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# ESSAYS

**Translating Audiences and their Bottoms: Filming *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

*John R. Ford*
*Delta State University*

It is indeed strange and admirable that *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play that so profoundly and exuberantly celebrates the limitless energies of theatrical performance, would itself have suffered from such persistent and limiting theatrical resistance. In his New Cambridge introduction to the play, R. A. Foakes notes that, except for a likely performance on New Year's day, 1604, "nothing certain is known about productions before the closing of the theatres in the Commonwealth period" (12). In fact, as Trevor Griffiths points out, "there are only two known performances of the play under its own name between 1660 and . . . 1816" (1). That 1816 performance was "a comic-operatic production," one of several adaptions of the play (1). The only other production was the one Samuel Pepys saw in September 1662, an experience that sent the diarist scurrying to his journal. "[W]e saw 'Midsummer Night's Dream,'" he observed, "which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life" (qtd. in Griffiths 10). Its only redeeming feature for Pepys was "some good dancing and some handsome women which was all my pleasure" (10). Even well into the twentieth century, productions have had a most Bottom-like difficulty expounding this dream. Baffled by its very inclusiveness, directors have often reduced the play to a series of pageants or skits, or expanded it to fit the design of ballet or musical arrangement, usually Mendelssohn's, sometimes adding "convincing" detail like realistic trees or live rabbits. Against this tradition, revolutionary productions like Harley Granville-Barker's and Peter Brook's distinguish themselves not so much by their ingenious devices as by their simplicity and faith in the poetry and theatrical energies of Shakespeare's play.[1] For both Granville-Barker and Brook, the only way to recover the rich variety of local habitations and names that this play so *play*fully creates was simultaneously to recover and exploit the aery nothing of Shakespeare's language and the suggestive resourcefulness of an "empty space"[2] on which those words might best reverberate.

But whatever surprising resistance *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may have encountered in the theatre, the play's most mysterious translations have occurred in film, a medium both uniquely friendly and uniquely hostile to a play about dreams and strange transformations. Film is, on the one hand, often characterized as a peculiarly "realistic" or "naturalistic" medium with its emphasis on visual verisimilitude, ocular proof. Every movie is a kind of

photographic document, a documentary. And yet, as Jack Jorgens observes, "[f]rom the beginnings of cinema, theorists have noticed the similarities between dreaming and watching a flow of images on the screen" (57). In fact, Russell Jackson has argued that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers an exciting challenge to the mixed resources of film: the play "invite[s] exploration of the film medium's inextricable but divergent tendencies: to create convincing representations of reality, and to offer new ways of showing the unreal" ("Shakespeare's Comedies" 103).

But film creates a more radical challenge for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for it deprives that play, indeed *any* play, of what is arguably a play's most distinguishing feature: an audience. John Wilders, for several years the literary consultant for the BBC Shakespeare television series, writes that his sharpest disappointment with that series was its—and his—failure to compensate for the loss of a live audience. For Wilders, the BBC's attempt to transfer "the performance of a play from an auditorium full of people to a practically empty studio [had] a number of drawbacks, the most obvious of which [was] that it allow[ed] actors no response of any kind to what they [were] doing. To perform in public a play or a piece of music is to engage in a dialogue with the audience . . ." (57).

I would like to explore how one recent film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has attempted to use filmic conventions to re-invent not just Shakespeare's play but the audiences who animate it. Movie directors and actors of this play find themselves in a delicate position not entirely distant from that of Peter Quince and *his* collaborators. In the spirit of Shakespeare's dramatic artisans, Michael Hoffman has used an array of strategies to re-invent, or "translate," theatre audiences into film audiences just as they've needed to "translate" this most aural and imaginative play into the visual and naturalistic world of film. There are other translations. Hoffman's movie engages in a kind of filmic conversation with earlier film versions of the play whose shadows haunt this adaptation. I am particularly interested in beginnings, how Hoffman's opening scenes help establish and limit the kind of dream, and the kind of dreamers, he wants to create. Moreover, to examine closely these strategies—successful and otherwise—is not merely to appreciate the distinctly separate qualities of these two art forms, film and theatre, but also to celebrate their wonderful and mysterious moments of convergence.

Long before his movie opened in late 1999, Michael Hoffman had been cultivating an audience for his *Dream*. Although known more for his Hollywood movies like *Soap Dish* and *Restoration*, Hoffman himself was not unacquainted with Shakespeare's play. In 1977, as a student-actor, he played Lysander in a performance "at Ray's Oasis, an outdoor restaurant in Boise, Idaho," and some time later directed a performance in Oxford, England ("Is

all our company here?" 9). But those were *staged* performances. Before Hoffman could create a movie of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hoffman had to create a movie *audience*. Like Zeffirelli, Oliver Parker, and others who had tried to create a public appetite for Shakespeare, Hoffman decided to choose a cast that, while comfortable with Shakespeare's poetry, nevertheless were most known for their work in more mainstream movies and television. Hoffman's casting strategy especially resembled that of Reinhardt,[3] who not only cast popular actors like James Cagney, Joe E. Brown, and Mickey Rooney as Bottom, Flute, and Puck, but allowed those actors to define their Shakespearean roles in ways that either reinforced or undercut each actor's popular image. So Cagney's Bottom, for example, as Russell Jackson has pointed out, "covered" his vulnerability with a good humored, tough-guy performance ("Shakespeare's Comedies" 103-04).[4] Similarly, Hoffman was recruiting an audience for Shakespeare by attracting an audience looking for Calista Flockhart, or Rupert Everett, or Michelle Pfeiffer, or Kevin Kline. In fact, the film's marketing strategies were so *imaginatively* aggressive that one might almost say that Hoffman was attracting an audience looking for a new line of Max Factor products. Every movie patron was given a glossy brochure for such midsummer products as Pease Blossom or Mustard Seed lipstick; or Cob Web nail enamel; or Shimmer Pan-Stick, "for shimmering shoulders and arms." These products, the ad assured us, are "now appearing at retailers everywhere." But the *movie* itself, the ad went on to say, could be experienced "only in theaters."

Casting Kevin Kline solved another problem for Hoffman, one of focus. Kline, a seasoned Shakespearean actor AND the popular star of *In and Out* and *French Kiss*, would play Bottom as the play's central character, a decision intended to help organize and unify the play for an audience that might be intimidated by the play's wildly diverse characters and subplots. Interestingly, Hoffman's anxiety about the play's lack of cinematic focus resembles that of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *stage* directors. Hoffman explains, "I always felt strongly that the movies [of *MND*] that have been made in the past were problematic, in part, because unlike *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* or almost any other plays in the canon, there's not a central relationship to follow; there's not a central character to follow. And although its thematic organization isn't necessarily a hindrance in the theater, I think in film it is. . . . And so it was important to find . . . a character that had a story that could unify the action for the audience" ("Is all our company here?" 10).

The woods near Athens is a place of multiple dreams and dreamers. Joseph Summers reminds us that "from just before the lovers enter the woods at Act II, scene ii, until the end of Act IV, scene i, when Bottom awakes and returns to Athens, more than half of the lines are spoken on a stage containing

one or more characters asleep . . . " (5). But for Hoffman, this was Bottom's dream. And indeed, with all the interpolated scenes Hoffman added, this was a dream that had no bottom. From the beginning, the camera was fascinated with Bottom. Even before the first scene with the mechanicals, we see Bottom sitting alone at an outdoor cafe, daydreaming just as a villager walks by leading an ass. He fingers his walking stick, adjusts his top hat, and returns a playful glance offered by an attractive passer-by. He really *does* play 'Ercules rarely. This is a most rare Bottom, if judged by most performances, and yet entirely within the generous spirit of this play. He is a dreamer. But more than that, we are attracted to his dreams. And why not? Of all the characters in Hoffman's movie, Kline as Bottom will be the one with whom we will most identify. If he can dream such a most rare vision, so can we. Interestingly, the scene where Bottom desires to play all the parts is a *public* scene. As he rehearses, he scans the bustling crowd moving this way and that across the public courtyard. He is trying to gather an audience. It's a wonderful moment that tentatively connects a vulnerable actor with an equally equivocal on-screen audience, while we look on.

Hoffman's opening sequence invites us into Athens—or Mount Athena—with a series of cinematic tactics that call to mind those of a number of popularizers of Shakespeare. The first moments of the film present a colorized allusion to the Dieterle-Reinhardt opening sequence of night metamorphosis. Set against the music of Mendelssohn, two animated fireflies dance against a blue night sky. Additional fireflies flit about the screen illuminating as they do pieces of the movie's title. Then the cluster of lights, now resembling stars, flies into the vanishing point in mid-screen only to metamorphose into yellow butterflies now swirling towards the camera in the sudden daylight. In Hoffman's film, such *visual* imagery of dancing lights and metamorphosis both anticipates and replaces some of Titania's most memorable poetry, cut in this production, as when she instructs her spirits to "pluck the wings from painted butterflies / To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes" (3.1.150-51).

As we adjust to the daylight, Mendelssohn's music continues, but now it modulates the energies of work and community in a colorful swirl of preparation for Theseus's and Hippolyta's wedding feast. The camera takes particular interest in the colors and tactile fullness of all that food being prepared and the energetic fleshiness of all those working fingers, arms, and faces. Hoffman's published shooting script describes "[w]hole roast pigs, pollo tacchino, bistecca Fiorentina. Mountains of garlic and onion, baskets of rosemary, basil, and thyme. Grilled peppers, yellow and red, swimming in olive oil and anchovies, braised fennel, grilled eggplant, delicate zucchini flowers and porcini mushrooms, like fairy umbrellas . . ." (*William Shakespeare's* 1).

After two severely cut scenes (1.1) where Lysander and Hermia chafe against the stiff resistance of Egeus and Theseus and the "harsh Athenian law" the elders invoke, the movie returns to the rhythms of village life. Now we're in the piazza. The village comes to life to the rich instrumental harmonies of Italian opera. In both these village scenes, but especially the second, the music, the activity, the color all pay affectionate tribute to Franco Zeffirelli, not just for his mastery of Shakespearean films, operas, and theatre, but for his wonderfully animated Shakespearean *beginnings*, those opening scenes in his *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Taming of the Shrew* that so effectively create a kinetic sense of community, tragic or comic, that propels the plays into action. There's a nod to Branagh here as well, another director affected by Zeffirelli. Workers splash about putting the finishing touches to a huge circular fountain that recalls Benedick, suddenly in love and romping about in a similar Tuscan fountain in Branagh's *Much Ado*.

With all that energy, color, and texture, Hoffman is suggesting something interesting about the relationship between the play's two worlds. Hoffman's Athens, for all its repressions, is charged with a surprising sensuality, a kind of latent tactile eroticism that suggests that even in Athens, with all its harsh and arid laws of obedience, there exists the promise of ripeness and release. Hoffman is using the camera to suggest cinematically the same dreamy mirroring of Theseus's world with Oberon's that theatrical directors sometimes accomplish through stage tactics such as by doubling those roles and others. So, for example, the abundant sensual delicacies set forth for Theseus's and Hippolyta's feast will encounter its dreamy mirror later in the play, when Titania commands her spirits—in language Hoffman *retains*—to prepare a feast for Bottom: "feed him with apricocks and dewberries / With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries" (3.1.144-45).[5]

Moreover, Hoffman , like Zeffirelli, uses close-ups and acute camera angles to photograph his actors in a style that creates a lushness, a sensuality and sexuality that resists social codes and limits. With certain characters, especially Oberon (Rupert Everett), Puck (Stanley Tucci), and the four lovers, the camera isolates sensual features in much the same way that Peter Donaldson has observed occurring in Zeffirelli's camera work in *Romeo and Juliet* (153-56). The effect here is to create an ambiguous sexuality too primal to define itself in terms of sexual categories. It is simply an image of undifferentiated desire, waiting to attach itself to "[t]he next thing then [we], waking, look upon" (2.1.179).

Sometimes, though, Hoffman lags behind the spirit and the speed of this play. There is a sense of sleepy *languor* in the fairy world that, while not without its opiate charms, makes that world move somewhat slower than the speed of desire. We expect the lovers and Titania to be drowsy, but not Oberon and Puck, who spend much of their time in supine repose. Part of the

problem is that the film never fully compensates for the loss of so much of the play's language, and the breathless speed generated by its rhythms and imagery. Love may indeed be "momentary as a sound / Swift as a shadow, short as any dream. / Brief as the lightning in the collied night, / That in a spleen unfolds both heaven and earth. / And, ere a man hath power to say 'Behold! / The jaws of darkness do devour it up" (1.1.143-48). But not here. Those lines are gone, as are Helena's iconography of the unheedy haste of blind, winged love, and Hermia and Lysander's exchange on the course of true love. Film, of course, has to work with images more than words. But we lose the music that establishes the giddy locomotion of love. Instead, we get bicycles. And there is another hard thing. While Kevin Kline's recreation of Bottom is one of the most charming and effective features of the film, there are certain things in Hoffman's construction of Bottom that will never please. Bottom is given a wife, played mutely by Heather Parisi, who clearly disapproves of her husband's real and imagined lives. Her character may lend pathos to Bottom's desire to lose himself in a world of theatrical wish fulfillment as a member of a craft that asks for nothing more than "not to offend." In fact, Hoffman insists that her presence in the film provides a principle motivation for Bottom: We know "he clings to delusions of grandeur because he has no love in his life" (*William Shakespeare's* viii). But surely in this case reason and love should have kept less company together. Mrs. Bottom's presence provides an all too gross and palpable *explanation* for Bottom's desire to dream, just as the omnipresent bicycles wobbling through the pathless woods provide a literal, one might even say *mechanical*, explanation for all that tumbling in the woods. What *say* you, Bottom? You can never bring in a wife.[6]

But if Michael Hoffman's attempt to use movie strategies to discover a theatrical play is not without flaws, even serious flaws, nonetheless, there's something engaging about the risks and energies that define the wonderful extravagance of a performance so notably discharged. Hoffman writes that "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* relies for its success on the interplay between diverse worlds, diverse perspectives, and the implicit unity that underlies them" (*William Shakespeare's* vii). And indeed this film does embrace the wild diversity of styles, genres, characters, and tone that define the heart of this play and yet have eluded so many attempts to perform it, whether in the theatre or in the movie house. Moreover, Hoffman exploits the eclectic strategies of theatre and cinema in a way that heightens this play's uncompromising inclusiveness, while at the same time reinventing an audience, thereby instructing all of us in the lunatic yet delicate art of hearing "[s]o musical a discord" (4.1.115).[7]

## Notes

1. See especially Halio (48-69).

2. The phrase, of course, is Peter Brook's.

3. Hoffman's *Dream*, as Samuel Crowl has observed (Rev. 41), often evokes the 1935 *Dream*. Often Hoffman will allude to a particular moment in the earlier film only to give that moment a mischievous turn. When James Cagney feels his new ears, he immediately looks into a pool of water to confirm his suspicion. Seeing is believing. When he sees his ass's ears, he collapses into sobs. In Hoffman's film, Kevin Kline, waiting for his cue in the brake, finds his top hat and cane with its decorative ass's head carved on the handle. As he puts on his hat, Puck effects the transformation. Kline, as Cagney did before him, sees a pool and glances at his reflection, much as he did in the shop window early in the play. What he sees is himself, his new ears hidden by the top hat. Seeing is believing. Pleased with what he sees, this Bottom breaks into operatic song.

4. See also Crowl, *Shakespeare Observed* 65.

5. Hoffman *does* cut the next several lines, but, except for the honey-bags stolen from honey-bees, the feast remains intact.

