longing you threw there.
You think about her.
How quiet it was in the barn that afternoon,
the light like butter,
thick and yellow through the chinks,
what she let you do,
how she took you where you wanted to go
and the smell of it,
fat with promise, the wine made good.

Paula J. Lambert-Neidigh
Holmes Community College

Gilt

The first one came with a caul
and she pulled it from the straw
tearing at the slick wet skin,
purplish gray. He took it from her
in one hand breathed into its mouth
past the tiny pointed teeth and
rubbed its chest so its four dead legs
circled into the air. "Better off, prob'ly."
He tossed it, slapping cold and wet
against the concrete floor. She flinched
when it hit, turned back to the gilt,
and waited for the next one to come.

Bonnie Horton
Delta State University

Ties

Around my granddaughter's throat I tie
a ribbon of black velvet and tatted lace.
Made by my great-great-grandmother,
Given to me by my grandmother, long cherished,
Now to be passed down, the ribbon creates for me
An epiphany of generations of young girls
Trailing generations of loving grandmothers
Whose spirits have stitched immortality.

Blue Heron

Blue heron, anachronism of birddom,
Standing knee deep in cypress break;
You offer memory and acceptance.
You have heard the primordial scream
And survived to bring the message
That nothing is new, merely rearranged
To suit our notions of time and space.
Will you be here when I face mortality
To assure me that I am yet to be?

Ancient Roots

Rising out of the mist
the cypress trees are privy
to dark secrets of Mother Earth.
Embryos of the primordial flow,
they stretch to join earth and sky.
The roots and knees struggle
to break through the ooze,
while clinging to stay grounded.
Dust-to-dust, but, in-between,
they embrace the spectrum
of this worldly home, briefly,
before they enfold the fullness
of Life.

Jo Ann Nye
Greenville, Mississippi

Driving Lesson

She drives with both hands gripping the wheel
staring straight ahead
she drives slowly, intentionally aware.
The young man smiles but he is impatient with such extraordinary
care.
He does not know she once drove nonchalantly
with her arm out the window her thumb hooked
over the spoke of the steering wheel
she drove down highways speeding
singing with abandon.
Would he believe she ran through fields
bicycled in mountains
played softball and basketball
and drank beer
large frosted pitchers of Coors in a smoky Colorado bar.

He does not like her much
old women are not endearing
unless they are very rich.
But try to think how it is—
The heart still yearns for running and speeding cars and singing.
The heart still yearns.

The Game

They sit in hot rooms
playing their cards in measured cadence,
enumerating maladies and afflictions.
Cognizant of limitations, resentful of diminishments
they discard doubts
needing faith of all persuasions
the hope of something more is all that can sustain.
They sit together in hot rooms
holding back despair that invades the loneliness.
They sit in hot rooms and wait.

Connecting

You know the feel
how you turn a corner and let the steering wheel
glide back through your hands as the car straightens.
There's music of course.
Mozart, "The Jupiter"
and you're tooling.
Life's little miracles
moments like these—
Mozart, in stereo he could not have imagined
in a vehicle he could not have imagined
at a speed he could not have imagined—
But the music,
Ah, he imagined that.

Jeffrey DeLotto
Texas Wesleyan University

A Moneychanger Outside the Temple,
Northern Jordan

Below the broken teeth of the Yarmouk hills,
On Irbi's winding streets, in shops and stands,
Arabs mouth, gesticulate the business of the day,
As with Mahmood Hassouneh, one of the eight
Old moneychangers down on Ajloon Street;
A Brit said Mahmood gave reasonable rates,
So in I strode to the dark stone shop,
Half built of blocks chiseled square when
The Romans sought to curb the desert's will,
A teller's cage, a desk, a framed Koranic prayer,
And a green chalkboard scripted in exchange rates;
I spoke slowly to the bespectacled clerk,
And Mahmood swept in from behind a drape,
Like Polonius in an old play or a greying
And grinning Arafat, bowed and took my hand
With rubber-tipped fingers, tacky from soiled currency;
I wanted dinars into dollars, I told him,
A cashier's check on a Stateside bank,
And gave him a thousand dollars' worth,
A roll of bright cash, as he passed me
A scrap of memo pad— "Write your name,"
He said, "and return in two days, maybe three."
The check will be here, he said casually to me,
"Insha'allah," If it is God's will, he said,
And smiled and began to turn away. . . . "But I
Need a . . . a receipt," I pled in my foreign fear,
Worried and scared as a Christian in a lion's cage. . . .
"Why?" said he, calmly. "I will be here each day."
And I had given away a thousand dollars,
Tossed it away— Who would believe it?
And imagining smirks and grins at my back,
I swaggered bravely away.

Returning in three days amidst the alien host,
I waited for the cold laugh, the derisive glare,

As Mahmood directed me to sit and rest;
"But is it here?" I had to know, and he smiled
And said, "A moment," and asked if I wanted tea.
Why not? I thought. Can I turn righteous and
Demand what I had no record of? So down I sat,
Commands were shouted, a boy ran for tea,
And we squatted on stools, Mahmood and me,
Looking out on the ebb and flow of market streets,
And we talked of people and towns, as Hassouneh
Took my offered cigarette, disgustedly jutting
A chin at two dusty Egyptian laborers sidling in,
Their greasy rolls of bills spilling out
Onto the plastic counter-top, haggling for
Egyptian pounds, wagging, shouting, pleading
With the clean young clerk behind the bars,
The laborers in striped robes, rubber boots,
Heads wrapped in soil-smeared henna cloths,
Sweeping on into the street, for the mail,
For the cash sent to sick and starving families
Scratching seeds from the sun-baked ruins
Of slums in old Heliopolis or indifferent Cairo.
"Animals," said Mahmood; "They are like beasts,"
And I had heard the tone before, my mouthcorners
Turned down, disapproving, at what I was not sure;
But we sipped hot mint tea from thin glasses,
Base and rim balanced between finger and thumb,
And sighed and smoked, and saw the shapes and
Sounds and smells of life drift by as in a dream.
And after a slow cigarette's span, the smoke
Whorling up in the still air, just eight minutes
Or so, I rose tentatively, anxiously, to go,
And he handed me a check, slowly stood,
And, hand over heart, he said
"Go in peace," and somehow I did.

Yvonne Tomek
Delta State University

The Grotto Stones

"une à une les pierres s'ajoutent au mur de ton enfance"

Hélène Dorion

Crouched

In the caves
On the mountain side
We began by
The flicker of fire

To speak the
Primitive soul.
We drew stories
Of the hunt

And inscribed
Our breath
Our bones
Into the clay and straw
Of the ground.

And then we came out.

And with love
The world tilted.
In the Medieval lay "Le Laustic"
The nightingale's archway is song
But there is too the arch
Of the arrow that follows.

All our days

We seek the shape
That holds us
And the temples that will

Unearth for us
The sacred stories
Of our lives.

The mind is a Grotto.

We lean into its dark walls
And hear the
Ancient canticles
Begin.

Javelin

When the world hung in space
In sheer gossamer blue
Like threads of the Virgin

It spun alone like a ball
Of yarn, gaining threads of
Green and brown and gold

Until
We found hunger,
And with hunger,
The hurl of the rock,
The javelin throw,
The slow, strong-legged
March around the world
And back.

To illuminate the nights
At Rouffignac, Niaux,
Pech Merle, Font-de-Gaume
And Lascaux

Spear heads dipped the
Smear of primordial blood/paint
From antelope, bison and mammoth
In the dark guts of the cave.

It was the toss of the arm
That shaped the world.

Is this what we still remember
As heirs to the javelin
On our walk every day
To touch the grotto door?