6. Russell Jackson's astonishing discovery of a hitherto lost shooting script for the Reinhardt-Dieterle *Dream* reveals that the 1935 movie had also considered—and rejected—the idea of a wife for Bottom. Further, the script's description of Bottom's encounter with his wife shortly after receiving his part as Pyramus, bears a remarkable resemblance with Hoffman's filming of a similar scene. According to the 1934 shooting script, after receiving his part, "Bottom hurries in from the outside, singing his little ditty (the song he later sings in the forest), crosses and drags a chest from underneath the bed. He opens the chest and kneeling before it begins rummaging through it. Several articles pertaining to the weaver's trade lie on top. Such as: bobbins, a bolt of cloth. These he pushes aside, dragging from the bottom of the chest a somewhat battered ancient mask. He rises, and smiling proudly puts on the mask—then begins to posture and strut about the room. His wife appears in the doorway of an inner room. She is a virago of a woman, with a face like a fury. She stands glaring at Bottom until he becomes conscious of her presence. He quickly removes the mask and keeping his back to her slips over to his loom and SINGS HIS DITTY again—now in a different mood, and begins to work frantically" ("Shooting" 40).

7. While Crowl is also moved by Hoffman's "daring and playful eclectic mix" and his "fertile visual imagination," nonetheless Crowl's overall response is somewhat less sanguine: "The road to Shakespeare, for Michael Hoffman, runs through the palace (and woods) of excess" (Rev. 41).

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**Sentiments of an Eighteenth-Century Universalist: From the Poetry of Judith Sargent Murray**

*Nancy S. Ellis*
*Mississippi State University*

From POEM IN FIVE PARTS
Written on hearing Mr. Murray on the morning of Sunday the 15 day of February 1778 upon Malachia Chap. 4 Verse 12:[1]

The sacred flame was from the Preacher caught,
To my glad ear he hath the tydings brought,
Messiah reigns the herald loud proclaim'd
Messiah reigns and hath the race redeem'd,
My soul responsive hails the son of Man,
His love, his truth, and his benignant plan.
But will it live in my untutor'd line
My verse too weak to reach the bold design,
Say Muse, shall I the arduous task give o'er,
Nor on adventurous wing such heights explore?
Or wilt thou lend thy aid—my breast inspire,
Touching my pen with pure celestial fire,
Exalting all the swelling burst of thought,
Deep, energetic, and divinely taught.
Come then bright spirit, fair Elysian guest,
Of all the power to dignify possess'd
Adorn my page—breathe o'er the glowing line,
And let thy influence conspicuous shine.
Rush on my soul, O thou impetuous wind,
Rush on my soul—in cloven tongues descend
Rush on my soul as on that happy few
Who heretofore thy blessed guidance knew.
And thus directed I shall then proceed,
Seize the award, and wear the glorious meed. (ll. 29-53)

These twenty-four lines, from an unpublished Poem in Five Parts, were written by twenty-six-year-old Judith Sargent Stevens (1754-1820), after "hearing Mr. Murray on the morning of Sunday the 15 day of February 1778 upon Malachia Chap. 4 Verse 12." The lines express Judith's desire to use her pen to record the "sacred flame" of the gospel as she experienced it under the preaching of John Murray (1741-1815), an itinerant Universalist

evangelist who had first preached in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1774 at the request of her father and uncle.

Judith, then the wife of John Stevens (1741-1786), a ship owner and merchant like her father, welcomed Mr. Murray's message, and in this poem writes of her belief in Christ as Messiah: "My soul responsive hails the son of Man/ His love, his truth, and his benignant plan." But she questions whether her "untutor'd lines," "verse too weak to reach the bold design," can make the message she embraces live on. The next few lines make it obvious that she desires her poetic effort not merely to survive, but to succeed.

In spite of apologizing for her verse as "untutor'd," Judith follows a poetic convention by invoking the Muse to "begin the sacred lay." She calls on the "fair Elysian guest" to "[touch her] pen with pure celestial fire" and to "[a]dorn [her] page." But then in keeping with the religious subject of this poem, she shifts the pagan invocation to the realm of Christian imagery by re-addressing the muse as an "impetuous wind" capable of "rush[ing] on her soul—in cloven tongues." This clever superimposition of imagery associated with Pentecost onto the secular wind of imagination belies the "weakness" of her skill and neatly turns her stated ambition to "[s]eize the award, and wear the glorious meed" into a double-edged one: this young woman wants both salvation *and* poetic success; she wants life for both her soul *and* her writings. Within a few years, she actually began receiving recognition for her writing. And fourteen years after first hearing Mr. Murray preach, she became Mrs. Judith Sargent Stevens Murray and eagerly supported him in his ministry, managed a complex household, and pursued her own writing career. Now, more than two centuries after she wrote these lines, while the question of her salvation may be left for theologians, her writings are finding new life.

This new life for her writings stems primarily from Reverend Gordon D. Gibson's discovery of a remarkable collection of Judith's manuscripts in Natchez, Mississippi, where Judith died at her daughter and son-in-law's home in 1820. The papers, previously reported lost, were donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in 1986. The manuscripts include twenty letter books of copies of about two thousand outgoing letters written between 1765 and 1818,[2] one manuscript volume of her Repository Essays, four manuscript volumes of poetry (in which very few of the poems are dated clearly), and manuscripts of some of John Murray's papers and records. The discovery awakened interest in this woman whose writings had largely been forgotten.

Today Judith Sargent Murray is generally considered to be America's first feminist writer because of her advocacy "regarding the merits of women's education during the early Republic" (Hennen 1). But as we are learning, Judith was passionate about many subjects, not just women's education, and being remembered was an ardent desire. Publicly, in the

Preface to the Reader in *The Gleaner,* she admits,

> My desires are, I am free to own, aspiring—perhaps presumptuously so. I would be distinguished and respected by my contemporaries; I would be continued in grateful remembrance when I make my exit; and I would descend with celebrity to posterity. (13)

Privately, in the preface and dedication in her letter books, she writes,

> [I]f those who may survive me, possess as much curiosity relative to me as I have experienced respecting those individuals of my kindred, who have lived before me, every thing I have written will be read by my posterity, should I be blest with descendants, with interest and avidity. (qtd. in Hennen 3)

During her lifetime, Judith actually achieved through her writing some of the recognition she craved. The degree of her recognition by her contemporaries can best be measured by the success of *The Gleaner*, a three-volume collection of her work that she published and sold by subscription in 1798. The collection, dedicated to her friend President John Adams, included her thoughts on subjects ranging from education and politics to manners and morals. In the early 1790s, prior to *The Gleaner*, she used pennames (such as Constantia) to publish individual and serial essays and poems in magazines. Her very first publication was a testament to her faith; it was a Universalist catechism for children, which was published anonymously in 1782 at the encouragement of friends. Seeing her words in print in *The Catechism* only whetted her desire to become a recognized writer, a desire she passionately pursued, from the prodigious numbers of letters and poems she had begun preserving even as a very young woman to the public writings she would do with her husband's encouragement.

Today, the degree of recognition by us, her "descendants," is growing, largely due to the recently discovered letters and poetry. These papers, available on microfilm, make previously unpublished materials available for study and have encouraged additional productions. *The Gleaner* has been republished, Sharon Harris has edited *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, Sheila Skemp and Bonnie Smith have published biographies with documents, and the fifth edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* includes Murray's essay "On the Equality of the Sexes." This growing attention is providing evidence supporting Harris's assessment that "[p]erhaps no American woman writer until Margaret Fuller equalled Murray in intellectual powers, in the breadth of genres in which she wrote, or in public recognition" (xv).

The letters are proving to be a treasure of firsthand information to scholars interested in almost all aspects of Revolutionary and post-

Revolutionary America. Not only are the letters interesting for the documentation of the personal, but the letters also comment on a multitude of political, religious, economic, and social and cultural issues.

Her poetry, the material least familiar to scholars, likewise comments on a wide variety of topics. The manuscript materials include nearly nine hundred pages of poems, very few of which were published. There are three hundred seventy poems indexed in the tables of content for the first three volumes alone; additionally there are numerous unlisted but titled poems in those same volumes; and there are another ninety pages in the un-indexed fourth volume. Harris writes that "poetry was the first genre in which [Judith] Stevens wrote and . . . remain[ed] one of her favorite forms, [but] it was not where her greatest talents lay" (xviii). Even a cursory examination of manuscript poems reinforces Harris's assessment, but it also determines there is much in the poetry that complements the letters and essays and reveals more of this remarkable Federalist woman and her times.[3]

"Religious commitment was a hallmark of [her] life" (Crumpacker 13),[4] and Murray expresses that commitment frequently in her poems. While these expressions seem generally mainstream Protestant, her family's alignment with Universalism branded them radical, if not heretical, in Gloucester. They were excommunicated from the local parish church and later had goods seized for failure to support the parish church financially (Skemp 24-25). Their interest in the liberal idea of universal salvation had begun before they met John Murray. Murray espoused the ideas of James Relly (d. 1778), a Welsh minister who agreed with Calvinists about original sin and predestination, but paradoxically argued that "because Christ had died for the sins of all, everyone would be saved" (21).

In November of 1774, after hearing Mr. Murray preach for the first time, Judith was so moved that she broke with social custom about male-female correspondence and wrote him a letter in which she stated that he had "enlarged [her] views, . . . expanded [her] ideas, dissipated [her] doubts" (qtd. in Skemp 23). Over the next five years, Judith's enthusiasm for a religion that recognized equality among souls and encouraged independent thinking grew, even though such beliefs moved her away from the place of comfort she had been born into in the community. In Gloucester in 1779, under John Murray's leadership, she and her first husband were among those who established the Independent Church of Christ, the first Universalist church in America. According to Skemp, Judith's stance "ended forever [her] deference to the standards and beliefs of her community" (24) and increased her commitment to her growing belief that "men and women were intellectual and spiritual equals" and "her growing willingness to discuss those views in a public forum" (19).

Reflecting her passion for education as well as faith, in 1782 she

entered the public realm in writing for the first time, publishing anonymously a *Universalist Catechism* to aid the Christian parent or teacher.[5] Though disclaiming years later in an 1805 letter that "present[ing herself] before the publick made no part of [her] plan,"[6] an undated poem titled "Upon printing my little catechism—1782" seems to contradict that statement. In the poem she writes of both her ambition and fear of failure:

Yes there are heights—I ought not to ascend,
My arrogance I never can defend,
Giddy with praise I have too high aspir'd,
My soul by false ambition hath been fir'd. (ll.1-4)

Aware of the critics and male-female role distinctions, she sounds a bit like Anne Bradstreet (in "Prologue") as she continues:

. . . honest Conscience—all-emphatic—said—
"Untaught, and simple, can you hope to find,
"Candor so prevalent in human kind,
"As from a female lessons to receive,
"Must Woman dictate—and must Man believe?
"Besides, your page, you know it cannot stand,
"The Critic's eye—and his more potent hand,
"Errors in style, in grammer may appear,
"While you can only wash them with a tear. (ll. 14-22)

Even though struggling with the dictates of public opinion and the pull of private ambition, Judith grew bold and began to submit essays and poems to magazines and papers with enough success that within a few years she was able to compile her previously published work and market *The Gleaner,* even including two dramatic efforts which appeared unsuccessfully on the Boston stage. Her public writings fed not only her ego but also, to a degree, the financial needs of her family.[7] Meanwhile, she continued writing letters and poetry.

Judith wrote poetry for at least thirty years: from the "occasional poems, which she began composing as early as 1775" to her last original publication in 1805 (Harris xviii). It seems writing poetry must have come closer to being an obsession than a simple pastime. She speaks of such an obsession in "Attempts at versification of Isaiah":

Well if I must the pen incessant wield,
And from this writing Mania nought can shield,
Let me a harvest for retention gain,
And thus to profit turn the Despots reign.

Since the "harvest," or "profit," could not realistically be financial, one of the ways she tried to glean value from her poetry was by focusing on spiritual matters. That focus finds varied expressions—sometimes simply as moralizations added to general subjects, other times as lengthy eulogies

paying tribute to exemplary Christians, or written prayers (often obviously praying for Mr. Murray in his evangelical efforts), or devotional thoughts, or encouragements for righteous living. She addresses fear of death with assurances of eternal life. She voices belief in guardian spirits and in the connection between the rational mind and spirit. She writes of the natural world as revelatory of the spiritual and praises the Creator, whom she often calls The Great First Cause. She attempts to versify scripture, to state doctrines, and in general to proclaim her personal faith, even as the poem introducing this paper shows she longed to do.

Some of her efforts are polished and controlled, clearly ready for a degree of public reading. These show poetic craft but not necessarily an original artistic gift. Other verse efforts are rambling accumulations of heroic couplets expressing strong emotions and opinions. When these latter verses are compared to the former, it can probably safely be assumed that Judith grabbed her pen and wrote *what* she felt, *when* she felt it, and did not always intend to turn a private voice into a public one.

Among the more polished verses can be found passages such as the following from "On the death of an aged relative" that speak of Christ as savior. It is interesting to note that the passages are not didactically "universalist."

> But Jesus came to seek and save,
> His life and death redeem'd the slave,
> Those who had stray'd, *the lost he found,*
> And soar'd to heav'n, with Vict'ry crown'd. (11. 43-46)

And this, from a hymn titled simply "Another," dated 1783:

> 4
> Behold Emmanuel's bleeding side,
> That wound behold so deep and wide,
> Mark well the sanguine issuing blood,
> Adoring view the cleansing flood.
> 5
> See in that fount the race are lav'd,
> Behold them rise from evil sav'd.
> Spotless they stand devoid of blame,
> White and unsullied their new name.

In style, these few lines demonstrate her ease with couplets in iambic tetrameter (a meter that could easily be set to music, though there is no evidence that it was), but Judith more often favored a longer line. This passage from "Upon the Dread of Death" illustrates the longer line as well as her Christian response to the fear of death:

> What are thou death—and why this dread impressed
> On the believer's—on a Christian's breast?

Didst thou not lose thy sting—pale tyrant say,
When the Redeemer washed our crimes away?
Since he descended to the silent tomb,
The grace with living verdure seems to bloom,
I hail it as some odoriferous bed,
Since there my God reposed his sacred head,
And when he burst the barriers of the grave,
Refulgent light proclaimed him strong to save. (ll. 1-10)

The reality of mortality with its accompanying mixture of dread of death and hope of heaven is a frequent topic, but so is the Christian's duty to praise God, especially for the hope of Heaven and eternal life. The poem "Redeeming Grace" illustrates Judith's using her verse to express man's desire to fulfill that duty and his awareness of his inadequacy:

What tongue can reach the great exhaustless theme,
Those glories point, which so resplendent beam?
Yet we rejoicing chant infantile praise,
And up to heaven would our glad Paeans raise.

. . . . . .

Then let us still our feeble voices lift,
To sing the triumphs of this mighty gift,
Eternal life, the mighty gift of God,
For realms of light we leave this humble clod.

. . . . . .

We only echo *Grace Almighty Grace*. (ll. 5-8, 17-20, 26)

This sense of man's inability to praise God adequately is also seen in verses that respond to the wonders of Creation, the handwork of the Great First Cause, as she often refers to God.[8] Her desire, always to give praise, is evident in "As o'er the wide Champaign":

As o'er the wide Champaign I pass along,
Or stray the Woodland's pleasing haunts among,
The varied God in every path I view,
And with new joy his radiant steps pursue.

. . . . . .

His lib'ral hand alike on all bestows,
The good munificent which boundless flows,
And may his signet stamp on every breast,
That holy zeal by gratitude imprest. (ll. 1-4, 21-25)

For encouragement and instruction, Judith gave her young niece, Sarah Sargent Ellery (her sister Esther's daughter), a copy of Mrs. Anna Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for Children* (London, 1781) and wrote "To the same with Mrs. Barbauld's Hymns for Children" to accompany the gift. (Inclusion of the poem with this particular book is rather ironic because of

Mrs. Barbauld's explanation of why her hymns for children are in "measured prose" rather than poetry: "But it may be doubted, whether poetry ought to be lowered to the capacities of children, or whether they should not rather be kept from reading verse, till they are able to relish good verse: for the very essence of poetry is an elevation in thought and style above the common standard" [Preface v].)

Take, my sweet Girl this little book,
Attentive o'er its pages look,
Nor let it unperused lie,
Nor pass its truths unheeded by.
Behold how good thy God hath been!
How he creates, and paints the scene,
Shines in the beam, breathes in the rose,
And in the stream prolific flows. (ll. 1-8)

After these opening eight lines, Judith's poem very closely follows "Hymn I" in Mrs. Barbauld's book; and "Hymn I" sounds as if it came from the book of Psalms. It begins with "COME, let us praise God, for he is exceeding great; let us bless God, for he is very good" and continues with the story of creation, tracing the creation of the sun and moon and of great creatures (such as the whale and elephant) and small ones (like the worm). Next comes Nature's praise response voiced by the birds and rivers and streams. Finally in the progression of creation comes man with his desire to praise God, a desire that grows along with his knowledge and maturity.

After the personalized opening in her poem to her niece, Judith too follows the order of creation, but she is consciously poetic. She presents the sun and moon, then sets up balanced contrasts of "huge animals" and "little lambkins," "enormous fishes" and "countless insects." She has "chaunting birds" who "[w]arble their thanks" and "brooks and rivers" that "[t]he soul to gratitude awake." Judith goes beyond Mrs. Barbauld's "Hymn I" by adding flowers and their incense to the catalogue of creation and then personalizing the poem by identifying God as "Maker," "friend," and "father" for both herself and Sarah. Then, after such poetic expansions, again she mirrors Mrs. Barbauld's hymn. The Hymn's lines are "A few years ago, and I was a little infant, and my tongue was dumb within my mouth. . . . But now I can speak, and my tongue shall praise him." Reiterating the idea that as we grow physically we are to grow spiritually, Judith encourages Sarah to resolve to use her child's voice to praise her Maker:

Then let the nerves which God hath strung
The Music of thy little tongue,
Swell all obedient to his will,
Far as thou canst his laws fulfill. (ll. 45-48)

In the gift book, "Hymn I" ends with the resolution "I will never

forget God, so long as my life remaineth in me." Likewise Judith moves to the idea that life on earth is impermanent and again expands poetically, contrasting the inevitable decay of flower, tree, and human body with man's hope for eternal life.[9] Judith ends with an admonition to Sarah to grow wise and virtuous in order to be fitted for heaven:

> But wisdom will superior rise
> All radiant virtue never dies
> Unfading beauty it obtains,
> In worlds above, refulgent reigns. (ll. 57-60)

This poem to her niece, though highly derivative, is nicely developed and shows Judith's concern with Christian education and behavior, her acquaintance with literature of the day, and her loving attention to family members.

Judith's commitment to her faith also turned her pen to public concerns and philosophical expressions. Interesting examples include a poetic argument against capital punishment. In "Upon the Infliction of Capital Punishments" she asks,

> Shall we, while reason to herself is true,
> Commit the crime which we so shocking view? (ll. 13-14)

She labels the criminal both "Villain" and "Victim" and thinks his life should be spared "for repentance" and judgment left to the "great Legislator":

> To God alone belongs the fragrant breath
> And God alone should wing the darts of death. (ll. 45-46)

Another example of public and philosophical concerns is "Prospect of Religious Liberty," in which she writes of being free of "legal threats" and "bigotry" and "superstitious wiles." Perhaps this poem was written when her family was embroiled in the tax controversy with the parish church or perhaps when she contemplated broader Revolutionary principles. Regardless, she grows philosophical:

> And will the beauteous Goddess rise,
> Fair Liberty, with azure eyes
> . . . . . .
> Will Prejudice dark fiend avaunt,
> With eye askance, and figure gaunt,
> From sanctimonious Despots free,
> Shall we emancipation see?
> . . . . . .
> Thus truth and Liberty appear,
> Filling with majesty their sphere.
> Religious Liberty, and truth,
> Eternal Peace, unfading youth. (ll. 1-2, 7-10, 41-44)

Even as she desires broad religious liberty, she desires religious tolerance on a more personal level. In "Candid Liberality" she pleads that small doctrinal differences should not break Christian fellowship and cause the prejudices which she had experienced firsthand:

> If he confesseth that our God is good,
> Though how, perhaps, he hath not understood.
> If joy, eventual joy, his tongue proclaims,
> If God the Saviour with glad heart he names
> . . . . . .
> I hail him brother found—yea intimate—
> . . . . . .
> Before the throne when we together bend,
> From One Omnific power when we descend
> . . . . . .
> Then every shade of difference let us wave,
> And only cry—*our God is strong to save.*
> (ll. 13-16, 21, 33-34, 39-40)

Christian fellowship is clearly something Judith cherishes. In "Conversation" she writes of the "charms of conversation" with "[a]n aged Friend" who expands her religious understanding and in "After Preaching," of the joys of sharing the "sacred page" with those "[w]ho sit serene at Jesu's feet." In "To the lorn traveller worn" she sees such fellowship as a "rational" experience and exercise for it expands the mind and "e'en reason guides":

> The mind recipient with new being glows,
> And faith's bright vision all unclouded flows. (ll. 23-24)

The concept of religion as reasonable and rational reflects the tenor of the age, the idea of the natural rights of man to self-determination, but it also captures Judith's private conviction that intellectually and spiritually men and women are equal. In such principles and in her faith Judith found both passion and quietness. These four lines from "There is in Jesu's name" demonstrate the quiet comfort her faith gave her:

> There is in Jesu's name a sacred charm,
> Which can the mind of every fear disarm;
> Drive melancholy from the labouring breast,
> And give the agitated bosom rest.

Such quietness provides a vivid contrast to the fervor voiced in other poems, but it is still a result of the "sacred flame" of the "tydings" of the Messiah she felt so passionately after hearing Mr. Murray preach in 1778. In response to the question that she asked then—"But will it live in my untutor'd line"—it seems the answer, 200 years later, can finally be "yes."

## Notes

[1] This transcription and others in this paper (unless otherwise documented) have been done from the microfilm by Nancy Ellis and Meredith Oliver Leathers (undergraduate student at Mississippi State University). We have kept the spelling, capitalization, and punctuation as close to the manuscript as we can decipher it. Permission to publish selections was granted by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (February 22, 2000).

[2] Bonnie Smith lists the number of letters as nearly 2,000 while Sheila Skemp records the number as nearly
2,500.

[3] Much of the last two paragraphs is quoted heavily from my earlier paper "New England Sampler."

[4] Crumpacker writes, "Religious commitment was a hallmark of Judith Sargent's life. In the early 1770s, she and her family had become interested in the English doctrines of Universalism—an outgrowth of the very Methodism and evangelicalism that had attracted earlier women to the Great Awakening. Significant for her must have been Universalism's espousal of spiritual equality for women and men of all classes" (13).

[5] Murray indicated this purpose on the title page. Originally published in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Reprinted in 1999 by the Judith Sargent Murray Society.

[6] Quoted from Letter to Rev. William Emerson, Nov. 21, 1805, by Bonnie Smith in her introduction to the reprint of *The Catechism.*

[7] Biographers Smith and Skemp record that John was not good at managing finances or very much concerned with such matters. Part of Judith's drive was the desire to maintain something of the privileged life she had known as a girl and to find a way to provide her daughter, Julia Maria, with some degree of independence in the future.

[8] Again, Judith reminds us of Anne Bradstreet. This time, of "Contemplations."

[9] This is another place where Judith's sentiments are reminiscent of Anne Bradstreet's "Contemplations."

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## How Private Lives Reflect and Shape the Public Life: Foremothers of Judge Lucy Somerville Howorth

*Dorothy Shawhan*
*Delta State University*

I met Judge Lucy Somerville Howorth in 1983 when she was eighty-eight years old and gave a talk to our local American Association of University Women branch in Cleveland, Mississippi. She was a small, kindly woman with a walking cane, not someone at first glance you would think of as a former lawyer-administrator in Washington, D.C. Yet when she began to speak, the clarity and depth of her thought were immediately apparent as she lectured about the relationship between labor unions and the women's movement.

Later I would learn that she grew up in Greenville, Mississippi, graduated from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, worked for a munitions factory in New York City during World War I, and attended Columbia University at night. Columbia would not admit women to the law school in 1920, however, and so she came home and entered the law school at the University of Mississippi. She graduated in 1922 at the head of the class, practiced law in Cleveland and Greenville, married another lawyer, Joe Howorth, in 1927, was named U.S. Commissioner of the Southern District (hence the title Judge), was elected to the Mississippi legislature, and served 1932-34.

In 1934 she was appointed to Franklin Roosevelt's administration as a member of the Board of Appeals of the Veterans Administration. She spent the next twenty-five years in public service in Washington, finally becoming General Counsel of the War Claims Commission, the first woman to be a general counsel of a major federal agency.

She and her husband retired in Cleveland, but she never retired as an ardent feminist and advocate for women's rights. She died August 23, 1997, at the age of 102.

Currently I am collaborating with Dr. Martha Swain on a biography of Judge Howorth. My section of the book focuses on her early years and on her foremothers, who fortunately left a valuable legacy of private writing. This private writing was essential not only in discerning the lives of the foremothers but also in suggesting how they helped set the stage for Judge Lucy's public career.

### Foremothers

*There may have been some weak women in my mother's inheritance, but there are no stories about*

> *them. All that we ever heard of were extraordinarily strong. It is my personal guess that the women who survived the early days in settling this country were all strong characters and had to be.*
>
> —Lucy Somerville Howorth

Lives of these strong women are preserved through family stories and through unpublished letters, diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies in the Howorth-Somerville papers at the Schlesinger Library in Cambridge. Lucy preserved and donated the papers and attached explanatory notes to many of the manuscripts. In addition, she passed along family stories about these women to a number of oral historians. While she left no written journals or memoirs herself, she made sure that the raw materials for saving the lives of her foremothers and herself were in order for future writers. She valued this heritage, and undoubtedly it shaped her.

Many of Lucy's forefathers were venerable men—lawyers, legislators, judges—but their lives are documented in histories and public records. She took pride in their accomplishments, but the lives of the women, particularly her mother, more often occupied her recollections and conversations. Clearly she thought of her own life story as a continuation of the lives of the strong women in her family, as well as a part of the history of women in America.

In her Afterword to the reprint of *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics,* Anne Firor Scott tells the story of a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with Lucy Howorth. Scott was at a point of indecision about the direction of her career, and she says the meeting was a catalyst for her in continuing her work on Southern women and political activity. She tells, too, about discovering the papers of Myra Smith, Nellie Somerville, and Lucy Howorth in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College: "Here before me (paradoxically enough in a New England college) were the life histories of four generations of southern women whose collective biography encapsulated the history of southern female activism over a century" (254).

We see this progression clearly in the biographies of Lucy Howorth's foremothers and of her own—responsibilities for child care and for managing slaves on farms and plantations, offices in church and women's clubs, activism in the suffrage movement, election to public office, and, finally, a career in public service. Family legend from the papers and the interviews is the source for many of the stories included here. Whether all are verifiable fact or not, the stories tell us the qualities that helped shape Lucy's character and that she admired.[1]

**Nancy Hardeman (1774-1832) – Lucy's great-great-grandmother**

Both her father, Thomas Hardeman, and her husband, Seth Lewis,

were delegates to a convention in Knoxville in 1796 to form a constitution for the state of Tennessee. Both these men are well documented in public records, but to recreate Nancy Hardeman's life we must rely on unpublished sketches written by her daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter. Her husband, Seth Lewis, who was appointed Chief Justice of the Mississippi Territory in 1800, has only this to say about his wife in his autobiography: "It was during this period [of studying law and supporting himself in Nashville] that I got married. This event took place in 1793" (102). Her great-granddaughter describes her as "a belle and a beauty" and seems tempted to make of her the stereotypical Southern lady, but reading the genealogical charts, we see that she bore twelve children in the wilderness of Mississippi and Louisiana, where Seth Lewis had gone to establish a plantation. Her daughter Amelia Lewis Thomson writes that she had the kind of duties that most white women in the plantation system had: managing the household; tending the sick, both slave and free; cutting out garments for both men and women, two suits apiece each fall and spring (cotton for summer, wool and cotton for winter).

Amelia recalls a story about Nancy and a slave that illustrates the personal dilemmas the slavery system often caused for slave holders' wives. Mark was a slave on the Lewis plantation, one who had previously belonged to Nancy's father. Amelia remembers Mark as a "wicked old man" who cursed and swore around the children and was fond of eating rattlesnake, which he smoked in his cabin. Each Christmas he got drunk on eggnog and stood on a stump and preached. "When sober," Amelia writes, "he was an Atheist. He had imbibed his Atheism from his former owner, my grandfather. This was all the preaching we ever heard while living on the plantation" (Thomson).

When Seth Lewis sold most of his slaves after the War of 1812, Mark was bought by a Frenchman, to his way of thinking a deep humiliation. The Frenchman allowed him to visit Nancy, and at each visit Mark complained bitterly about the ignorance of the Frenchman and how miserable he was. Even though she thought Mark was a bad influence on the children, she persuaded her husband to buy him back (Thomson).

Stories about the Indians who populated the land then are also a part of family legend. Seth Lewis is said to have defended some Choctaw Indians against a white man who was trying to take their land. Lewis won the case, and each year thereafter they came to the Lewis house and "performed for them a war dance," after which Nancy served them a big dinner. Then the Indians wrapped themselves in their blankets and lay down around the gallery of the house for the night, but by morning would be gone (Edmonds).

In a cholera epidemic in 1833, Nancy was taken ill at the home of a daughter who had the disease and for whom she had gone to care. A

messenger came for Seth Lewis who went immediately, but Nancy died in less than an hour. Her granddaughter remembered the dread and confusion and terrible heat as her grandmother was brought back at night and buried in the family graveyard. The children were not allowed at the burial but watched from a window as the servants lined up along the avenue holding torches and weeping. "I can see it all plainly as I saw it then," she writes, "and poor Grandpa too, as he came in and passed on to his room, none of us daring to intrude except sister Maria and sister Fanny. . . . We all missed our dear lovely grandmother, and often went to her grave and covered it with flowers" (Watts).

**Sally Myra Cox (1822-1887) – Lucy's great-grandmother**

Sally Myra Cox wrote her name S. Myra Cox, feeling that Sally was undignified. She is remembered in the annals of Greenville as the "Lady with a Lantern," one who never failed to minister to those in need (Thomas 258). A devout Methodist, she is said to have often preached on the levee of the Mississippi River (K. F. Somerville). Through the Methodist Church and as a result of the devastation of the Civil War, she stepped out of the private realm and into a more public one. She left written records—a spiritual diary from 1852 to 1869, a two-page autobiography, and minutes as corresponding secretary for the Greenville Methodist Episcopal Women's Auxiliary. In addition to those resources are taped interviews with Lucy about her great-grandmother's life. In these stories we see characteristics that Lucy admired, such as fearlessness and strength in the face of adversity, and while Lucy was in many ways quite different from this great-grandmother, we understand how hearing such stories early on could have helped shape her own life.

Listening to Myra Cox through her writing, we hear a woman devoted to spiritual quest. "I was born 31 of August 1822," she begins her autobiography. "My mother was a Methodist, my father never was a member of any church" (Smith). This introduces the thesis of her life and hints too at a pattern in her own marriage. The remainder of the two-page autobiography focuses on her spiritual development, culminating in her conversion at a camp meeting when she was twenty. She includes no references to the usual facts like place of birth, marriage, or births of children. Her diary, too, focuses on the spiritual and mystical with few references to family and community events outside the church. Her children were dying, war was raging, her husband was shot, but in a style characteristic of the nineteenth-century spiritual diary genre, she deals with those events not at all or only briefly.