Jo LeCoeur
University of the Incarnate Word

No Witchdoctah Swampboat Tour

She does not walk on gilded splinters. Nor wrap
a snake about her shoulders. Just weaves

our craft through skeletal trees, fog-shrouded
islands. Guided by one atmospheric lantern, she

stands her ground in the moving boat, its wood to
her bare feet as earth to roots. No prayers braided

in her hair, her stick no totem, she poles our
pirogue through the evening at a pace that makes

her work look easy, her poling art not scaled for
show. I dim the lantern flame to talk of ghost

tales, spells, incantations. She mouths no mumbo
gumbo, just signals me hush-listen to the deep

place where the swamp is beating. Thick wings
high above us whip night air to music. Feathers

bright as Chopatuli Choctaw seesaw down like
lazy spirits. Unfocused by my need to see, I

think to make the lantern brighter. And am
pitched-black into night. Waiting to be swallowed

blind. Sensing paths unearthly gliding toward
us through the swamp. It's not the swamp

that's moving. Her hands wrap serpentine about
her staff, the moon's gold splinters at her feet.

Chopatuli [alternate spelling for Tchoupitoulas, "those who live by the water"] Choctaw refers to the *Mardi Gras* Indians, a traditional costume since the 1791 Cabildo prohibition of masking for *la gente de color*.

Rain Dance Apache

White Mountain Apache Reservation
issues camping permits—Canyon only,
Mountaintop sacred, Keep off—

wrapping too much around me
like too many garments,
sweatsuit, sleeping bag, tent,

all woven too tightly, restricting
my visions, limbs locked in
waiting for morning to fall

leafblade by treetrunk down
the vertical rise to this Black
River Canyon where I listen for sunup,

hear drum-pounding rain. Whoops build
in my chest louder than thunder
inside my thighbones and under my

tongue sucking rain needles, hair ends
floating straight out and upward,
every cell particle straining toward

unshadowed light through my eyelids
and cheekbones, throat swallowing
lightning to burn off the permits,

the garments and skin, down to a
wild breast of bone bounding up
steep rock, tree roots and pinestraw,

bones unwrapping too, silver and
glowing, gliding faster than flight,
not caught in this tent,

in this bag, in this middle-aged woman,
graying and softening, wrapped
in too many garments to climb

the stair lightning sent special for me
by Apache welcoming spirits,
naked and painted, leaping the peaks.

Terry Everett
Delta State University

Sunflower Song

A golden sunflower, backlighted
by a morning sun beaming
through the Cherokee Blue air
of Good October, blazes,
stands in the center of the vortex
of sparrows and doves that come
and go in arcs that frustrate
ancient cats who lounge nearby,
and I hear a golden voice
count cadence for the sparrows
in their wheeling departures
and returns, for the gray doves
in their more deliberate
patterns, for the cats purring
in harmony with Mother Earth's heart,
and for me above them all
in my goldfish bowl breathing
into being this word-web
woven by Erato returning
in this sunflower singing
in the sunflow of morning

Prayer in Silver

Long ago some Homer struck
the very note on the first lyre
that I hear lilting in the light
streaming like molten silver
around and through golden leaves
and flowing into soft gestalts
that wound the hearts I wanted
to soothe.
Oh, Erato, give me
words that heal hearts that break,
words that flow gently like cool balm.

In My Left Hand

I measure time by how a body sways
Roethke

You are the dove of the dawn of time.
You are the voice of the seven seas
I hear and breathe on this Fifth Morning
in the Garden *in April when . . . not
even death could stop my dream . . . and ghosts
gather now* in the white light moving
in the wind fondling the River Birch
in the white light moving *behind my . . . eyes
dazzling me* with blossoms unfolding
by the thousands, each one white, each one
larger than my mind, each one a Word
feathered into being in a black
rising from a *shadow white as stone*
which I hold in my left hand forever.

Joe Amoako
Delaware State University

The Inactive Cat

Giant bush that never consumes
Foliage evergreen that never withers
Never rust your golden trinkets
Golden trinkets that from coast to coast tingles

Dreadful heads sandwiched
With dagger and wits of the ancient
Apostles of goodwill their mantle be
Their venom bitter sweet
From coast to coast
Their flags unfurred

A torch sparkled in the darkness
Caves and tombs gave way
A tongue toed to tour the tombs
A voice vibrated in the valleys
Multitudes and multitudes
They shouted in tears
Freedom Freedom
For ever and ever
Freedom and justice

It's all darkness
Total darkness
Without the ray of the sun
Horizontal total darkness
Vertical total darkness

The giant cat mews
In solitary he sits
Inactive he purrs
For his sons and daughters
Only food for worms
Yes his sons and daughters
Only food for worms
Gallant men of old and new his
Only food for worms

Still the trumpet sounds
Foliage evergreen still
Still the golden bell tingles
Sounds of SOS still sounds
Yet the mewing cat in solitary sits
Without prey to feed his sons and daughters
His sons and daughters still
Only food for worms

Is anything wrong anywhere
Is something wrong somewhere
To that extent
I say
The cat is sick

Is anything in the minds of my people
Is something in the minds of my people
To that extent
I repeat
The cat is sick

How long
How long
How long shall thou sit in solitary
On the kirk with flaming eyes

Thrash the sickle
North South East and West
Hear your children crying and wailing in the rockies
Babylon is falling
Falling from within and from without

Yeah
Cast thee for a catch
For yonder lies life
The yawning lips
Withering white

The cat is the map of Ghana. It's like a cat sitting with its back toward the West. The poem is about Ghana—Ghana before independence, with independence, and how the people are suffering, especially the Ghanaians in Nigeria. Written in Lagos, Nigeria in August, 1981.

Frances Downing Hunter
Arkansas State University

Early Morning Music

That precious hour before the alarm's
assault, a crosstown train wails
like a late night jazz horn
riffing slowly toward morning.
Closer now, the staccatoed
rumbling of wheels on tracks
drums the back beat as a bird
closer still, picks up a high note
holds it, then scats home.
Slow rain thumbs the base.

Inside our wooden cocoon
the black dog stretches
retracts, as the man slumbers.
Wishboned around me, both
breathe in rhythmic counterpoint
to melody, as I search
for a space, an opening to stretch
an unbound foot to tap.

Kricket Wilbanks-Thweatt
Delta State University

Tattoo

Tattoo my soul
i beg of you
you in your whiteness
glowing with your heart stained
tattoo me
with your scarring stare
of pure innocence
purge my thoughts
with your coal
burning my brain
purify me
with your brand of love

i am drawn
into your twine of selflessness
and i yearn for your tattoo
with soft words filling the water
in your white light
i see you bleeding
hints into the air
loving me with your pain
caressing me with
the scars
i gave to you

Rages

raging through me
at such rapid
speeds
anger
so strong
I hit the wall
until my knuckles
are swollen
and bloody

controlling me
with such overwhelming
power
self-destruction
has all of my attention
I am endlessly drowning
in my own nonexistence
screaming at
this empty world

soaring out of me
with such pure
intensity
hostility
so real
I lean into my reflection
seeing
in the mirror
the hate I breathe

shooting through my body
with indescribable
momentum
dominating motives
I submissively
bow
so the world
can feel my
undeniable pain

Joshua Gordon
Hinds Community College

In the Neighborhood of Midnight

Café Du Monde's the only place lit
not serving drinks, so I steer you
there, try feeding you beignets before
things turn ugly. One of your comrades
in cups bumps the rail next to our
table, belching his apologies for which
you give him a high-five and
a "Right on!" The river breeze kicks up
powdered sugar, covering us like fairy
dust, but no dice; you won't even look
at a menu. So I let go the wheel,
watch you slop coffee all over,
soapboxing everyone in earshot how,
once upon a time, you hung the moon.

Kitchen Table Astrology

She stands beside the table
a minute before asking am I done
and, picking up the overturned
chair, gets a broom to clean up
the broken glass scattered like
stars across the linoleum.
I stare at the shards thinking
to read them like constellations,
divine words to cover for those
already loose in the kitchen.
But before prophecy and intuition
can kick in, she's swept up
the glass and left me trying to
define a moment in cosmic terms.

FICTION

MAGNOLIA AMUSEMENT COMPANY

Randolph Bates
University of New Orleans

No thought now of how he loved the rain. It came down in curtains that softened the road. He downshifted Ben's Hudson to keep from sliding toward the ditches along the sides. Fool day to collect from a place he'd never seen. And he, Emile Tacon, he the fool doing it, fool younger brother, so Ben could stick to his Saturday routine at Magnolia: high on paregoric or the other, though keeping up on the phone, recording each bet and the scores, hysterical singing on the victrola the whole afternoon.

Woods wreathed his view up ahead and in the mirror behind. Just the wind-swept trees—no houses or fields. The wind-swept trees. Then, to his right, he saw a different motion. Someone, a woman, bobbed along at the far edge of the ditch, as if walking there could preserve her from the mud.

He rolled to a stop abreast of her, but she didn't break stride. Obliged him to pass her up, stop twice. He stretched across the long seat to crank the window down. She came even with the wine-reddish fender, walking fast. He had to call out.

She stopped and turned her head.

"Going far as Bucky's. You want a ride?"

He saw her search to locate his face. She shifted a bundle—her shoes and a paper bag—to hold it against her chest.

Wind swirled around her. The wipers clicked.

"Might rain," he said.

Her eyes crossed his, steadied, returned to settle briefly. She took a measured step back and paused.

Then she half-sprang across the ditch.

At the end of his reach, straining, he shoved open the big door and saw orange liquid road mud spatter her feet, her ankles, the hem of her drenched dress the color of wheat.

She brought the air of the woods into the car. Nerves abruptly feathering within him, he stirred his hand in the back and came up with a shirt.

"Help dry you."

Still holding the shoes and the bag to her chest, she accepted the shirt in her free hand and set to blotting her arm, the front of her skirt, her knees.

"You're wet as a dog. Why are you out here?"

"Like you. Going to Bucky's."

"Bucky's?" He gave her a look.

"Some weekends I work there."

"You *work* there?"

"Right. Work. Weekends. Some of us have to." Her eyebrows and mouth mimicked the disbelief in his expression. "I inventory the stock, fill in at the bar." They sat looking at each other. Then she expelled a sigh that seemed to seal a decision. "Bucky's my mother."

He turned to her full face. "Bucky's a colored woman."

"Why you think that?"

"My brother told me."

"Who's your brother?"

"Ben Saik."

"Benny Saik's a sweet man."

"How do you know him? Ben."

She ignored the question. "Isn't he old to be your brother?"

"Well . . . , yeah. He is. We're half-brothers. Our mother had Ben when she was almost a child. I came later. Twenty-some-odd years."

"And *your* mother, is *she* a colored woman?"

He detected a smile at the corners of her mouth. Noticed the way her lips flattened as they pulled back from her teeth.

"Close, I guess." He smiled faintly himself. "Ben says some around Avery think we're gypsies." He gestured toward his dark eyes and brows, his dark shaggy hair. "Or Jews. But our mother was Syrian. Born . . . and lived all her life in New Orleans."

The rain pelted harder.

"Shouldn't we go on?" she said. "You could get stuck here."

He turned to the wheel as if unsure of its function. Put the Hudson in gear, eased forward. Though the rain required him to crane toward the windshield, he glanced at her as he drove. At her thick bottle-blonde hair, her skin lighter than his, and her eyes lighter than her skin, than her dress—lighter especially than her eyelids and the complexion around them. This complexion had a shine to it and was darker than the rest of her face.

"Shouldn't you pay more attention to the road?" She spoke without looking at him.

"Right, but if Bucky's your mother, how were you able to go to the high school?"

"My father. . . ." The bag made a damp sound as she adjusted her hold on it. "My father was a white man. . . . My mother's father too. . . . And her grandfather. . . . Understand?"

After a moment, he nodded.

"And what about you? Why didn't you stay? At the high school."

He touched the brake and looked at her. "*You* remember *me* ?"

She made him wait for her answer.

"If I didn't, I wouldn't be in your brother's car."

Then she added, "I expect Milton Withers, wherever he is, remembers you too."

"Hope so," he said. "What else do you remember? I mean, about me."

"Just that it seemed like maybe you noticed . . . me and my friend Florence. And were shy."

"I wasn't noticing Florence. You wore sweaters backwards, with the buttons in the back. And your shoulders, you have broad sho—"

She tapped the streaked glass. "We're almost there. Just around the curve."

He took his brogan from the gas and let the Hudson coast, then shook his head. "What are you *doing*? Why were you *walking* to Bucky's, or any damn place, in weather like this?"

"That's *your* business?" She had turned her face from him and was gazing downward through the passenger's window.

Up the road a clearing came into view as the fat tires lost momentum. "Well, no, it's not. But. . . ." His voice softened and became plaintive. "But I still . . . want to know."

He turned his torso as well as his face toward her, but she wouldn't look at him. They rolled slowly to a stop. She answered, as if to the window. "Because somebody told me not to."

He put out his hand, almost touching her bare arm. It was rounded at the biceps from the way she held the bundle. Her fingers, he noticed, were within the mouth of the bag—and now he glimpsed this too—around the butt of a pistol.

He withdrew his hand as she continued to speak. "I can walk the rest of the way too, if you want to keep sitting here."

The back tires slipped, then caught, as he goosed the Hudson. Neither spoke until after he braked and guided Ben's garnet-colored car, bouncing on its springs, off the road down into the bowl of a gravel-splotched lot.

Two trucks and a sedan, each muddy, were parked at the far margin of the lot, where the gravel was constant. On the incline above them stood a low cinder-block building coupled to a frame addition. Beyond these he saw the roof of a trailer house set back near the pines.

She had the door open before he could turn the key. "Thank you for stopping for me." She swiveled away to step out.

"Hold on now! C'mon. . . ." The plea in his tone surprised him. He cut the motor, and the Hudson shuddered and fell still.

She turned to look back at him. For a moment he couldn't speak. He sat there, flummoxed, meeting her eyes. Eyes that were no color he could name, since he had no word for a green also amber and somehow like pearl.

Rain blew in from the cracked door.

"I have to go." She swung the door open and stepped out.

"I want," he managed, putting his palm up to stay her.

She shook her head, an expression of fright crossing her features. She drew back her arm to swing the big door shut.

He heard the rain pelt her dress.

Its collar fell away from her throat as, lowering the bag and her shoes, she shifted her weight and leaned forward to look in at him. His awareness of this change caused him to focus hard on her eyes.

"Dudn't matter why you have the gun." It felt like he was losing his voice. "I just want to know—"

"No," she said, "no," shaking her head and crumpling the top of the bag closed. "I've got more trouble than I need, and—"

He could only assert his open hand, like a wave or distress sign.

"No," she said. "And don't try to find—don't even look around for me."

"I don't care about whatever it is," he was saying as she slammed the door and he found himself sitting numbed in the emptied car, noticing his hand, which he still held before him.

She didn't pause at the open entrance to Bucky's. Instead she ran the length of the low building, then around the corner, out of sight.

Cursing his idiocy, he lowered his hand.