Instead, the focus of the diary is an experience she calls "entire sanctification," by which she means "being entirely consecrated to God in order to be able successfully to meet and resist the many temptations to which

I was continually exposed." She writes of fasting, praying, reading scripture and books on sanctification in her efforts to "make a full surrender." Arising at a quarter after four one Sunday morning to pray and read the Bible, she has a vision of Jesus with his blood flowing like a stream, but she is unable to cross the stream to him. Later that day, however, she prays again for the vision, and when it appears this time, she is able to plunge into the stream and feels herself cleansed. "Oh, the bliss of that moment, when my soul was enabled to cast all her care upon Jesus and feel that her will was lost in the will of God. I praised God for this great deliverance."

Believing herself thereafter marked by God, she combines the Wesleyan principles of spiritual striving with social action. She might well have been a pastor had that been an option. Like many women, she developed leadership skills within the church, serving as a steward, a position usually held by men (Thomas 44) and as Sunday school superintendent (Trigg). She entertained so many of the circuit riders in her home that she had a special room designated as the prophet's chamber (Trigg). She traveled by boat to Memphis and on to Corinth by train to become the first delegate ever sent by the Greenville church to an Annual Conference. She and another matron of the church organized a society for the young women that they named, appropriately, "The Swamp Lilies" (Thomas 136).

Orphaned at eighteen months north of Natchez, Mississippi, Myra was raised by an aunt until she was nine when she was sent to Nazareth Academy in Kentucky, a Catholic girls' school, the first west of the Alleghenies. She returned to Mississippi to live with her older brother, a lawyer and a member of the Mississippi legislature. In 1840 at age eighteen, she married Abram Smith, a lawyer who became a legislator and a wealthy landowner. She bore eight children, but only four survived to adulthood. In addition, she raised four orphaned children.

Before the Civil War the Smith home was a lively, sociable place bustling with the activities of a houseful of children and overseen by a mother known for her cooking, her hospitality, and her singing voice. But all that would change in 1861 when war broke out and her firstborn son, Alfred, joined the Confederate Army. He survived the battle of Shiloh but was never the same thereafter and was murdered after the war was over. Myra's husband was shot and killed on a country road by a Northern patrol. Next, her two daughters died and a mortgage was foreclosed on all her property. She was forty-eight years old, but she gathered her resources and started over. A friend gave her a lot in Greenville, two of her brothers sent her $500 each, and she built a boarding house, began a catering business, and took up sewing. In 1878, her remaining child, Abram, Jr., died in the yellow fever epidemic. Her only living descendant then was her granddaughter, Nellie Nugent, Judge Lucy's mother.

When Myra Smith died at home with her granddaughter Nellie and Nellie's husband Robert in 1887, she had through her industry and thrift acquired some rental property and left an estate of around $10,000, a fact Lucy calls an "amazing achievement," for "just scrambling around in a community where everybody was just barely making it and getting a restart. . . . You see, she had respect."

**Eleanor Fulkerson Smith (1844-1866) – Lucy's grandmother**

Myra Smith's daughter, Eleanor, according to Lucy, "was smart, so people said she had a mind like her father—that's what people said about smart women, but Myra was smart too." She left no records, not even a signature, so we can only gaze through others' eyes at her, namely her husband William Nugent's, who wrote her long letters from the Confederate Army. Judge Lucy edited and published these letters some ninety years later. We know from his letters that Eleanor wrote responses, but they are lost. William had been her tutor from the time she was eight years old until they married when she was sixteen, and the letters suggest a good deal of the teacher-student dynamic remaining in their relationship. "You need scarcely, therefore, in future proffer the request that I should look with a lenient eye upon the imperfections of your letters," he writes her. "Each pen-traced line from you is dear to me, not only as an evidence of your continued affection & kind recollections of one whose greatest happiness it is, to love you, but in carrying me back to years ago & making my heart, as the poet has it, 'play old times' over again" (Cash 9).

Those old happy times would never be for Eleanor. She gave birth to three children while living as a refugee during the war years. Two died. The one remaining was Nellie, Lucy's mother. Eleanor died at age twenty-one on January 1, 1866, of "privation, malnutrition, and grief" (Cash 25).

**Nellie Nugent (1863-1952) – Lucy's mother**

Nellie Nugent moved decisively into the public realm and had tremendous influence on shaping Lucy's career. She burned much of her personal correspondence before her death, but her speeches and published articles document her active life. Lucy characterized herself as a compromiser but not her mother, who was, she said, "a fighter to the last ditch" (Cash 26). She probably had to be for sheer survival, born into a country at war, a sickly child with a congenital birth defect—the fingers on her right hand fused. It is said that she could win at croquet with one hand, however, and that she was so skillful in concealing her hand that most people did not realize she had this handicap (Scott, "Nellie" 26).

She was two years old when her mother died, and her grandmother Myra became her primary caretaker. Her father remarried and moved from

Greenville to Jackson, where he became an increasingly prominent and wealthy lawyer and had five more children. When she was twelve, her father sent her to Whitworth College, a Methodist boarding school in Brookhaven, Mississippi. After two years there, the president told her father they had taught her all they could, and so she was sent to another Methodist institution, Martha Washington College in Abingdon, Virginia. She earned an A.B. degree there in 1880 and was valedictorian of her class.

Returning to Mississippi, she refused her father's offer to study law in his office and instead went to Greenville to live with her grandmother and tutor a banker's children. There she met Robert Somerville, a civil engineer who had come to Mississippi from Virginia to work with the levees and flood control. They were married in 1885. They had four children, of whom Lucy was the youngest.

Like her grandmother Myra, Nellie was an active Methodist but with a social agenda that took her increasingly into the public sphere. She had no interest in the domestic arts, and one brother-in-law reportedly said, "I wish Sister Nellie would quit grandstanding and come home and take care of her family" (Shands).

Nellie's first experience with public organizing and leadership came through the church in her position as district secretary of the Women's Foreign Missions. She was attending a meeting in Nashville for the Women's Board of Missions when the treasurer gave her report and the motion was made to turn the money over to the bishops. "Mother knew how that money was accumulated," Lucy said, "women saving from their little household allowances, selling a jar of jelly for a quarter. And then they were going to blithely turn it over to the bishops to spend! Mother said it set her wild. It is significant that what put her on the road to suffrage was her deep religious conviction" (Hood-Adams).

The next step was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Nellie was serving as corresponding secretary of the state organization when she met Frances Willard in 1896. Nellie considered her the greatest woman she had met, and she had a powerful influence on Nellie's thinking. The next year Nellie was elected president of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association and from then until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 used her considerable talents as an organizer, a writer, and a speaker in the cause of votes for women.[2] Eventually she held the office of second vice-president of the National Woman Suffrage Association. She said once she discovered that major decisions in government were decided at midnight in smoke-filled rooms in the King Edward Hotel, she concluded that was not a very effective way to run a government (Shands).

In 1923 she became the first woman elected to the Mississippi legislature and served a four-year term. She stopped short of claiming her

active public life as a career, however, casting herself as primarily wife and mother. Late in life she wrote, "I never set out to have a 'career.' It was borne into my consciousness that I ought to show my colors and be true to my principles. I never sought any office. My rule was to accept only when no one else was both able and willing to serve. If other competent women were available then I had no call to take time from home and family duties." She had no problem with encouraging Lucy toward a life in public service, however, and was bitterly opposed to her marriage for fear it would ruin her career.

From great-great-grandmother on—from the plantation, to the church, to the voting booth, to the state house, to Washington, D.C.—Lucy Howorth's foremothers' lives are both a microcosm of the Southern white woman's activist history, as well as a rich context for her own biography.

## Notes

[1] See Stone.

[2] For a good analysis of Nellie Nugent Somerville's role in the suffrage movement, see Wheeler.

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## The Poetic Stimulus of Chinese Written Characters

*Jianqing Zheng*
*Mississippi Valley State University*

Among Imagists, the chief lovers of Chinese language and poetry are Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. Their interests in classical Chinese poetry can be equated with their interests in Chinese written characters, and here Pound, chiefly influenced by Ernest Fenollosa's *Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, is the most prominent. He cherishes this essay as his guide that reinforces his ideas of the new path Modernism should take. He also asserts that classical Chinese poetry is "a treasury to which the next century may look for as great a stimulus as the renaissance had from the Greeks" (*Literary Essays* 218).

At the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century, Fenollosa achieved prominence for his studies of Chinese and Japanese art. He left at his death, according to T. S. Eliot, "a quantity of manuscripts including a great number of rough translations [literally exact] from the Chinese" (177). Fenollosa's rough translations from the Chinese were literally exact because they were derived from the Japanese Sinologists, especially from Kainan Mori, who was "one of the greatest Sinologists of the Meiji period in Japan, and was the author of a number of books, including commentaries of T'ang period poetry" (Kodama 219). Fenollosa's *Chinese Written Character* fascinated Pound in two main respects:

1. A large number of Chinese characters developed out of a primitive perception of relations between natural objects, and those characters present images at the same time they denote associated ideas.
2. The advantage of Chinese word, pictorial or ideogrammic, as a poetic medium, is that its etymology is visibly present in its written form.

Fenollosa says, "Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature. . . . [T]he Chinese method follows natural suggestion" (8). And he gives an example of Chinese characters:

人　見　馬
Man Sees Horse

About this "horse," Pound says in his *ABC of Reading* that "Gaudier Brzeska, who was accustomed to looking at the real shape of things, could read a certain amount of Chinese writing without ANY STUDY. He said, 'Of course, you can see it's a horse' (or a wing or

whatever)" (21). Pound realizes that the Chinese written characters have features that can be considered imagistic:

> The Chinese still use abbreviated pictures AS pictures, that is to say, Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things. It means the thing or the action or situation, or quality germane to the several things that it pictures. (*ABC of Reading* 21)

This "thingness" states Pound's idea of the image and provides new eyes to see things from a new angle, like what Brzeska sees in the character horse. Even though Pound's idea may not be linguistically right, it is quite true to the sense of art, especially when he tries to find word-image in Chinese characters as a fresh poetic stimulus, which helps him develop his ideogrammic method that "consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register" (*Guide to Kulchur* 51).

Pound believes that, in poetry, words can be charged with meaning in three ways: melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia. According to Pound, these three ways are the three kinds of poetry:

> Melopoeia, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.
>
> Phanopoeia, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination.
>
> Logopoeia, the dance of the intellect among words, that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or in music. It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode. (*Literary Essays* 25)

As for phanopoeia, Pound means to use a word to throw a visual image into the reader's mind or imagination, thinking this is "probably reached by the Chinese, due in part to their particular kind of written language" (*ABC of Reading* 42). In fact, phanopoeia is a technique that confirms Pound's principles of Imagism. He says he began to use "the term phanopoeia to get away from irrelevant particular connotations tangled with a particular group of young people who were writing in 1912" (*ABC of Reading* 52).

On the other hand, Amy Lowell, influenced by Florence Ayscough, may not have read Fenollosa's essay but says very much the same thing as Fenollosa does. She writes on the basic characteristics of Chinese characters:

> Very early in our studies, we realized that the component parts of the Chinese written character counted for more in the composition of poetry than has generally been recognized; that the poet chose one character rather than another which meant practically the same thing, because of the descriptive allusion in the makeup of that particular character; that the poem was enriched precisely through this undercurrent of meaning in the structure of its characters. (302)

Lowell's ideas are similar to Fenollosa's. According to Fenollosa, "a large number of primitive Chinese characters, even the so-called radicals, are shorthand pictures of actions or processes" (9). Those written characters present vivid images at the same time they signify associated ideas. Fenollosa holds that the process from the image to the idea, from the concrete to the abstract, depends on the use of metaphor, which not only suggests immaterial relations but also is the very essence of poetry (22). The use of material images interprets the obscure (Fenollosa 23), and "the Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built with it a second work of metaphor, but has, through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue" (Fenollosa 24). Fenollosa intends to say that the Chinese ideogram is indeed the paradigm of the image; it is assumed to be natural rather than conventional, and it is a living metaphor that is therefore direct and concrete. He sees poetry in the Chinese character, and it is this kind of "seeing" that has enabled Pound to develop his ideogrammic method.

About his idea of "primitive Chinese characters as shorthand pictures," Fenollosa is criticized by George Kennedy, who argues that "only 364 [out of 9,353], or 3.9 per cent of the characters could at that time [around AD 100] be traced to a pictorial origin" (29). Richard J. Lynn states that "Fenollosa's thesis is that every Chinese character is either a pictogram or ideogram (only a small percentage actually are) and thus incorrectly stressed the pictorial qualities of characters and neglected their phonetic elements completely" (15). But Kennedy and Lynn have overlooked Fenollosa's assertion that

> it is true that the pictorial clue of many Chinese ideographs can not now be traced, and even Chinese lexicographers admit that combinations frequently contribute only a

> phonetic value. But I find it incredible that any such minute subdivision of the idea could have ever existed alone as abstract sound without the concrete character. (30)

Here Fenollosa is wise enough to realize that the pictorial clue of most of the characters cannot be traced now, and by "primitive Chinese characters" (9), he obviously means, not the Han period characters (which cannot be regarded as the primitive Chinese characters), but the "jia gu wen," the inscriptions on tortoise shells and oracle bones of the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century BC).

In his "Pound's Chinese Translations," Chang Yao-xin states that

> the [Chinese] language has lost, over the centuries, much of its pictographic and ideographic force and become every bit as abstract as any phonetic languages ever invented on this planet. . . . In most cases characters no longer call forth any pictures, and generally people could not care less about them. The present writer did not see a mountain until he was seventeen years old, and then the one he saw had only one peak rather than the classical three. Thus a native Chinese is impressed at once by the sound and the sense of the character 日 ("sun") the moment he sees it, perhaps in the same way a native American is by those of the phonetic word "sun." (129-30)

Chang's statement seems plausible since the ideograms have lost much of the visual characteristic through the process of simplification over the centuries and since a native Chinese seldom notices the pictorial clue of ideograms, but Chang fails to notice that the Chinese characters may have an arresting force to non-Chinese speakers, especially to poets and artists. In their eyes, the written form looks like a concrete image. If the Chinese language had become "every bit as abstract as any phonetic languages," Fenollosa would not have written his *Chinese Written Character*, and Pound would not have considered it a great stimulus to his poetry and adaptations of classical Chinese poems. Christine Brooke-Rose, who understands the intention of Fenollosa's essay, points out that

> Fenollosa saw poetry in the ideogram. He saw that to picture "spring" as the "sun underlying the bursting forth of plants" is beautiful. . . . It is this kind of "seeing" which has enabled Pound to "translate" Confucius in a way that brings him alive to us instead of making him sound like an idiot. (103)

Furthermore, it is of great importance to notice that the most valuable point in Fenollosa's essay is not his theory of pictorial characters but the poetics he discusses: the written characters as images

as well as transitive verbs and nouns as key words in poetry. The following passage clearly shows Fenollosa's intention in his essay:

> My subject is poetry, not language, yet the roots of poetry are in language. In the study of a language so alien in form to ours as is Chinese in its written character, it is necessary to inquire how these universal elements of form which constitute poetics can derive appropriate nutriment. (6)

Fenollosa's *Chinese Written Character*, as poetic stimulus, according to John J. Nolde, gave Pound "insights into the Chinese language and confirmed his maturing ideas about new forms required for his revolution in Western poetry" (32). In his *ABC of Reading*, Pound summarizes that

> Fenollosa's essay was perhaps too far ahead of his time to be easily comprehended. He did not proclaim his method as a method. He was trying to explain the Chinese ideograph as a means of transmission and registration of thought. He got to the root of the matter, to the root of the difference between what is valid in Chinese thinking and invalid or misleading in a great deal of European thinking and language. (19)

Based on Pound's summary, we can safely say that Fenollosa's essay, through Pound, has considerably influenced modern Anglo-American poetry and poetics. Without his essay on the Chinese written characters, Imagism may have had a very different direction.