When his pulse subsided, he sighed, letting all his breath go. A moment later he fished cloth coin sacks and rings of keys from under the seat. Then, cradling what he carried, as she had, he came out of the car and dashed for the open door.

As he ducked through the run-off that curtained the doorway he glimpsed sparse Christmas lights strung up near the ceiling. These—and sheen from the nickelodeon and the pinballs—were all there was to see by. He stood blinking, breathing the scent of disinfectant and stale smoke and drink, until he made out the bar, then the dark man behind it, then the three or four others ranged about the room, smoke from their cigarettes ribboning upward. They were looking his way.

The bartender withheld acknowledgment until he crossed the dank cement floor and the damp denim of his jacket touched the bar top. "Help you?" The man stood taller than he did and sighted down on him as he spoke.

"Ben Saik's my brother. I'm here to do the machines. And collect."

The bartender eyed him for a moment, his look suspended between suspicion and assent. "Seed Mista Ben's car come. Thought you was him. Or Dee Willis."

He laid the keys and cloth sacks on the bar, more audibly than he intended. "Dee Willis is in Alabama, till tomorrow, with a band.

"The bartender's posture altered, inclining in his direction. "I didn't know Mista Ben had a brother in Avery. Sho' didn't. Did you know Ben have a brother?" he asked, it seemed of the other men in general. "Say, did you?"

One of the men shook his head and made sounds that expressed amiable amazement, which was echoed by the others.

Tacon loathed the prospect of explaining himself when he had questions of his own, about her. But he gave them an answer. There was really no choice. "I never lived in Avery long. And when I did, it was way back. My name's Emile—Emile Tacon. Ben's half-brother. I was in the army. Now I'm out—working with Ben. He said you could call him. At Magnolia."

The bartender moved to the other end of the bar where he hoisted a heavy black phone-set from a shelf beneath the bar top. He swept the receiver to his ear but dialed awkwardly, his fingertip too large for the holes in the face of the ring. After a pause he replaced the receiver. "Tied up. You care for a drink?"

"Thanks," he answered. "A coke." He resumed scanning the shadows for other entrances.

It was a long space, windowless, under furnished, and increasingly dim-lit farther from the front. A low bandstand filled one far corner—a darkened pool table the other. Some rickety tables and chairs were scattered about the room as if dragged where they were by whoever last used them. There were barstools, just a few. From the look of it, Bucky's was a place where most patrons stood.

"Open the man a Co-Cola." He heard the bartender, though he now gave most of his attention to the brighter end of the room and the floor-length sheet of burlap Ben had said he would find on the wall next to the bar. He looked from the burlap to the two pinballs and the nickelodeon, which stood close to it. The keyholes were on the sides where Ben said he thought they would be. This was good because some of the machines, newer ones, were the devil to open.

As he began picking through the keys for the ones Dee Willis had marked for him with bits of adhesive, a wiry man with a bloom of gray hair stepped around the bar. Jittery and solicitous, this older man murmured as he reached below the bar and threw back the sliding lid of the drink cooler. "Yes *suh*! Sho' am! Go'n gitchou a Co-Cola rat *now*!" The man snatched up a soft drink and jammed it into the side of the cooler. He snapped off the cap as if tossing down a weight. Despite the broad strokes of his movements, he set the squat bottle on the bar top—precisely, and without sound.

Before Tacon could acknowledge him, the gray-haired man had turned away, still murmuring.

Tacon lifted the bottle, which to the heft was like a paperweight, and was about to drain its six ounces when the man raised an ice pick.

"Go'n make it *cold* too!" He slammed open the other side of the cooler and stabbed into it with the pick.

Tacon set the bottle down and waited until the man placed a glass full with ice next to it on the bar.

Tacon reached into the pocket of his jeans. The man cut his eyes at the bartender. Though now talking into the phone, the bartender shook his head.

"You cain' pay here," the gray-haired man said, showing his palms.

Tacon thanked him and sipped his drink, casting about for a way, short of questioning, to prompt this man to speak of her. But, remembering the gun, he thought better of it as the bartender's conversation with Ben petered into trivia. Tacon pictured Ben, his aging brother, snug behind his desk or on the sofa in the office, distantly attending that odd music—opera! —then suddenly making small talk, as if with his whole mind, in the rare instances when a gambler wanted to gab on the phone.

"This here could be Bible water," the bartender declared, receiver to his ear. "If it come down at us again, we might better hunt up a boat."

His reference to the weather made Tacon notice the absence of the moist roar on the roof and on the gravel and soaked earth beyond the door. He looked out through the thinning run-off and saw that the rain had stopped. He sighed. Drank the rest of the coke and set the glass next to the empty bottle on the bar. He took up the cloth sacks and the keys. Regardless of where she was—time to do his little work.

The machines were a snap. Nothing had to be fixed. This place wouldn't be hard. Not like some of the others—Zero's, the White Castle, Chalfon. But like them, it was a gold mine in nickels. He eased out receipt boxes, top-heavy with slippery coins, and poured them into the bags. As he did this, he thought fleetingly of the shallow pockets this silver had come from. Then with a wince, he remembered the 45—Carol Fran's new tune—that Dee Willis had left for him, along with scrawled instructions clipped to it in the big center hole: "takeout mene miss-treeter put own emit lee." Damnit to hell, that record was still back there, where Dee had propped it to catch his eye, on Arthur's work table at Magnolia.

He cinched the coin sacks and took out "Mean Mistreater," which was cracked. Then he snapped open the front of the box and peeled away the title. For reasons vague to himself, he didn't want to leave the record here, to be blown to bits of vinyl, someone's airborne target. Instead he slipped it into one of the inner pockets of his denim jacket, a reminder to himself to replace it with "Emmett Lee" the next time.

The sacks now a leaden weight in his right hand, he moved to stand

in front of the length of burlap. He paused, glancing first at the bartender, then over his shoulder through the club's doorway. The bruised grays of the sky intensified the drenched greens of the woods. He wished he could go there.

With the back of his hand he pushed aside the burlap. It concealed an open sliding door no wider than a window. Beyond it was a smaller room, darker than the other. He turned to the bartender. After a moment the man reached under the bar top and flicked a switch. In the smaller room two light bulbs flashed on overhead, one over a poker table, the other in a bare corner where he knew the craps would be. The slot machines stood to his right, a thick-brushed sign extending across the wall that separated them from the empty corner: "**no gamble-ing**." At the back of the room was a door marked "PRIVATE" by a small metal plate. He remained very conscious of this door as he opened the slots. The receipt box in the nickel slot was full, the box in the quarter machine almost empty. After he had adjusted the payoffs, emptied portions of these boxes into the pay trays and the rest into the sacks he stood straight and took a long breath.

His brogans on the slab floor seemed to him too loud, lumbering, as he crossed the room to the door.

There was no response to his light knock. Pulse thumping, he turned the knob—and felt soft resistance. As he was about to bear down and turn from the shoulder, the door opened and he found himself looking down into the face of a handsome tan woman.

"Excuse me, sir, but no."

He recognized her daughter in her light eyes and full lips, in the compact shape of her hand on the door edge.

"I thank you for bringing Camille in the rain, but the envelope you want, Lonnie, the man at the bar, he has it for you there."

He scarcely noted her careful words. His gaze immediately passed above the crown of her gray curls, his eyes scanning a cramped miscellaneous space, then an adjacent door that was opened onto a kind of a breezeway. Beyond it, he glimpsed jeweled grass and the trees. And, at the edge of the grass, her.

Yet it took him a moment to know this. Evidently bathed and now dry except for her hair, she wore starched men's work clothes that were sizes too large for her and were rolled at the sleeves and the cuffs. She still clutched the bag—it was an effort for him to remember what was important about that. Her feet, he noticed, were framed in the round-nosed flat shoes she had carried, and her thick hair was combed back in wet furrows. She could have been mistaken for a boy too pretty for work clothes and labor with his hands.

He pressed forward, but the older woman blocked his way, her palms on his ribs.

"I just want to speak to—"

"You should go," she told him. "Quick!"

As she spoke, her voice rising into a rushed whisper, gravel popped in the front lot and he heard the steel gargle of a V-8 with glass-packs. It was well tuned, and clean.

He sensed fear in the woman as she pushed him away from the door and closed it behind her. She went directly to the burlap and, after a pause, stepped through it.

He waited a moment, then tried the door—and found it locked.

Turning back toward the burlap, he saw he had left the slots standing open. It suddenly felt urgent that he lock them.

While securing the machines, he heard the engine cease. Then the slam of a door, a heavy step on the gravel. A shadow rippled across the burlap.

Tacon parted the coarse sacking—but only a few inches—and realized he was hiding.

To his left, through the club's entrance, he could see most of the car. It was an old Ford convertible, three quarters the size of the Hudson parked beyond it. Custom white paint job. Nosed, decked, almost chromeless—a beauty. To the right of the burlap, the driver approached the bar. A man in his twenties or thirties, he wore boots and tight jeans. No shirt, despite the rain-cooled March air. His pinkish skin stood out in the dimness and accentuated the mass of him—planes of smooth muscle, the beginning of a gut. He brought down his palm on the bar top. "Shot a V O. . . .

"I'm looking for a woman," he said to the bartender, Lonnie, as Lonnie poured him the shot.

"Mens genelly do," Lonnie said, his grin conspiratorial. "I looks for 'em too. Don' find none of 'em too much though." He glanced expectantly toward the other men, who were shifting about in ways preliminary to laughter. But the shirtless man stilled them with his eyes. Lonnie's grin faded; he assumed a concerned tone. "You say a *woman*, suh? What she look like?"

"Like a white woman."

There was no depth in the man's voice. It was high yet flat. "But," he added, without moving his head or in any way acknowledging the presence of the gray-haired woman at the side of the bar, "a lot younger than *her*."

The woman had been steadily regarding the newcomer. Now she moved to stand closer and to look up into his face.

"Sir, my name is Rebecka Malone. My late husband owned this little place. We don't know anything about—"

"Tell you what," he said, turning his head to look down at her. "You want to keep this little place, keep it like it is, you better get her out here.

. . . Bitch took my .38." He knocked back the shot. "And I don't give a rat's ass about your late husband."

Tacon saw a flinch register in the woman's posture as she tried to stand firm. He also saw, when the other turned his head, that eerily he looked like the boy from Tupelo who had been on Ed Sullivan—except that these features were fleshier and more drooped.

For the moment it seemed no one was willing to make a definite move. The older woman still stood looking at the man without a shirt, but the men beyond the bar had receded into the shadows in the dimmer end of the room.

Tacon breathed harder. A smothered feeling had begun in him with the sound of the Ford's engine, and now the feeling thickened.

"That be thirty cent for the V O, suh." Lonnie proved he was a risk-taker, and the other men stirred in alarm.

The customer puckered his mouth as if his tongue were working a bitter morsel from inside his lip. His gaze rested on Lonnie before idling away to take in the room. "So who's driving the boat?" he asked of no one in particular.

"Suh? A *boat*?"

"Mister." The proprietor spoke to him, but he ignored her.

"Bus, ugly red pee-wagon—whatever you call it." He raked his fingers backwards through his ducktail.

Lonnie's pluck, which so disquieted the others, still held him at the edge of forbidden exchange with this man who was shorter but much wider than he was. "That air's a car, suh! Don' make that kind no mo'. That's a Hudson Hornet. That's—"

"It's shit. Whose is it?"

This time he looked at Lonnie as he spoke to him, and Lonnie stepped back.

"That'd be mine," said Tacon.

What else could he do? But as he turned his shoulders to push through the burlap, he glimpsed the private door behind him—now it was open—and her silhouette in the door frame. He couldn't take a good look though: the voice of the other man drew him into the main room.

"Wha—? What . . . is . . . this? *Another* white man here today? And him the first one. Wonder how come?"

He turned from the bar to stare at Tacon full-face, with maybe twenty feet between them. "Or *is* he a white man? A real one."

Tacon gazed into the bleached blue of his eyes. Then, without meaning to, he looked down. Cowed by the superior animal.

"So whatcha got in those sacks? Looks like they heavy."

Tacon couldn't answer him. Couldn't speak, think. He looked at the

sacks in his hands.

The other persisted. "It's a secret? Yeah? Like another secret—the woman you come here with? I'd like to hear about *that*. Like where she is now. Right now."

Tacon shook his head and gazed through the entrance at the wet woods and earth.

"I'm talkin' to you, Jewboy. Just to you. By yourself. Where is she?"

As if he hadn't heard, Tacon lurched through the entrance, outside.

"Don't leave," the other warned him, not raising his voice.

"I'm not," he managed. Nausea swirled in him as he quick-stepped toward Ben's car. An ingrained sense of duty drove him first to finish his job and, if he could, protect the money.

The ignition key Ben had given him jiggled in the lock to the trunk, but once he succeeded at inserting it, the trunk yawned open. He dropped in the sacks, the rings of keys, his wallet. Then he noticed that no one had followed him. It came over him in a rush that, instead of tossing Ben's key in after the rest or sailing it into the woods, he could leave. Could just go—and be wheeling the Hudson out of the lot before the other had even cranked the sweet-throated 8.

He closed the trunk softly, pressed his weight down till it locked—and, as he did, he remembered the envelope, the main money, still with Lonnie at the bar. Money meant to pay off the sheriff on Monday. But compared to her that money was nothing, and he wondered was she still there in the second room . . . where she had witnessed how this other one had spoken to him. And was she waiting there now for whatever it was that the other would do?

A feeling of resignation swept over him. With his blood up, as it had been when she rode with him in the rain, he slipped the key into his sock, working it down until he felt it under his instep.

He straightened and started back toward the door. Little was clear in his mind as he crunched across the gravel, queasier, but at least now resolved to see it through. The few times in his life when he couldn't avoid fighting—those hadn't ended so terribly. If there *were* another way. . . . Yet how bad could this be?

In the instant that he stepped under the overhang, Tacon saw the rinsed world of the woods in a way he would never repeat, or forget—the shining wet pines, oaks, magnolias, and dogwoods. And one solitary sweetgum. This tree was so vivid, it was as if he could see life quiver within its supplicant branches and the sharp stars of its leaves.

Crossing the threshold to the doorway, he glanced to his right, seeking her at the edge of the burlap. As he did, the other man, moving fast,

stepped to him from the left. Tacon glimpsed his eager features—was it ecstasy in his face?—but he didn't see the fist, and what it was armed with, sweeping in an arc toward his eyes.

There was a pop like a dropped light bulb—he knew the man hit him, but he didn't feel it—then a near deafening ring in his ears, and beyond that, faintly, someone was screaming. He felt himself lose balance, and he couldn't see. If he could just get his bearings. . . . He was surprised he wasn't hurt. Except that it seemed he had stepped in a hole—when what happened, in fact, was that he went down, like grain through a chute.