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**The Living Moment: D. H. Lawrence's Poetic and Religious Vision in "Fish"**

*Justin Williamson*
*University of Southern Mississippi*

For D. H. Lawrence, "the business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment" ("Morality" 527). As other critics have noted, this definition of art comes from an essay on the novel "but is framed so as to embrace other modes" (Pollnitz 3) as well. Indeed, Lawrence had already offered a compelling apologia for his verse some years earlier in his "Poetry of the Present," written as the introduction to the American Edition of *New Poems* in 1918. In this essay, Lawrence argued for the validity of and desperate need for a particular kind of versification quite different from the "treasured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats" ("Poetry" 182). He insisted that the poetry of the "immediate present" or "living moment" stands diametrically opposed to the fully complete, polished, and elegantly symmetrical verse traditionally lauded by poets and commentators alike. Lawrence found these poetic qualities inhibiting and equated this strict regard for formalistic concerns with stagnation, decay, and death. The poetry Lawrence was interested in writing was vibrantly charged, and protean; it defied classification and form.

His blatant and purposeful disregard of traditional poetic conventions outraged many, and Lawrence came under considerable critical fire for what was perceived as an unabashed justification for less than masterful versification. Among the most famous and influential of Lawrence's detractors, T. S. Eliot and Richard Blackmur are particularly conspicuous. Eliot is perhaps best known for his general assessment of Lawrence's cognitive abilities, or lack thereof. "Mr. Lawrence is incapable of what we normally call thinking" (Gutierrez 3) is one way Eliot expressed his distaste for Lawrence and his work. Eliot was also fond of referring to Lawrence as a "heretic" and his poetry as not "orthodox." However, it is R. P. Blackmur's pointed excoriation entitled "D. H. Lawrence and Expressive Form" that fully voices the formalist reproach and, I believe, misunderstanding of Lawrence's unique poetic design. Blackmur's wrong-headed critique is a full frontal assault on Lawrence's ostensible lack of technical expertise. Blackmur sees Lawrence's verse as a kind of lively and energetic form of self-expression attempting to masquerade as legitimate poetry. For Blackmur, the puissance of the vision can never carry the piece when it is lacking in formal strategy. He even relegates Lawrence's celebrated "demon" to a marginal position,

referring to this "demon" as nothing more than a "habit of hysteria" (114), and ultimately concludes that Lawrence "left us the ruins of great intentions" (120).

Clearly, Blackmur assails Lawrence on grounds that Lawrence had previously defended himself upon many years earlier. As Lawrence suggested in "Poetry of the Present," his prime objective to be accomplished via the poetic medium was to completely abandon the customs of bygone eras and forge boldly ahead into murky, uncharted depths of versification. While Blackmur, Eliot, and others fiercely clung to limited notions of how poetry should look and function, Lawrence with characteristic vision and prescience marched forth in hopes of expanding a circumscribed poetic scope and ultimately challenging the underlying assumptions that are made about poetry and what it as a communicative medium could accomplish.

Lawrence proposed to capture "the poetry of the immediate present" ("Poetry" 183) or the "living moment" ("Morality" 527). The verse Lawrence envisioned was unfettered by convention and possessed the dynamic, ever-changing quality of life itself:

> The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after. In its quivering momentaneity it surpasses the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels, the poems of the eternities. Do not ask for the qualities of the unfading timeless gems. Ask for the whiteness which is the seethe of the mud, ask for that incipient putrescence which is the skies falling, ask for the never-pausing, never-ceasing life itself, without denouement or close. There must be the rapid momentaneous association of things which meet and pass on the forever incalculable journey of creation: everything left in its own rapid, fluid relationship with the rest of things. ("Poetry" 183)

Perhaps no better examples of this unique and riveting aesthetic exist than in the mature verse found within Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*. By focusing on flora and fauna, Lawrence is able to more closely investigate the notion of the "blood-self" or "blood-consciousness," with which he had become highly preoccupied. After reading widely in anthropological texts such as Frazer's *Exogamy and Totemism*, Lawrence became convinced that his own theory of the "blood-self" (i.e., that the blood actually functions as a seat of perception albeit a different kind of perception than the mind) was accurate. So some critics, most notably Christopher Pollnitz, have read the poems of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* as Lawrence attempting "to replace the worn Romantic templates of mind and nature with a model of perception more in accord with his own sensuous experience and more adequate to the post-

Nietzschean period" (Pollnitz 4). Sandra Gilbert has suggested that Lawrence's purpose in the creation of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* "was ultimately two-fold: first to explore the inhuman otherness of animals and plants, and second, to bring to consciousness that unconscious participation in natural process which makes man like birds, beasts, and flowers" (164).

While both of these views shed significant exegetical light on each commentator's respective reading of the poems, they should be qualified somewhat. First of all, both positions seem to miss the integral religious aspect of much of the poetry in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*. As one critic has argued, "in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* there is a truly religious apprehension of a power which is not the dominating power of human politics but the creative power of nature, combined with a sense of its nonhuman quality" (de Sola Pinto 226-27). Although Vivian de Sola Pinto pointed out the pervasiveness of an identifiable and important religious strain in the poems, he was primarily interested in applying his theory to Lawrence's prose. In this study, de Sola Pinto's shrewd observation will be applied to "Fish" and traced out in minute detail with regard to Lawrence's artistic and spiritual inclinations in an effort to prove that not only was Christianity necessarily obsolete for Lawrence, but it had ultimately become unintelligible. As Masson has suggested in her insightful analysis of Lawrence's Protestant roots, it is clear that as early as 1907 "Lawrence [could] no longer identify himself with the Christian world-view" (55). Although he was fully aware that he could no longer make sense of the forceful and surprisingly articulate Protestant teachings of his youth, a central concept of unpretentious probity, a kind of laid-bare honesty, remained always with Lawrence.

This shrewd veracity manifested itself in a general confessional quality in Lawrence's verse, particularly salient in his love poems. It was so noticeable that W. H. Auden admitted, "I find Lawrence's love poems embarrassing[;] they make me feel a peeping Tom" (288). I would argue, however, that this same incisive and trenchant confessional tone is no less prevalent and important to the poetry of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* though it has been heretofore overlooked. This aspect of the poetry stems from a religious fervor that Lawrence constantly tried to distance himself from but never fully relinquished.

The same unadorned, shocking honesty of experience in Lawrence's love poetry that caused Auden to be taken aback is a central guiding force in one of the most successful of Lawrence's beast poems. Ross Murfin, in his book-length study of the poems, firmly places "Fish" among Lawrence's very best and even heralds its success vis-à-vis another much-lauded poem, "Snake." Murfin explains, "While 'Snake' never really does what it hopes it does, 'Fish' in its best moments does surprisingly well what it worries it can't do: it breaks us out of our stuffy temple and brings us up against a primordial

element of the original world through poetry" (169). Only two other critics have dealt with "Fish" substantively. David Cavitch has offered an unsatisfactory psychoanalytic reading, the shortcomings of which have already been enumerated by other commentators. Christopher Pollnitz, briefly alluded to earlier, has offered up a fascinating interpretation hinging on a new epistemology involving "blood-consciousness" forwarded by Lawrence in reaction against the Romantic tradition. However, a central thrust of the poem that Pollnitz acknowledges but fails to develop is the ineluctable religious aspect. Though he admits that "if we take 'Fish' on its own terms, we must accept it as a fundamentally religious poem, invoking and concentrating upon an object that only reveals itself to the eyes of mystical insight" (35), Pollnitz opts to pursue other avenues of interpretation. I would modify this assertion by adding that "Fish" advances cogent arguments about the havoc that religion, particularly Christianity, has wrought.

"Fish" is indeed a fundamentally religious poem and also an incisive critique, one that was composed during a time when Lawrence "was particularly disillusioned with humanity" (Gilbert 162). He felt compelled to abandon society for the ostensible purity and genuineness of the natural world. In much the same fashion, Lawrence had attempted to distance himself from the religion of his youth, teachings and pronouncements thrust at him by a domineering mother. Although Protestantism was deeply ingrained in his psyche, Lawrence yearned for a more satisfying spiritual experience. His need for a religion better suited to his sensibilities led him on a quest of epic proportions. Lawrence's globetrotting exploits are well known, and they more than suggest his acute need for an adequate, or perhaps Lawrence would say circumambient, religion. From his attempt to construct a naturalistic religion based on primitive Aztec lore to his vision of a utopian society called Rananim, Lawrence's religious quest closely parallels his poetic struggle. If the traditional conventions of poetry confined Lawrence, then so too did modern-day, organized religion. It has been argued that although a definite affinity between Lawrence and William Blake exists, they differ in that "Blake wished to save Christianity from the Churches; Lawrence sought to save men from Christianity itself" (Colmer 14). "Fish" stands as a shining indictment of how Christianity has muted the once acute spiritual receptors of man to the natural world around him, to which he is inextricably linked in a life-sustaining symbiosis. When man confronts beast in the living moment, it is impossible for him to sustain or even initiate meaningful engagement. The revolutionary poesis that Lawrence forwards calls for an equally radical and momentous shift in what are in his estimation sorely inadequate notions of spirituality.

"Fish" commences benignly enough with a kind of general description of the creature's carefree insouciance and *joie de vivre* from the point of view of a single speaker:

> Fish, oh Fish,
> So little matters!
>
> Whether the waters rise and cover the earth
> Or whether the waters wilt in the hollow places,
> All one to you.
>
> Aqueous, subaqueous,
> Submerged
> And wave-thrilled.
>
> As the waters roll
> Roll you.
> The waters wash,
> You wash in oneness
> And never emerge.
>
> Never know,
> Never grasp.
>
> Your life a sluice of sensation along your sides,
> A flush at the flails of your fins, down the whorl of your tail,
> And water wetly on fire in the grates of your gills;
> Fixed water eyes. (1-19)

In these opening lines, it is difficult not to observe the underlying note of envy, if not outright jealousy with which Lawrence's poetic persona muses on the fish's inviting existence. The fish is imagined to be on a free and unfettered journey, unencumbered by the cares and concerns of the human sphere. This is, of course, a resonating rejection of anthropomorphism on the observer's part. He seems to envy and look upon with awe the characteristics of the fish that make him most distinctly not human, a kind of quintessential otherness beyond our grasp.

By the end of the second stanza, the fish begins to take on some symbolic significance. As the speaker notes, whether the water rises and inundates the earth or sinks into dark and unknown, primordial crevasses, the fish shall remain a potent and viable force. The fish can now, even at this early moment, be seen as a physical incarnation of Lawrence's poetic doctrine. This ostensibly simple beast is constantly moving and changing, not being beaten down or drowned by the dangerous currents but dexterously

manipulating them. This is made fairly explicit by the fourth stanza, which reads "As the waters roll / Roll you. / The waters wash, / You wash in oneness / And never emerge" (9-13). Like Lawrence's lofty, if misunderstood, vision of a new kind of poetic expression capable of capturing so much more energy and vitality than previously conceivable, the fish moves quite naturally in its habitat and "never emerge[s]" (13). Lawrence envisioned the language he used to "wash in oneness" (12) with the ideas that he felt compelled to urge. Lawrence proposes to be an unbounded poetic visionary. For this to be possible, he cannot be hampered by stultifying conventions of formalism. He must be free to "wash in oneness / And never emerge" (12-13).

The very next stanza appears to be quite pivotally problematic. At surface-level, the observer seems to continue to lament human intelligence and envy the fish's apparent unsophisticated perception. The speaker contemplates how pleasant the fish's life must necessarily be without the cognitive abilities and trappings of humanity. To "Never know, / Never grasp" (14-15) in human terms might certainly be a desirable state in which to reside, especially when allegedly civilized societies continue to degenerate into utter grotesques. However, if the fish is a symbol of Lawrence's poetry of the living moment, then we must delve deeper in exegesis. A paradox that will become central to the poem arises at this point: the creature that apparently cannot grasp human affairs is himself ungraspable by humanity. The seventh stanza, which appears next, serves to reinforce the ideas of the fish being unbounded, vital, and wonderful in its apparent simplicity, simplicity denied us by virtue of what we have chosen to do with our limited human intelligence.

The eighth stanza begins curiously and prefaces more detailed description of the fish:

> Even snakes lie together.
>
> But oh, fish, that rock in water,
> You lie only with the waters;
> One touch.
>
> No fingers, no hands and feet, no lips;
> No tender muzzles,
> No wistful bellies,
> No loins of desire,
> None. (20-28)

In the lines above, the speaker acknowledges and appears to marvel at the fish's fierce independence. The fish is compared to another animal often recognized as solitary and self-sufficient. However, the fish is more

independent primarily because the only touch that it receives or requires to sustain itself is the sensation of the circumambient tides enveloping it. Indeed the fish does not possess the brief catalogue of anthropomorphic fallacies that the speaker suggests. Because the fish is without these qualities that we tend to mistakenly ascribe to animals, it becomes increasingly more difficult to place the fish into a tidy human category.

This is an unfamiliar, suspect beast singularly free:
You and the naked element,
Sway-wave.
Curvetting bits of tin in the evening light.

Who is it ejects his sperm to the naked flood?
In the wave-mother?
Who swims enwombed?
Who lies with the waters of his silent passion, womb-element?
—Fish in the waters under the earth.

What price *his* bread upon the waters?

Himself all silvery himself
In the element,
No more.

Nothing more. (29-41)

Here, the poetic persona continues to ponder the fish's puzzling and, it would still seem, enviable existence. The fish moves about in fertility itself. Propagation is only an instant away, for, as the speaker notes, the creature is perpetually "enwombed" (34) in the "waters under the earth" (36), whence all life sprang. The fish, like the aesthetic that Lawrence implicitly advances, is at the center of the "never-pausing, never-ceasing life itself, without denouement or close" ("Poetry" 183).

At this point, the speaker is becoming quite dissatisfied with this initial description of the animal. There must be some other attributes besides its reproductive function to which the observer can relate and thus partly dispel at least some of the fish's mystery and strangeness. Two possibilities occur to the speaker:

Himself,
And the element.
Food, of course!
Water-eager eyes,
Mouth-gate open
And strong spine urging, driving;

And desirous belly gulping.

Fear also!
He knows fear!
Water-eyes craning,
A rush that almost screams,
Almost fish-voice
As the pike comes
Then gay fear, that turns the tail sprightly, from a shadow.

Food, and fear, and joie de vivre,
Without love. (42-57)

The searching commentator is positively ebullient when he actually surmises three important characteristics that he and the fish share. However, even though the poet appears to have discovered some common ground, it quickly becomes clear that the man and the beast still remain worlds apart because the fish lacks the fundamental human emotion love. Far from pitying the fish for this lack, the poet continues to admire the animal and actually exhibits jealousy toward the fish because it appears "So utterly without misgiving" (75) and was "Born before God was love" (79).

Clearly, Lawrence is mounting one of his most virulent attacks on Christianity here. Because the fish antedates Christianity, he is incapable of feeling "misgiving" (75), shame, guilt, or any other potentially damaging notions bound up in the etiological myth or crucifixion story to which devout followers of Christ must subscribe. Moreover, Christian theology had become so culturally pervasive that less devout adherents and even non-Christians had internalized much of the basic lore of this religious doctrine; thus, the true impact of Christianity could never be overestimated. Much of its tremendous impact was negative. As Lawrence observes in "Fish," God is love. In other words, the ideas and notions that we now possess concerning love are Christian in nature. This is problematic for Lawrence because we can turn the other cheek and we can be wedded in connubial bliss, but we cannot fully experience the overwhelmingly sensual carnality of white-hot passion. Christianity has traditionally relegated the pleasures of the flesh to the extreme periphery, if not outright condemning them as unwholesome or immoral. In fact, the only instance in which sexual congress is permitted is within the bonds of marriage and even then only for the purpose of procreation. Lawrence thought this quite absurd and also quite dangerous, for he acutely perceived the need for physicality in our relationships. He felt that eschewing what have been misnamed our baser needs is terribly unhealthy and potentially disastrous.