He lay on the gravel, stunned again when his head struck the earth. Gradually he understood—and voiced it to himself: *I'm hurt.*

Someone stepped on him, or kicked him. He was aware of others' strangled breathing and of shoes or boots scraping on the cement and biting into the gravel. Then he heard, as if at a distance, the explosions from a gun. Pain began to sear him in increments that accumulated in his head. He held his palms to the gelled secretions that oozed from the left side of his face. Never—he understood now—would he change the position of his hands, though their trembling hurt him further. Through the clouded vision of his right eye, he made out the little bottle, his free coke, which lay level with his face in the gravel, its thick glass crazed with a webwork of fissures.

He lost consciousness, then regained it, aware that the rain had returned and that he was being lifted in darkness. He heard weeping. Then he lay in the back of a foul car, across a seat saturated in the tin scent of grime and wet dogs. In his mind he spoke to God, as he usually did after waking and before sleep—despite the absurdity of it, asking God to be with him, and with his mother and Ben.

He felt himself drifting away, yet resistant—like when he was a boy swimming in the Gulf and the warm current seized him. The current would draw him out, then he would stroke free of it and float in. The car bumped along a bad road, but his head lay cradled and much of the scent of the squeaking seat had gone away. His nose nuzzled boiled khakis, a man's zippered fly. Panic seized him, and he spoke out, feverish and infantile. " . . . hurt. Help me. Will you h—?"

The current increased its pull, and—such relief—he gave in to it completely when he heard her say, "I will."

Birds of the Storm God

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The old Tejas hunter Two Hawks squatted on the dense grey mud that fringed the shining disk of Matagorda Bay, watching two shore crabs rise out of their holes, seeming to taste as well as see the humid summer day with their eye-stalks. He remained motionless, still as the drifted buttonwood nearby, as the minutes passed, and gradually the crabs crept closer, closer, until one began pinching at the thick leathery sole of his foot that was deeply cracked by rough ground and salt marsh.

He smiled slowly at the pinch of the crabs, knowing how they waited, something always waited to feed as others fell. Soon, little brothers, he thought, and turned at the sound of gunfire, boom, boom boom, boom, breaking the stillness of the day, and the crabs shot back into their holes as his toes gripped the broken shells in the mud and he raised his black eyes, one clouded over now, a haze on his right side that had begun three months ago.

Across this pocket of the bay, to the east a cloud of egrets and storks rose into the bright morning haze, but numbers fluttered back to earth, like handfuls of white flower petals between the fingers of a palsied hand. Boom boom, boom, boom, the faint percussions drifted over the impassive mud flats. The feather hunters were stuffing their bags, he knew.

"I remember," he said aloud, a green heron cocking its head at the sound, one long leg poised to step further into the warm water, toes spread.

And he thought back through all those rounds of seasons, friends long dead or drifted to the whites, or further back into the stony wild that was beyond the monks and the mesquite. He remembered when he had begun to think about the sounds his father and mother sometimes made together in the wigwam and he had looked at the girls, at their bodies, in a new way. They had lived further north then, and he had looked across the water there on the upper reaches of Galvez where the bright birds floated down onto the islands to the east, the low islands that stretched into the Gulf and kept the waters quiet where their people fished and gathered oysters and crabs. He told his father he wanted to go out to the islands, paddle out there and catch some birds, for meat, he had said, but knew he wanted to make a feather bonnet for the girl on the other side of the clearing who looked at him with soft brown eyes and made him look away.

His father had looked hard at him, deep into the boy's eyes, and had said, "We will go and see the old man tomorrow," nodded, squeezed the boy's shoulder, and strode away.

The following morning, his father shook him awake and they walked

out into the dark morning of the season before the long heat, the bushes and sawgrass dripping in the dawn, made water together near the edge of the clearing, and came back to the cold fire, filling pouches with smoked mullet and berries that hung over the coals. The stream water was cool to their throats, and they rose and followed the hard path that led south.

Just before noon, he followed his father down a side trail to the east and, leaving their pouches and knives, all but two bags made of knotted vine, they waded into the still waters in the lee of a finger of low sand. Schools of mullet jumped lazily, one darted in a curled vee beyond the reach of some prowling shark. The boy and his father began to feel forward with their feet, soon encountering the encrusted beds of oysters in the warm waist-deep water. According to the instructions of his father, they gathered four handfuls each of the fat shells long as their open hands and waded ashore. "For the old one," his father said, and the two continued their pace south.

Just past an old red oak, its trunk disfigured like the hind leg of a deer that had been broken and mended poorly the boy had stalked and shot with his bow in the last frozen rain, his father's stick-straight back and tireless stride shifted west, seemingly into the midst of the dense palmettos and scrub oaks. At first, the boy had difficulty picking out the trail, so overgrown it was, but he soon began to notice up-croppings of limestone and harder rock among the fallen branches, rock that was polished smooth by the soles of passing feet, and the boy felt a brush of fear, as when last spring a panther's print in the fresh mud filled with water as he watched.

His father pushed on, rapidly, driven in a way the boy was not accustomed to, until after the trail circled around two hackberry trees draped in wild grapes, the trail widened to a clearing painted suddenly crimson and gold as the sun plunged down.

In the dying light, at the clearing's edge rose a mound of whitened oyster shell, tall as a man, and near the center of the grass-tufted clearing, next to a ring of smooth and tight-fitting fire stones sat the old one.

After the sparks caught the moss tinder and sent tiny tongues of flame up into the twigs, catching twisted grey branches alight, the old man accepted the bags of oysters with a nod and carefully laid out the swollen shells in a row. He then brought a curious copper tool like a sharpened thumb out of a beaded pouch and began to pry open the shells, each with a hollow pop that made the boy's mouth run with saliva.

But as the man worked, the boy shyly stole glances at this old one they had traveled to see, but the man did not look like the old ones he had seen among his people, and this was certainly not a white old one, either. Chapetyl, his father had called him, was the color of oiled cedar, dark reddish brown, with thick grey strands of hair falling only below his ear under a curious collection of bright red and green and yellow feathers bound to his

head in a manner the boy had never seen. Most odd was the man's face, round jaw, receding chin, jutting lips and thick hooked nose, like a stone hatchet, the man's face was, the eyes glittering black and shining, like the tiny arrow points he had seen from the south.

They ate, almost drank, the sweet oyster meats in the cooling dark around a yellow ring of flickering light, ate in silence, each buried in his own thoughts, the boy noticing as the flames began to crackle and blink green and red and blue, wondering if the salt caused that, when his father broke the night.

"The boy wants to go to the islands, after the birds."

"Humph," the man grunted, looking like one of the sad giant turtles that dragged themselves sometimes up onto the sand. He seemed to become one of these wrinkled creatures, opening his beak and beginning: "The storm god gathers the feathers of those birds for his cloak. You see them on some days sweeping the highest part of the sky, out of reach.

"There was a season long ago when the large birds lived here with us on the shore and we shared the fish and the crabs and the storm god came sometimes to gather his feathers but we knew him. But then came a people who killed, a people who killed people and birds and animals with little cause, who took birds with arrows and crept up onto the birds' nests in the dark and grabbed the birds by their long legs and killed and ate the tiny young birds until the birds cried out, screamed out loud and long for the storm god to help them.

"Far to the south, in the southern sea where the water is warm as blood, the sleeping storm god raised his heavy eyes and heard the screams and cries of his beloved birds, and he arose and called to his great black thunder bird that carried him over the water, his bird Hurakan, and the storm god grew sad and then angry as he listened, so that he grew darker and swelled and lightning bolts broke from his brow and torrents of tears poured from his eyes."

The boy had been staring into the colors of the crackling fire but looked up at the old man, whose words were pounding out as steadily as the beating of a drum but his lips no longer moved and his eyes stared straight ahead into the night.