Turning now to the second movement of "Fish," we may trace a shift from the general to the particular. The speaker of the poem becomes an observer:

> A slim young pike, with smart fins
> And a grey-striped suit, a young cub of a pike
> Slouching along away below, half out of sight,
> Like a lout on an obscure pavement . . .
>
> Aha, there's somebody in the know!
>
> But watching closer
> That motionless deadly motion,
> That unnatural barrel body, that long ghoul nose . . .
> I left off hailing him.
>
> I had made a mistake, I didn't know him,
> This grey, monotonous soul in the water,
> This intense individual in shadow,
> Fish-alive. (100-12)

Although he has attempted to make an effort in understanding the creature, the speaker plainly admits, "I didn't know him" (109). Lawrence's poetic persona has absolutely no point of reference against which to adequately begin understanding this animal or what unique knowledge it may have to offer. The pike stands outside the scope of Christianity, so it can be of no use whatsoever. The observer, genuinely interested in comprehending this life force so very different from his own is thoroughly nonplussed as he sounds a bitter refrain: "I didn't know his God, / I didn't know his God" (113-14). The speaker didn't know the fish's God and would never learn because "*there are limits* / . . . to the one God" (119, 121). The limitations of adhering solely to a single monotheistic doctrine are easily perceived and numerous. Christianity is unable of assisting the observer make sense of an animal as ostensibly uncomplicated as a fish. The implicit question is evident: How adequate can Christianity possibly be? If "Fish are beyond me" (122), certainly there are many other things, possibly monumentally important things, beyond my circumscribed and callow perception rendered thus inadequate by central Christian tenets.

The third movement of the poem vividly depicts the consequence of unswervingly holding to a belief that simply does not work. The speaker actually catches "a gold-and-greenish, lucent fish from below" (131) and is made fully aware that he is "*not the measure of all creation*" (139). The speaker is now confronted by the "living moment," and it is completely incomprehensible to him because nothing has prepared him to face it. Sadly,

all the speaker can know is that he cannot know. Religion, specifically Christianity, is inadequate, and, if we read the fish as a kind of metaphoric representation of Lawrence's poetry of the present, we find that unfortunately humanity is not ready to be led out of the wilderness yet:

> He outstarts me.
> And I, a many-figured horror of daylight to him,
> Have made him die. (148-50)

So the living moment ends and the speaker is none the wiser. However, he unknowingly answers at least one of his questions about fishes in the final stanza of the poem, which begins with the first line of Genesis:

> In the beginning
> Jesus was called The Fish . . .
> And in the end. (170-72)

Why can't the speaker understand fishes? Precisely because his thinking is so inextricably bound up in Christian doctrine. The biblical point of reference is the only one that the speaker chooses to avail himself of, again suggesting the pervasiveness of this ideology, and, unfortunately, it is painfully insufficient in helping him spiritually grasp the unique otherness of fish.

Lawrence's point is well taken. He implies that as far as civilization has progressed (organized religions like Christianity being a usual concomitant of civilization), perhaps because of this alleged advancement from the very seas that the fish commands, we are still incapable of understanding what appear to be the simplest of things, such as a fish. However, through his poetry of the living moment, Lawrence offers up an exciting alternative to firmly entrenched and primarily Christian ways of thinking and perceiving. At the very least, we can identify what is quite possibly a primary hindrance to our complete discernment of the world in which we find ourselves. At its best, in poems like "Fish," Lawrence uses this visionary aesthetic to vigorously argue against a religious tradition that he finds simply inadequate and for a new kind of poetry capable of relating in more accurate terms the vibrant, dynamic qualities of life itself.

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## Only the Pub is Real: Claude's *Mrs. O'*

*Paul H. Lorenz*
*University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff*

In January of 1956, Lawrence Durrell, employed as the British director of information services on Cyprus (Bowker 218), wrote to his friend Henry Miller from Nicosia to tell him that he had just finished *Justine*, his "first *serious* book since *The Black Book*" (1938) and that

> a lovely young Alexandrine tumbled into my arms and gave me enough spark to settle down and demolish the book. (She is French, Claude, a writer with something oddly her own.) Night after night we've been working on our books, typewriters at each end of the dining-room table. . . . Outside the dull desultory noise of occasional bombs going off, or a few pistol shots, or a call from the operations people to say that there's been another ambush in the mountains. A very queer and thrilling period, sad, weighed down with futility and disgust, but marvelous to be able to live in one's book while everything is going up inchmeal around one and the curfews settle on the dead towns. (Durrell-Miller 280-81)

The "lovely young Alexandrine" was not Durrell's second wife, Eve Cohen, the Alexandrine most closely associated with the "Justine" of Durrell's fiction, but Claude Forde, his third wife, born Claude Vincendon, the daughter of a French banker and an Alexandrian Jew. She had two children and was married to an English sailor (Bowker 226) who wanted her to move to Bombay to open a hotel with him—a prospect which did not thrill her. Instead, she had taken an apartment by herself, then was hired by Durrell to work with the Cyprus Broadcasting Service while she worked on a novel based on her experiences running a pub in Ireland after World War II, the novel which was to become *Mrs. O'* (MacNiven 430).[1]

It might be interesting to compare *Justine* with *Mrs. O'* to discover the genetic similarities between these novels gestated together over the same kitchen table: indeed the two novels seem to ask for such an investigation, for both novels begin with a disclaimer arguing that all of the characters are fictitious, with Durrell going on to claim that "[o]nly the city," that is, his imagined Alexandria, "is real" (9), while Claude insists that in her novel, "Only the pub is real—and the city and county of Cork" (9). The similarities that Henry Miller claimed to see in the novels (MacNiven 461), however, are not the topic of this present essay. Of more interest to me at the present time is Claude's ability to capture the spirit of that "very queer and thrilling period, sad, weighed down with futility and disgust" and her protagonist's ability to

live "while everything is going up inchmeal around one and the curfews settle on the dead towns" (Durrell-Miller 281) of county Cork. I have chosen this direction to illustrate a point that historian Simon Schama argues in the February 2000 issue of *Harper's Magazine.* That is, if history is to live in our schools, the way history is written will have to change: it will have to return to "the kind of descriptive picturing that makes even histories meant as the analytical political science of the past credible as human experience" (37). Though not meant to be "analytical political science," Claude's *Mrs. O'* brings the Ireland of the late 1940s to life through a series of descriptive picturings in a way which few histories have been able to achieve.

Ireland, or Eire as it was known from 1937 until 1949 (Kenyon 128), was unique in Europe in the years immediately following World War II. In 1939, Eire had severed all relations with the United Kingdom (Harrison 665) and when war broke out later that year decided to declare neutrality; it remained a non-combatant throughout World War II (Gilbert 109). As a result, Eire essentially escaped the war and its consequences, including the bombing that did so much damage in the rest of Europe. Isolated from the hostilities, Eire never had to resort to the rationing of food, clothing, and fuel which continued in England from 1940 until 1954 (Kenyon 297). Indeed, Eire's unique status is what draws Claude's heroine to the emerald isle in the first place.

The novel opens with a picturing of the mental state of post-war Europe as the unnamed narrator, later dubbed "Mrs. O'" by her pub patrons, recollects the circumstances which had originally brought her to Eire. She describes how, in the year immediately following the end of the war, London, her adopted home, and Paris, her real home, had both become quite hateful to her. Wandering through the Tuileries, her hands in her pockets, the narrator recounts how she "frowned at the pale faces of the people, at their grey collars (a mute reminder of shortages and makeshifts), at the general atmosphere of 'accablement' [depression or fatigue]" (14) with the intolerable smell of decay all around her. But despite "the general débâcle," the soon to be "Mrs. O'" has enough money to set herself up in business, and the recent "dismal conclusion" of her own "unsatisfactory marriage" has left her free to go and do as she pleases (14-15). She wants to open a business, to start over, and as she glances through a school atlas considering places of escape from the shortages and general *accablement* she finds around her, her reasoning paints a picture of Europe in 1946. After rejecting America, Asia, Africa, and Australia for personal reasons, she decides to stay in Europe:

> the old continent, with the ever-shifting frontiers, the variety and the sameness, every name in the tangled pattern the title of an ancient story and the headline of a contemporary newspaper. Yes, it would be somewhere in Europe, but

> away from all these identical dreary fellow-Europeans. There was no attraction for me in Slav sadness, Latin fire and Scandinavian stodge. Was there anywhere the war and its dismal aftermath had by-passed? Of course: Switzerland (oh no—picture post cards and Red Cross parcels) and Eire. (15)

And so it is in Eire that our narrator decides to look for "a place combining the necessities of life and the joys of quiet insanity to allow putting down roots" to achieve "the feeling of rejoining something known and felt before and never recognized" (20).

The Eire she finds is a land of stark and startling contrasts where "an air-hostess from county Clare" could make "Aer Lingus seem like Cinderella's coach" (21), a land simultaneously modern and lost in a storybook past where she can witness

> a chamber-pot emptied out of the window from a room festooned with crucifixes and upward-gazing female saints—a drunk staggering into church at six-thirty in the morning under the impulse of a drug more powerful than alcohol, deeply seated in an unconscious conscience—a beautiful young man reverently greasing a motor cycle in the lee of Blarney Castle. (20)

And yet, in these contrasts, our narrator instinctively discerns "a cohesive element that binds the totally dissimilar into a closed shop of Irishness" (21) which she passionately wished to penetrate. When she arrives in Cork, she finds congenial people with "a surrealistic quality about them which combined with their simplicity and warmth" to achieve an effect that she found "irresistibly attractive—a combination like Bovril and Cleopatra" (27).[2] It is in Cork that our narrator decides to open her pub, to accede to her customers' inexplicable redubbing her "Mrs. O'," and to gather individual portraits of her customers, the picturings of Ireland which lend historical significance to this novel.

Of particular significance is the way that Claude manages to capture the desperation of the Irish poor in her picturing of Phelan, a man who looks more like a Welsh coal miner than the gentle Irish burglar he is. A kind of Robin Hood of burglars, Phelan steals only from large corporations, never individuals, because he never wants anyone personally to suffer as a result of his burglaries, an attitude which causes those who knew him to proclaim: "Yerrah, 'tis an honest man is Phelan. . . . Fifteen separate convictions he's after having—and never robbed a person at all" (39). Claude explains that Phelan is a self-taught burglar—"which as any specialist will tell you is just not good enough" (39). As a result, the local police know Phelan quite well and he spends a good deal of time in jail. At home, Phelan has nine sickly

children and a poor wife, "a beautiful skeleton of a mother" (49). Not only is the family desperately poor, starving in fact—Claude relates that even "a spoonful of margarine, or a piece of dried fish quite upset them" (39)—but the entire family is infected with tuberculosis (39). Phelan, himself infected with tuberculosis, is the kind of man who loves his wife, as he tells Mrs. O', "so hard, that God save us, I can't help it, Mrs. O'—and she—she feels the same . . ." (41). When not in jail, he robs fashionable department stores, not to get rich, but only to provide food for his family and suitable clothing for his children's first communions (40). When tragedy strikes, though our narrator notes that "it is always deeply embarrassing to witness deep emotion" (42), she does not spare us the heart-wrenching details but lets us hear Phelan's story in his own words:

> Ye remember me twins, Mrs. O'? De boy died early this morning and I was after getting a small box for him. 'Tis ten miles to the simmitry as ye know, but praying a little to our Lady to watch over the child, I took him there on me shoulder. Sure, 'twas broken me heart was—but God save him, he had a dacent burial—the good Father was there . . .
>
> . . . I went back Mrs. O', . . . and the girl twin had died while I buried the brother. Ah Holy Mother, I could not stand it. Sure, there was no box for this one—and no money to buy one, and 'twas in my arms I took her the last ten miles to join her twin. Father Murphy came again in the buggy, Mrs. O'. 'Twas good of him. Then I came home and Maggie was there, and she so lovely and so sad. . . .
>
> . . . Mrs. O', she was so lovely, and 'twas broke entirely our hearts were. . . . There will be more Phelans to die—and 'tis I—I'm making them for death. (42-43)

Here is the binding of the totally dissimilar in the Irish spirit that Mrs. O' hoped to understand: how circumstances dictate that Phelan's deep love for his wife must cause him to commit what for him was the greatest of crimes, though no one but himself sees his guilt: the police and other patrons are only sympathetic and help him home.

While many of the picturings of Eire in the novel show the difficulties of life in the late 1940s, not all of them share the maudlin sentimentality of Phelan's story. Some of them show a sense of practical humor such as the story of Mrs. Shea dropping her best teapot and ruining her lace table cloth after her son impresses the local priest by reciting all of the Holy Days of the Church flawlessly, only to follow up this triumph with the embarrassing assertion that Easter is the most beautiful of the holy days because of the food served at Easter tea (78). Other picturings tell tragic stories in a matter of fact way. One of the stories which spans most of the novel is that of Paddy

Donovan. Paddy is recruited early in the novel to do some remodeling work in the pub that Mrs. O' buys, and he provides a good deal of humor in the early pages of the book (52-68). Later in the novel we learn that Paddy's alcoholism has gotten out of control, causing him problems all over town as he neglects his family and steals to buy liquor (132-38). Despite Mrs. O's best efforts to help her friend, he cannot stay sober. Just before the novel ends, he leaves an empty bottle of whiskey and "an affectionate and cheerful" suicide note for his wife, a note in which he says he is tired of feeling guilty about being unable to control his drinking and affirming his belief that his wife and their children will be better off without him. By this time, Mrs. O' can only sum up the numbness brought on by her vicarious experience of the Irish condition with the comment "I had nothing left in me with which to give comfort—plenty of pity but it was the detached pity of the intellect, not the compassion that hurts as it wells up" (188).

That intellectual shell of detachment which hardens over Mrs. O' as the novel progresses eventually provides her motive for leaving Eire. This detachment is not typical; rather it is the cumulative effect of the frequent stories told by people drowning their sorrows in the pub. More typically, the picturings presented in the novel show an Irish triumph over adversity. Such is the story of Dierdre and her maid Norah. This is how Claude sets up the story:

> My friend Dierdre had a maid who was "simple, God save her" and who inexplicably became pregnant. Her employer, a woman of self-indulgence in legitimate appetites and self-restraint in those considered less legitimate, had the generosity and the sense of humour of her *concitoyens* without the inquisitorial cruelty of chauvinism—instead of feeling irritation towards a girl who had "let her down"—she sought the background story when her condition became obvious.
>
> You see, the creature was so ugly, so dull, so incredibly undesirable in her brute usefulness, that it was hard to believe the facts. She was returning from church where she had been to confession (though what the poor creature found in her life of wet floor-cloths and stuffed-up sinks that could be considered worthy of the confessional, I don't know), when "all of a sudden-like, it happened." (78-79)

When no more details are forthcoming, Dierdre starts posing questions, but Norah has no idea who did it. She only knows when it happened: "the bells was ringin' and ringin'—that's when, and it so cold, Mam—so cold—with snow. Then he pulls me into the alley, and Mam, the bells was still ringin' but it wasn't cold anymore—it was all lovely and warm like when I fixes the

boiler . . ." (79). This story delights Dierdre, and when the child is born, this woman, who "had never looked at a man," adopts the child and raises it, with Norah's help, as if it were her own, almost forgetting that Norah "bore the child—remembering only the warmth in the snow and the joyous peals of bells she never heard" (80). One of the advantages of the novel, one of its real strengths, is the way in which a talented artist, with a few words of description, can bring worlds and characters alive, actually take us into the very skins inhabited by living characters to experience vicariously what they are experiencing.