"And Hurakan rose and spread his black wings and began to beat them, the powerful feathers rending the sky, the air pushing the water into sharp peaks broken with white foam, and the storm god rode north on Hurakan, slowly, feeling the powerful muscles of his carrier beneath him, driven by the cries of the herons and storks, the egrets and terns that echoed across the expanse of the Gulf."

Again the boy raised his eyes and dimly saw the old man across the fire, his hard face shining, lips pressed together in anger, but the darkness

throbbed with his voice, held the boy like hands pressing his shoulders down, his bare flanks feeling the broken shell and coarse sand imprinting his skin. His father sat motionless next to him, eyes closed, palms open on his knees, mouth hung loose at rest.

"The people who lived with the birds felt the sky hold its breath, saw the pelicans staying close in and low and looked out over the still water turning flat and grey. Far to the south at the edge of sight they saw the darkness spreading across the rim of earth, sweeping forward. As the day drew to a close they saw the wings of Hurakan black and tattered tearing across the sky and felt the anger of the storm god and were afraid.

"All that night and into the following day the storm god held Hurakan hovering, panting, beating its terrible wings upon them and the storm god cried for his birds. The huge wings of Hurakan pushed and swept the waters of the Gulf up onto the land, far back into the land, until the people climbed high into the trees. Many of the new people did not know Hurakan, did not understand the water, and were drowned or were swept hard against the trees until their bodies broke, found later like old blankets draped over limbs.

"On the afternoon of the second day, the storm god grew tired of his anger and turned his great bird and bid it to beat its wings back into the Gulf. As Hurakan withdrew, beating and pulling his great black wings, the waters fell, but as they fell Hurakan gathered and pushed back the land into the Gulf with his thick wings and clawing feet until all along the shore but separated from the land by shallow water Hurakan built up a row of islands from the mud and sand he had dragged back and made a home for the birds of the storm god.

"As the last long pinions of Hurakan's plumes receded that afternoon, the storm god opened his colored cloak and let beams of sunlight burn down onto the new islands off the shore to show the birds the way, and they came and began to pace and strut and probe about in the mud and sand as the sun came out brilliant and sparkled on the glittering sea. The islands smoked and steamed in the sun like loaves of browned maize. The storks looked one to another as others wheeled down and wagged their thick heads, egrets strutted in the drying pools and with the herons speared frantic fish and slid them down long throats, ruffling their plumes contentedly. Far overhead the sandhill cranes circled and called to their faraway homes. Terns chattered and probed the fresh sand with their sensitive beaks, and all the flocks knew the islands were their home, knew the storm god had heard their cries."

As the last droning fall of Chapetyl's voice was absorbed into the night, the boy looked up over the red and grey broken coals from the fire and saw the old man nod forward onto his chest, his necklace strands of pink and yellow shells glowing dully in the gloom. An immense fatigue swept over the boy, and his arms wrapped his knees, asleep before his forehead rested.

The dawn light wakened the boy, and he unfolded awkwardly, feeling the slick damp of the salt-coast air clinging like grease to his limbs, his hair wet to the touch. The fire was cold, and squatting on his hams next to the boy sat his father, impassive, almost amused.

"Where is the old man?" The boy asked.

"He has gone away."

"But where? Did you see him go?"

His father stared hard at him, turned down the corners of his hard mouth in what he felt a smile, and said, "You know."

The boy had known, and the understanding made him glad that he soon would be a boy no more, and sad as the weight of knowledge sometimes settles on one's shoulders like a heavy burden, a bag of stones.

Two Hawks heard, far off, the boom of the feather hunters' guns, but thought instead they were the distant thunder of another storm and he smiled, as his father had, turning down the corners of his mouth. He did not feel the pinch of the crabs this time, did not feel the tiny claws pry open the cracks on his toes, did not see the bright red beads of blood as they tasted.

Pilgrimage

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1990 was the worst and best year of my life. In the short summer of that year, I had my greatest musical find and my most tragic personal loss. In June, Columbia Records gave me an epiphany of sorts, Robert Johnson. I had heard the name and legends but never the music. My dad always said he was the best guitar player that ever lived. He also told me the legend of Johnson selling his soul to the devil at the crossroads. Johnson recorded in the twenties, but his recordings were lost until 1988. Somehow, someone from Columbia stumbled across the acetates that had all twenty-nine songs Johnson had recorded at his only two recording sessions. Blues fans went nuts. When the recordings were finally released, I was waiting at the record store when it opened. My dad and I sat that day and listened solemnly to those songs. My dad was right—he was the greatest player there ever was. At times we both could swear there were two people playing but no, the liner notes and tablature reassured us, there was only one man making those amazing sounds. We were mesmerized. The music was haunting and the lyrics were "otherworldly." We sat there staring at the picture on the cover. "So this is who you are," I whispered.

My dad replied, "Yes son, this is the man who started it all. He is the originator."

I didn't think he looked like much of a Bluesman at all, more like a traveling Vaudeville player. Nice suit and hat and a vagabond sort of look. He was surprisingly young looking. I always had an image of him as a haggard old field hand. But no, he was immaculate and looked even younger than the thirtyish man he was. I was a little disappointed in the picture, I admit. Gregg Allman looked more like a Bluesman than Johnson did, and he was white. I found it hard to fit this man on the cover in front of me with the sounds I was hearing. However, slowly I admitted that the voice did fit the face. My dad and I didn't listen to anything else for weeks, and when we started listening to other stuff again, we couldn't help but point out how it paled when compared to Johnson.

On August 9, 1990 my education ended. My father's heart attack wasn't completely unexpected. His health had been in decline for years, and in our last summer together I was doing the driving, not because I could but because he couldn't. Not only had I lost my father but my mentor, the person who taught me everything I love.

He was buried on Saturday, and Sunday morning at three a.m. I left.

I had driven up into Mississippi several times on my own, but I had never really taken the time to stop and look around. I was always driving. I spent the two days between my dad's death and his funeral driving around Uptown looking at all the places we had visited together. Now it was time for me to head up into the Delta for an extended visit on my own. Something was eating away at me that I didn't understand. I had ghosts to exorcise, sins of my ancestors to understand, and I could swear I heard Johnson's hellhounds nipping at my heels.

The sky was clear when I left. Otis Redding was in the tape deck singing Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come." A crescent moon was in the sky as I made it out onto the dark Louisiana bayous of I-55 north. I drove for two and a half hours until I made it to Mississippi. The tip of the boot's string where Louisiana turns into Mississippi is a strange place. The bayous of Louisiana stop almost exactly on the state line, and the fields of Mississippi begin almost as immediately. Both places are haunted, and it felt strange to be in a place that fostered such evil and death on a Sunday morning when I should have been in church. Stranger still was that my first stop was to be the grave of a man who supposedly sold his soul to the devil, and my second stop would be where Old Scratch did that deed.

I drove without stopping to Morgan City, Mississippi where the stone was. This was plantation country, and once I left the interstate for Highway 49 all I saw were a few small towns and huge fields with the occasional gray shack close to the road. These weren't old slave cabins but overseer cabins. The slave cabins would have been much closer to the plantation house and wouldn't have had doors facing the road as these did. Slave owners built the cabins with the doors facing the fields so the slaves wouldn't be able to see the road. If slaves saw the road, they could dream of escape with what little free time there was in their lives. Slave owners didn't even want a glimmer of hope in the minds of the people they owned. These shacks I was passing were the places where runaways were killed. These shacks were put on the edge of the road not only to make it easy to spot runaways but also for a far worse reason. When a runaway was caught and killed at one of these roadside shacks, all the overseer had to do was kick the body a few feet into the road to warn other would-be runaways. I began to understand a little better why the devil was so prominent in the lives of the people that lived in this place. I began to see the Hell that this place had been.