It doesn't take very long in the classroom for a teacher to discover that Simon Schama is right: history classes and history texts have not succeeded in bringing the past alive to the students we teach. To cite one personal example, last semester I taught Langston Hughes' play *Mulatto* to an "Introduction to Literature" class. Despite the presence of an automobile in the play and an explicit date (in the 1930s) mentioned in the stage directions, most of the students reading the play were convinced that the events recounted took place before the American Civil War. Clearly, if we are to be a people with a history as we march forward into this millennium, we must take steps to keep the past alive, to do as Simon Schama suggests: expose ourselves and our students to "indelibly powerful pictures of the historical moment" (37), be that a moment of the present or of the past. Literature, especially novels, can make it possible for our students to make meaningful connections to the past, connections which may even motivate them to consider the past and the events of the past as meaningful in their understanding of the world as it is, meaningful enough to learn at least a basic outline of the historical past. I am not claiming in this essay that Claude's little novel *Mrs. O'* is a great work of literature; I'm merely claiming that it provides a bit of living documentation of an obscure moment in the recent history of Ireland, a picturing which connects the Ireland of Roddy Doyle, or today's headlines, with the Ireland of Joyce's *Dubliners*, and as such contributes to our understanding of who we are and what we are doing in this world.

## Notes

[1] Claude identifies herself as the author of *Mrs. O'* with only her first name.

[2] Bovril is the commercial name of a concentrated beef bouillon.

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## On the Range of Styles in *All the Pretty Horses*

*William C. Spencer*
*Delta State University*

Cormac McCarthy deserves his reputation as a master word-mason whose writing style is jaw-droppingly awesome in its virtuosity: its precision, its power, and its incredible range. Although Vereen Bell charges one of McCarthy's novels with "lurid idiomatic excesses" (91), and although Mark Royden Winchell concludes that "McCarthy is simply asking language to do more than it is capable of doing" (307), other critics have been more kind. Terri Witek notes that McCarthy "combines the furthest reaches of both educated and rustic dictions" (51). Reviewer Larry Johnson credits McCarthy with "verbal pyrotechnics" and asserts, "His first five novels, each [stretch] the possibilities of our native tongue a little farther" (163). Perhaps the most favorable comment on McCarthy's stylistic transcendence has been made by John Ditsky, who argues, "Dictionally, tonally, McCarthy simply goes beyond Faulkner. . . . McCarthy writes as if there were no limits to what language might be pushed into doing" (2). Though critics do not always agree on whether McCarthy's language should be considered a positive breakthrough or a detracting excess, most would probably concede John Lewis Longley, Jr.'s position that "McCarthy's fictional rhetoric would be worth a book-length study of its own" (81).

McCarthy does, in fact, exploit a remarkable range of styles in *All the Pretty Horses* (as he does in other novels), proving himself to be a master of suiting sound to sense; by turns his stylistic effects are realistic, musical, poetic, theatrical, cinematic, and even mystical. He is a minimalist in punctuation, a maximalist in diction. He achieves realism through laconic cowboy dialect and the inclusion of untranslated Spanish, and every so often, at key moments, he catapults his rhetoric into a transcendent high style—a style which Rob Jarrett describes as sublime (121) and which I would like to term "cosmic." Although it is his cosmic style that inspires the strongest reaction and the most comment, each of McCarthy's styles has its own power, its own pleasure.

Who would be willing to give up the exclamatory, combative, profanity-spiced, clipped, earthy dialogue of Lacey Rawlins? McCarthy gives him such indispensable lines as "You're a lyin sack of green shit" (40), "I got a uneasy feelin about that little son of a bitch" (43), "I know you aint no goddamn sixteen" (40), and "Son, . . . I dont give a shit who it belongs to. But it damn sure dont belong to you" (41).

Quite a different dialect is spoken by the Encantada captain, Raul, whose English no is very good. Indeed, his English is so broken as to seem

politically incorrect. By contrast, another Mexican character, the Dueña Alfonsa, speaks eloquently in an aphorism-laden style comparable to Emerson's. Some of the novel's profoundest, most memorable sentences are spoken by Alfonsa:

> "Nothing can be proven except that it be made to bleed" (230).
>
> "All courage [is] a form of constancy. . . . It [is] always himself that the coward abandons first" (235).
>
> "The world is quite ruthless in selecting between the dream and the reality. . . . Between the wish and the thing the world lies waiting" (238).
>
> "What is constant in history is greed and foolishness and a love of blood" (239).

Another of McCarthy's dialect styles, one which adds to the novel's realism but which has excited a lot of complaints, is the Spanish dialogue. For the most part, these complaints seem unwarranted since ordinarily the narrative indicates the meaning of the spoken Spanish either through context or more likely through a character's verbal response or English reiteration. For example, as soon as the old man in the stone jail cell says, "Cuidado con el bote," John Grady warns Rawlins, "Don't step in the bucket" (157). Fairly consistently, in fact, McCarthy seems to offer a Spanish 101 course for readers, teaching us that *ollas* are clay jars, *barrial* is a basin floor, *lagunas* are shallow lakes, and *salon de belleza* is a beauty parlor. He even teaches us some Mexican prison slang, including two words for cigarette butt and one for big shot, and at one point John Grady helpfully explains, "Anybody can be a pendejo. . . . That just means asshole" (185). Perhaps significantly, McCarthy seems much less helpful with translation in the novel's last section. Possibly, the increased challenge to and confusion of English-speaking readers parallels the challenge and confusion that John Grady experiences from Alejandra's rejection of his marriage proposal and from his dangerous attempt to reclaim his horse. John Grady comes to realize as Alfonsa has warned him earlier, that sometimes "there is no translation" (232).

In McCarthy's more ornate, more artificial rhetoric, there are again many variations, variations which produce remarkably different effects. This diversity even within McCarthy's cosmic style manifests his interest and expertise in the techniques of music, theater, filmmaking, prosody, and incantation. On the very first page of the novel, for instance, McCarthy begins to demonstrate his stylistic virtuosity and range. The fifth paragraph begins with two short sentences, both under ten words long, and ends with a

nine-word sentence—but framed within these is a sentence exactly a hundred words in length which describes the passing of a train:

> It came boring out of the east like some ribald satellite of the coming sun howling and bellowing in the distance and the long light of the headlamp running through the tangled mesquite brakes and creating out of the night the endless fenceline down the dead straight right of way and sucking it back again wire and post mile on mile into the darkness after where the boilersmoke disbanded slowly along the faint new horizon and the sound came lagging and he stood still holding his hat in his hands in the passing ground-shudder watching it till it was gone. (3-4)

Like certain blues guitarists or harmonica players and a few rock and roll drummers, McCarthy here imitates the sound of a train passing at a crossing, in his case with the music of his language. He chugs a boxcar, mimetic sentence across the page, conjunctions serving as the couplings, with no punctuation to slow the locomotion, and when the train disappears so does the altered style.

In other passages, as Nancy Kreml has pointed out, McCarthy's shift into high-style gear draws emphasis to the action. This technique sometimes seems impressionistic and theatrical, as when a spotlight directs attention to a particular place on an otherwise darkened stage. One scene that McCarthy stylistically spotlights is John Grady's cauterization of his own bullet wounds. This heroic action is depicted in a 116-word sentence containing twelve *and*s, but framing this drama are sentences of only fourteen words each.

> John Grady had begun to shout even before the gunmetal hissed in the meat. His shout clapped shut the calls of lesser creatures everywhere about them in the night and the horses all stood swimming up into the darkness beyond the fire and squatting in terror on their great thighs screaming and pawing the stars and he drew breath and howled again and jammed the gunbarrel into the second wound and held it the longer in deference to the cooling of the metal and then he fell over on his side and dropped the revolver on the rocks where it clattered and turned and slid down the basin and vanished hissing into the pool.
>
> He'd seized the fleshy part of his thumb in his teeth, shaking in agony. (274)

McCarthy also blazes a stylistic spotlight on his protagonist's name, again in order to help elevate him to heroic stature. But in this case, using a trick he may have picked up from James Bond movies, McCarthy constructs fragments and a certain rhythm to dramatically introduce his hero to the

audience. First, the *narrator* tells us, "The boy's name was Cole. John Grady Cole" (7). The full name is set off in a fragment, which McCarthy further spotlights by following it with a space break in the text. Just nine pages later, John Grady utters his full name himself in a fragment in response to an attorney's receptionist's question, and late in the novel when Mrs. Rev. Jimmy Blevins asks for his name, again we hear the dramatic rhythm of "Cole. John Grady Cole" (295).

In at least two important passages McCarthy uses several rhetorical techniques but especially repetition to create a kind of vertigo effect for the reader. These passages seem to insinuate altered states of consciousness for the characters involved. A whirling dizziness and a sense of the suspension of time are implied as multiple phrases circle back around repeatedly. In the first of these passages, McCarthy aims at a style appropriate for narrating the beginnings of young romantic love for John Grady and Alejandra. The phrases "side by side" and "up the ciénaga road" each appear three times; references to the "moon in the west" and "some dogs barking" each occur twice, and eighteen gerunds convey a sense of constant motion.

> The nightdamp laid the dust going up the ciénaga road and they rode the horses side by side at a walk, sitting the animals bareback and riding with hackamores. Leading the horses by hand out through the gate into the road and mounting up and riding the horses side by side up the ciénaga road with the moon in the west and some dogs barking over toward the shearing-sheds and the greyhounds answering back from their pens and him closing the gate and turning and holding his cupped hands for her to step into and lifting her onto the black horse's naked back and then untying the stallion from the gate and stepping once onto the gateslat and mounting up all in one motion and turning the horse and them riding side by side up the ciénaga road with the moon in the west like a moon of white linen hung from wires and some dogs barking. (140)

The effect here seems almost cinematic, as if the director of a romantic film, in order to convey the dizzy rush of falling in love, employed a 360° pan shot, circling the young lovers again and again—but McCarthy achieves this bit of movie magic with words alone.

Despite the incredible variety in McCarthy's styles, there does appear to be one overriding, ultimate rhetorical goal, which admittedly is most evident in his powerhouse, high-voltage passages. This goal is to establish a pervasively mystical style. Indeed, McCarthy's bold, persistent use of repetition often achieves an effect that can be termed incantatory. McCarthy's plot repetitions, intertextuality, and repeated character types are well known,

and his linguistic repetitions, sometimes almost mantra-like, are equally remarkable. The fact that he aims for a mystical style is evident not only from his repetitions but also from the way that he combines words and sentences. Typically, his long sentences will be a string of independent clauses joined by conjunctions, almost always "and." A stylistician would point out that McCarthy favors loose sentences (rather than periodic ones) and therefore has a dominantly paratactic style. Ross Murfin notes that a "paratactic style is characteristic of many well-known ancient works of literature," such as "the Old Testament . . . , *Beowulf* [c. 700 A.D.], and *La Chanson de Roland* [c. 1100]" as well as the work of Hemingway, for one modern example (386). The fact that McCarthy constructs so many long, loose sentences, joining independent clauses with conjunctions, implies on a subliminal, linguistic level the connectedness of all things. In commenting on Hemingway's loose sentences, William H. Gass concludes, "These 'ands' . . . insist upon the suddenness of everything, the disappearance of time, the collision of different spaces" (170). Gass's observation equally applies to McCarthy and, in fact, helps to McCarthy's amazing 210-word sentence narrating John Grady's magical dream of freedom the first night he's in jail.

> That night he dreamt of horses in a field on a high plain where the spring rains had brought up the grass and the wildflowers out of the ground and the flowers ran all blue and yellow far as the eye could see and in the dream he was among the horses running and in the dream he himself could run with the horses and they coursed the young mares and fillies over the plain where their rich bay and their rich chestnut colors shone in the sun and the young colts ran with their dams and trampled down the flowers in a haze of pollen that hung in the sun like powdered gold and they ran he and the horses out along the high mesas where the ground resounded under their running hooves and they flowed and changed and ran and their manes and tails blew off of them like spume and there was nothing else at all in that high world and they moved all of them in a resonance that was like a music among them and they were none of them afraid horse nor colt nor mare and they ran in that resonance which is the world itself and which cannot be spoken but only praised. (161-62)

This incantatory sentence contains twenty-two *and*s; multiple repetitions of the words *horses*, *run*, *flowers*, *dream*, and *resonance*; parallel structures; five negatives; three rhythmic appositives; three similes; and no internal punctuation. The tumbling run of sentences like these seems to reinforce a McCarthy character's mystical insights that "all [is] motion" and "Nothing

ever stops moving" (*Suttree* 452, 461).

McCarthy additionally insinuates a mystical bond in *All the Pretty Horses* even on the level of diction through his pervasive, unusually frequent use of compound words, not just known compound words but also many that he coins. He seems almost German in his yoking technique to create such new words as *boilersmoke, groundshudder, blanketcoats, wagonsheet, deadcentered, nickelmounted, windtattered, nightdamp, beltholsters, saddlescabbards, fivegallon, downcountry, bloodred, horseskull, ardenthearted,* and *brainbox.* As long as this list is, it is actually only a small sampling from the novel, and these created compounds appear throughout the text, not just in high-style sections.

Numerous repetitions and echoes of all kinds, the compounding of words, and the amazing combination of sentences all add up to an implied sense of mystical unity, a vision in which space and time and self are all suspended. McCarthy's cosmic style, like Walt Whitman's, is often incantatory, thereby aspiring to the power of a magical spell. Ultimately, Cormac McCarthy's stylistic choices in *All the Pretty Horses* deepen the philosophical implications of the novel and furthermore serve to undercut and complicate the final image of an isolated, alienated John Grady Cole riding off alone. The style, at least on an unconscious level, may remind us that John Grady's story is a universal one and that in one sense he is *not* alone. Significantly, Alfonsa tells John Grady that her "father had a great sense of the connectedness of things" and she gives voice to Gustavo Madero's insight that "Those who have suffered great pain of injury or loss are joined to one another with bonds of special authority. . . . The closest bonds we will ever know are bonds of grief. The deepest community one of sorrow" (238).

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**"The mastery that man must hold": Little Red Riding Hood Grows Up in Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away," Silko's "Yellow Woman," and Carter's "The Company of Wolves"**

*Laurie A. Sterling and Kathryn Yerkes*
*King's College*

Bruno Bettelheim reads the Grimm brothers' "Little Red Cap" as a story about the "ambivalence about whether to live by the pleasure principle or the reality principle" (171). The wolf tempts the little girl from the path and the civilized social world into the pre-social, sensual world of the wilderness. Clearly the wolf as seducer is a remnant of the sexuality of the tale's precursors. Sexuality and sensuality are dangerous, and it is only through the intervention of the hunter, "the responsible strong, and rescuing father figure" (172), that the girl is returned from death to the civilized world. Susan Brownmiller sees in the tale's sexuality a stronger and more fearsome moral: "Red Riding Hood is a parable of rape. There are frightening male figures abroad in the woods—we call them wolves, among other names—and females are helpless before them. Better stick close to the path . . ." (277).

Recently, in response to an assignment for a class called "Fairy Tales, Storytelling, and Culture," Kate [Yerkes] wrote a paper that read D.H. Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away" as a "Little Red Riding Hood" tale. In our ensuing discussions we began to explore the interrelation between Lawrence's story, Leslie Marmon Silko's "Yellow Woman" and Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves." While Carter's story is a self-conscious retelling of Little Red's story, all, it seems, follow the tale's basic structure. Melody Graulich says that "Yellow Woman" "elliptically explores the desire to give up sexual control, to be overpowered by sexual urges" (19). Indeed, in exploring the basic theme of the transgression of social and sexual boundaries, all three of our tales explore the dynamic Graulich describes, though all chart this dynamic differently. Silko and Carter delve into their heroines' psyches, exploring their desire to be overpowered by their own sexual urges, to be free from the rigid sexual mores of their cultures. Lawrence, on the other hand, does not afford his nameless woman such luxuries. Lawrence writes of the desire to give up sexual control, but not to one's own desires. He seems to believe in a sort of "rape fantasy" in which women want to be victimized, and he sees his heroine's desire to explore the wilderness—and "the wilderness within" (Graulich 7)—as "foolish," naïve, and self-destructive. Lawrence's story thus reinforces the basic moral of "Little Red Cap," for the woman of his story finally pays for her transgression with her life. Silko's "Yellow Woman," on the other hand, is afforded power through her journey of self-discovery. She returns to her home and socially

prescribed roles, but she retains some control over her identity. Carter's heroine, the "strong willed child," finally turns the tables on her seducer completely.