The sun was full when I pulled off Highway 49 and onto the red dirt road that led to the Mount Zion Baptist Church. The road ran along the edge of some old plantation with unknown trees on the right side. Small hurricane ditches and high weeds lined both sides of the road and that was it. I hadn't seen a house in a good five minutes and only guessed from the directions I had been given that this was the road. The church was about a mile down the road

on the left and appeared just when I was beginning to question if I was going the right way. I let the car drop to about ten miles an hour when I saw the church come up, perched on a small hill and looking like it was sliding into the field behind it. For some reason, I wanted to sneak up on the place. I spotted the small clearing in the weeds that marked the land bridge over the ditch and pulled the car over into ankle-deep mud.

That summer had been extremely wet, and the week before had seen some bad thunderstorms in the Delta. The church was old, abandoned, and the back half that was sliding was flooded. The water rose up the hill until it was a few feet from the front of the church. I thought at first that the building might have been an old slave shack because of the way the door faced, but it was far too big. Three slave shacks could have fit into the building, small as it was. Although the building was partially flooded, it was covered with a fresh coat of white paint, and the gold wooden cross above the front door looked new. The fix up was probably due to the new gravestone in the front yard. However, this church hadn't heard hymns in years. Fresh paint didn't hide decay. The whole scene was kind of a metaphor for the south as a whole. My first thought when I stepped out of my car and into the mud was how would I get the car back out of here. I had been in some sort of trance when I spotted the church and didn't bother to look off the road and was lucky I hadn't driven into the ditch.

Johnson's grave wasn't hard to pick out. It was one of only two graves with a marker larger than a brick. The ceremony dedicating the grave had been long ago enough that the weeds had grown back fairly heavily, and as I walked over the other graves to Johnson's, I found myself gardening at an old abandoned Mississippi church. I got kind of involved in clearing the weeds and spent about ten minutes getting the place ready for my visit. The gravestone was a four-sided piece of marble or granite, about two feet tall with a pyramid top. There were inscriptions on all four sides. The north facing side was inscribed with notes about his life and the work involved in getting the stone built. The south side listed all twenty-nine of his songs. It was on the east side that I first focused my attention. Here, close to the top, was a small oval of ivory carved with the same picture that was on the cover of my CD. The inscription under the carving called him the "King of the Delta blues singers," and that he was. Further down, the stone talked about the reason why Johnson was king of the Blues and what was so haunting about his music. His music was his story, however horrible that story was. As I read, I thought of James Baldwin's character Creole from "Sonny's Blues," who had said the same thing when he attempted to make an audience understand what force drove a blues musician's spirit. I sat for a while in the clearing I had made, a chill going up my spine, and then moved to the west side of the stone. Here were the words I had seen in print and only recently

heard. Words that runaway slaves could have uttered with an overseer's gun to their heads, just before taking their last breaths:

You may bury my body
down by the highway side
So my old evil spirit
can catch a Greyhound bus and ride.

I sat there in silence. I had turned the tape deck off when I got out of the car, so the only sounds were my breathing and the wind in the weeds. I am not someone who believes in ghosts and spirits, but yes, I felt a presence as I sat at that grave. After staring at the words on the stone for a few minutes, I got my camera. I didn't feel right about taking pictures of someone's grave, but I knew I'd want to reflect clearly on this for some time to come. Then I got back in the car without wiping my feet, then backed unexpectedly easily out of the mud, and headed back to 49. I took out the Muddy Waters tape I had been listening to and put Johnson in.

I drove for about an hour up 49 to where Highway 61 intersected it. I had made it to the crossroads. Mississippi Highways 49 and 61. The place where the blues and most of the legends that surrounded it were born. By the time I arrived at the crossroads, I had begun to understand a little bit about what I was doing there in the first place. I was making my pilgrimage to my Mecca. In a way, I was seeking some sort of forgiveness for my ancestors making this place the Hell it is. I always knew that one day I would get here. Now that I had made it, there was so much more. Just like with those songs my dad put in my ear, there was something underneath. Just like with Mecca, the reasons why were about more than the place; they were about the getting here. If I was ever to fully understand the music that I loved so much, I needed to physically see and feel what that music was about and where it came from. It was then that I finally thought about who had put the notion of coming here in my head, my father. I hadn't thought about him all morning although I wanted to. He wanted me to do exactly what I was doing, learning. I was finally understanding what his lesson in life to me was.

Thankfully, I got to the crossroads at eleven in the morning and not midnight. I don't believe in the devil, but there was something about this place, just like Johnson's grave. When I knew I was getting close, I put "Crossroad Blues" in the tape deck, but, unfortunately, the song ended about a minute before I got there. I pulled off 49's blacktop, onto the red dirt shoulder about ten feet before 61 crossed, shut the car down, and sat there. My feet stepped out into the gravel, and I looked west across to the road to see a ditch, some weeds, power lines, and a cotton field. I took my time, letting the image soak in, and just stared out into the distance of the field. The power lines were the only things that seemed not to fit neatly into the image, and I

wondered about them. Had they been here in Johnson and Muddy's time, or were they fairly recent? Next my gaze turned north, and I walked towards 61, looking to the exact center of the crossroads. I think I expected to see Old Scratch himself appear in the middle. I was nervous. When I got to the corner, I turned around to look at the east and south.

The place was desolate: four directions of barren deserted delta flood plain. Blues legends tell how this spot is the rim of Hell, and I guess it fit the image I'd had. The fires wouldn't be visible yet; the emptiness would come first. I walked to the center of the two roads, my nervousness building. When I got there, I looked down at the pavement. There was no need to worry about traffic as not many people came this way anymore. The presence I had felt at Johnson's grave had followed me. Here I was, standing in the middle of the two roads. This was the spot. This was the spot where Johnson and others turned their faces north at seven minutes to midnight. This was the spot where those men, desperate for a way out of this land, handed their guitars to the hand they felt on their right shoulders. This was the spot where they heard Old Scratch laugh and knew they were dead. The hellhounds would follow from here.

Off in the distance to the west a dark summer thunderstorm was coming up, and the clouds were starting to chase my sun away. That was all the warning I needed. I may not have believed in the devil, but I wasn't ready yet to find out if I was wrong. I walked back to the car and put in "Dreams" by the Allmans. I understood what my dad was talking about. I understood how evil this place was, and I understood what made this place the center of a Diaspora. I understood why I hadn't seen many houses. Who the hell would want to live here? When I got back in the car, I believed in ghosts. Although I hadn't seen any, I had felt them. I don't know how to explain it, but something haunted this place I was sure; something had to. Sitting there waiting on the storm as the wind started to blow and the sky grew increasingly dark, it was easy to imagine what had gone on here. It was easy to remember that 49 and 61 were originally slave trade roads.

The thing I didn't understand was how in the middle of all this evil, somehow, joy had come. That was the question I was leaving with, and I knew I'd never understand the answer. In my thoughts, something more along the lines of Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem" would have happened. "What happens to a dream deferred?" And yes there really wasn't much of an emancipation for many of the people who lived and died here. "Does it explode?" Yes it does. It did, and while I could listen to the music that came from that explosion, I had never experienced what went on here. I was a white kid from the suburbs who bitched when things didn't go his way. I

didn't know shit. Not even my dad's death the prior week came close.

The thunder and rain began, and I headed on north with Johnson singing:

> I got to keep movin'
> I got to keep moving'
> blues fallin' down like hail
> blues fallin' down like hail
> and the days keeps on worryin' me
> there's a hellhound on my trail.

POMPA is set in Times New Roman.

Printed by CUSHING-MALLOY (Ann Arbor, MI).