In D.H. Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away," our Red Riding Hood is a grown woman, and aware of the sexual world (at least, as experienced with her less-than-passionate husband). But, though she has knowledge, and thus no longer innocence, she remains somehow unmoved, untried, untouched, and blank. Her home life in civilized, married society is a study in boredom and lackluster existence. Her only loyalty to this life is due to inveterate morality—not feeling, or desire, or passion. Lawrence reveals that "[h]er conscious development had stopped mysteriously with her marriage. . . . Her husband had never become real to her, neither mentally or physically. . . . [O]nly morally he swayed her, downed her, kept her in invincible slavery" (547). She languishes there, doing her duty, but is not emotionally invested in her family or home; her quick and unstudied departure proves that.

Hearing tales of far-off, wild natives in the Mexican hills, our nameless woman mounts her horse and leaves that known, charted, and defined world behind her. She claims to be traveling to visit her daughter in a convent (another symbolic reference to her sheltered femininity), but truly intends to seek out these natives, to "see their houses and to know their gods," to experience their "savage customs and religion" (554, 549). She will cast aside all of her upbringing, all mores and prescriptions of feminine life to experience something startling and alive. She will be no longer a student of the deadened reality principle, choosing instead to *experience*, and to allow her inhibitions to be countered and broken with freedom. As her subconscious tells her, "She must get out" (548).

Hers, like that of all Red Riding Hood characters, is a journey of sensuality and experience, one also of personal fulfillment and discovery. Thus far, she had "never [been] allowed to go out alone"—and Lawrence's woman is now tempted by her own curiosity about the "mysterious, marvelous Indians of the mountains" (550, 549). She rides out alone to satisfy that curiosity and to explore the wonderment of the sensuality of the uncivilized world. Through her travels into the unknown and wild, the journey of every Red Riding Hood character is symbolized. By choosing to leave, this unnamed woman assumes an air of independence, leaving behind her settled family life, and exploding the myth of the naturally unassertive woman. However, though we briefly enjoy her strong, driven journey, we see very quickly that Lawrence's purpose will not allow her to acquire sensual and spiritual freedom. Instead, it is used as a lesson to teach her that her place and role in the world will remain the same no matter where she journeys and what she learns: her path does not fork.

The journey itself clearly parallels the typical fairytale pilgrimage. She must pass through the forbidding forest, with branches that pull at her and winding paths that will try to confuse her. She must meet with the wolf (or in this case a wolf pack), encounter the danger, and either die, escape, or be rescued. It is in this last step that Lawrence damns her. Her needs and search become secondary in the story, as it so clearly turns into a struggle of man versus man, and she the quarry in between. When she encounters the natives in the forest and is taken to their mountain village, she quickly finds out that she has been taken as a sacrifice. She will be killed to appease their gods, and, according to their beliefs, return to them the powers and position they have lost to the white man. She, white and woman, will be food for the Indian appetite for freedom—just as, in her own culture, she is a captive to quell the hunger of masculine wants. Her one allowed realization lies in knowing, finally, that she cannot become what she needs to be in either place: civilized, or barbaric. She will always be inhibited, always be disallowed, unable to tap into what Lawrence calls a "half-childish, half-arrogant . . . feminine power" (554). She will always be a character in the wolf's tale instead of the heroine of her own, sojourning about with what Lawrence terms a "foolish romanticism" and "crazy plans" (549, 550). She will always be the useless and yet useable slip of a "girl from Berkeley" (547). It is particularly in this turn of the story that Lawrence's personal ideas about women and the female journey become clear judgements: his voice becomes harsh, mocking, scoffing at the female power this woman seems so assured of.

Once the woman realizes her unchangeable position, she relents, giving herself up to it. She remains a captive of the natives, locked in their dwellings, clothed or not by their own choosing, touched at their leisure. As her sexuality is disallowed by Lawrence, thus are all her emotive aspects altogether, and she literally becomes a ghost in their midst. She loses all control, all care; it is almost as if she is separated from herself, hovering above her own story. The only brief moments of attention or excitement that burst through her haze are when she knows she will be dead (or realizes she is, for all intents and purposes, dead already). She knows now what she has met in the forest, how dark and animalistic it is; however, she is in some ways stimulated by this knowledge, excited by the wildness within and without her: "The woman was powerless. And along with her supreme anger there came a slight thrill of exultation. She knew she was dead" (556). Lawrence liberally calls on death imagery: in the course of only a few pages, the reader is inundated with references to her metaphoric demise. Lawrence also freely plays with the characteristic Red Riding Hood collision of fear and excitement, turning it from a desire to experience and gain in self-knowledge to one of a vivid "rape fantasy," illustrated indisputably in a line which reads,

"She knew she was a victim; that all this elaborate work upon her was the work of victimising her. But she did not mind. She wanted it" (577). Lawrence, finally, seems unable to penetrate the female psyche. Instead of allowing his character the freedom to explore her own wilderness, he writes a character who seems to desire victimization. And this woman, much like Perrault's Little Red, is sacrificed to the wolf's power, killed, consumed, gobbled up. She has ended as an immolation, just as she started out to be. As in every variant of Little Red, there lies an element of twofold death in the rape of woman as the means for man to assume power. In this story, we can see in harsh modernity the very essence of Little Red—the rape, the shattering of innocence, and the sacrifice of her identity.

Lawrence, whether by his own personal ideology, or the boundaries of his time—the very moral borders this nameless woman was bent on escaping—does an excellent job of making the Little Red character a threefold victim. Not only is she a hunted bit of meat for the savage wolf-like personality; she finds that, in either world, there really is no possibility for self- or sexual realization. Lawrence, like both cultures of man in this story, denies her sexuality, making her into a void, a nameless emptiness, "the space between the stars" (570). The final words of the story prove her a pawn—and the need of the wolf pack, white or native, to fight her instinctive resolve and desire: "Then the old man would strike, and strike home, accomplish the sacrifice and achieve the power. The mastery that men must hold, and that passes from race to race" (581).

Silko's "Yellow Woman" is a retelling of the traditional "Yellow Woman" stories from Native American culture, and it grows out of many of the same tensions as do "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Woman Who Rode Away." As Little Red ventures into the woods and Lawrence's heroine into the mountains, Silko's Yellow Woman leaves the socially inscribed world of the pueblo and ventures into the wilderness as the story opens: "My thigh clung to his with dampness, and I watched the sun rising up through the tamaracks and willows. . . . I could hear the water, almost at our feet where the narrow fast channel bubbled. . . . I looked at him beside me, rolled in the red blanket on the white river sand" (31). Clearly, Yellow Woman has "strayed from the path" (and interestingly, Silko uses the same color contrasts as do so many Little Red tales—red and white—sexuality and innocence). Yet Lawrence, while appearing to write an exploration of feminine longing, writes a "rape fantasy." Silko understands female sexual fantasies very differently; her story explores not a desire for victimization but the ability to express a female sexuality that, so often, is not socially sanctioned.

Much has been made of the "ambiguity" of Silko's story. Indeed many readers have been troubled by the ambiguity that surrounds the relationship between Silko's nameless narrator and Silva, seeing an encounter

that looks dangerously like rape. Ironically, though, it is this ambiguity that emphasizes that this is a story of woman's desire, woman's power, and not of male domination.

Though the story may seem to blur the lines between rape and fantasy, Silko herself, in a 1986 interview, links the story with female desire. She says,

> The river was a place to meet boyfriends and lovers and so forth. I used to wander around down there and try to imagine walking around the bend and just happening to stumble upon some beautiful man. Later on I realized that these kinds of things that I was doing when I was fifteen are exactly the kinds of things out of which stories like the Yellow Woman story [came]. I finally put the two together: the adolescent longings and the old stories." (qtd. in Graulich 10 ).

Similarly, it is clear that in the wilderness with Silva, Yellow Woman experiences an awakening that is spiritual, sensual, and sexual. As she is thinking about her family and the stories that will be told about her disappearance, she thinks, "[T]hey will go on like before, except that there will be a story about the day I disappeared while I was walking along the river. Silva had come for me; he said he had. I did not decide to go. I just went" (38). Yet there are clear signs of choice in the narrative that Yellow Woman tells. As the story opens, Silva is sleeping. The narrator mounts her horse to ride away and then "remember[s] him asleep in the red blanket beside the river," dismounts, returns to him, and wakes him. Later she tells us, "He touched my neck and I moved close to him to feel his breathing and to hear his heart" (33). It is after they travel to Silva's house that the story takes a potentially violent turn. Silva pins her down, and she remembers, "I was afraid because I understood that his strength could hurt me. I lay underneath him and I knew that he could destroy me." But she immediately gives us insight into her desire: "But later, while he slept beside me, I touched his face and I had a feeling—the kind of feeling for him that overcame me that morning along the river. I kissed him on the forehead and he reached out for me" (37). She wakes the next morning to find Silva gone and realizes, "I had my chance to go now. But first I had to eat because I knew it would be a long walk home" (38). In a narrative of languor somehow reminiscent of the world of the lotus eaters, she eats apricots, sits in the sun and "drows[es] with apricots in [her] mouth," and finally thinks of her family as she "wander[s] along the trail through the pine trees" (38, 39).

"It was noon when I got back," she remembers. "When I saw the stone house I remembered that I had meant to go home. But that didn't seem important any more, maybe because there were little blue flowers growing in

the meadow behind the stone house and the gray squirrels were playing in the pines next to the house" (39). Like Little Red left to her own devices and tempted from the path by the beauty of the flowers, Yellow Woman chooses to follow the pleasure principle and remain with Silva in the wilderness rather than returning to home, family, and obligation. Finally, after fleeing from the white rancher, she returns again to the "place on the river bank where he had been sitting the first time [she] saw him." She tells us that she "felt sad at leaving him." "I wanted to go back to him," she says, "but the mountains were too far away now. And I told myself, because I believe it, he will come back sometime and be waiting again by the river" (43). Repeatedly Yellow Woman makes choices that are motivated by pleasure.

If this ambiguity, then, finally seems to resolve into a narrative of choice and desire, the strange, dreamlike setting of the story only serves to reinforce such an understanding of Yellow Woman's agency. Paula Gunn Allen reminds us that the Yellow Woman stories are "always female-centered, always told from Yellow Woman's point of view" (qtd. in Graulich 11). Silko's story is no exception. Unlike Lawrence's narrative, which purports to be a woman's story, but which is focalized through a limited omniscient third-person narrator who seems markedly male, Silko's Yellow Woman tells her own story and retains some control over her experience. As a storyteller she wields power. She tells her readers one story; she tells her family another: "I decided to tell them that some Navajo had kidnapped me," she says. Clearly her two stories are variants of one another. Indeed, both are variants of traditional Yellow Woman stories. As with little Red variants, the Yellow Woman tradition offers a variety of endings. Melody Graulich summarizes: "Sometimes she is abducted by [the ka'tsina spirit]; sometimes she seeks him out. Sometimes she is killed, by either her abductor or her husband. Often she returns to her tribe with new spiritual offerings, the result of the encounter" (11). Thus Silko, even as she constructs a story that recognizably remains a Yellow Woman tale, has some choice in the story's plot and resolution. With varying resolutions come different "morals" and different uses of the story. Silko chooses the path of most Yellow Women; as Grandpa would say—"She'll come home—they usually do" (38). In so doing, Silko, unlike Lawrence, allows her heroine to explore her own desires without condemning her to death or permanent exile. At the story's end her heroine, newly experienced, chooses to return to the apparent predictability of her home.

Some critics, though, have seen evidence that the narrator herself has control over the course of the narrative. Silko's comment linking adolescent fantasy with the strange dream-like setting of the narrative encourages us to read the story as fantasy. As such, the plot belongs entirely to the narrator. She seems to underscore this when she tells Silva, "I don't have to go. What

they tell in stories was real only then" (34). Graulich argues that "[t]he narrator's comment at the story's end—that because she 'believes' it, Silva will return for her—implies that perhaps she had 'believed' him into being" (18). Such a reading of the story's ambiguity helps to locate Silko's story more completely within Paula Gunn Allen's understanding of the function of Yellow Woman lore. Allen sees these female-centered tales as cultural tools. They allow women to give expression to their sexual desires. Indeed, they validate women's sexuality. The story, she says, does not suggest that "difference is punishable" but instead, "suggests that the behavior of women, at least at certain times or under certain circumstances, must be improper or nonconformist for the greater good of the whole." Silko's narrator, like her precursors, is "a liberating figure" (Graulich 11, 12).

Unlike the stories of Lawrence and Silko, Carter's story is a self-conscious re-visioning of "Little Red Cap." Carter's purposeful retelling seems to bring us to a fitting conclusion to this examination. For, if Silko's narrative provides an avenue for women to explore their own sexuality and to "give up sexual control" as it is prescribed by social norms, Carter does still more; she claims a profound power for women's sexuality. Reminding us of Red Riding Hood's original moral, Carter tells us, "[W]e keep the wolves out by living well" (115). As the story progresses, we see the irony in this statement, for her heroine chooses not to live by society's prescribed morals. The "strong-minded child insists she will go off through the wood" and is more than complicit in being led astray: "she wanted to dawdle on her way to make sure the handsome gentleman would wager" (113, 115). Yet when the werewolf threatens to eat the heroine, Carter tells us that "the girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat" (118). Finally the wielder of sexual power, *she* seduces the werewolf and literally strips him of his power. Carter tells us that to burn the werewolf's clothing is to "condemn him to wolfishness for the rest of his life" (113). Overturning the dynamic of the striptease in most Red Riding Hood tales, our heroine "laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing" (118). Unlike Lawrence's woman, who is sacrificed for her transgressions, or Silko's woman, who, having explored her internal wilderness, is re-inscribed within her culture, Carter's heroine succeeds in blurring the cultural definitions and boundaries between the civilized and the wilderness. In Carter's words, "the forest has come into the kitchen" (116).

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# POETRY

*Patricia Waters*
*Chattanooga State Technical Community College*

**The Dress**

This dress frightens me,
impels men I hardly know
to approach, to say, with a kind of shy,
halting politeness:
I like your dress.

Was it Mohammed who said
silk permits the body a second
nakedness?

Two pieces of silk sewn together falling
slightly off the shoulder: a simple sheath,
sleeveless, Greek, archaic,
some Lapith nymph the centaur steals
from the marriage feast—

water brought up
from the deep dark well, cold,
clear as the first moment light takes it,
how it slakes thirst,
becomes memory of all water.

**Out of These Things**

The housewives of Hartford in their clapboard houses
watch the poet walk to work.
He is composing to the measure of his step,
to leaf mass overhead, its tremblant green, suburban *luxe*,
those shrubberies, children's hiding places and paths,
houses built for safe-keeping,
each room, its light, its heft of air.

In her innermost interior of beige
the housewife fingers the page:
from whom must she steal this moment?
She reads the poet who puts her body in a book,
who draws her breath into the word,
into the fall and tumble of words,
she breaks her voice upon, heart coming after.

**April 7, 2000**

On a cold vertiginous day I kneel
to kiss your grave, wiping away the dead grass,
talking to save myself from falling,
saying I cannot believe it,
I cannot believe you are gone.

You are not gone,
my mother and my father,
you are breathing raw spring
through me as I bend to the earth
where fifty years ago you walked
hand in hand picking out your plot
not believing it, not believing for a moment
it would come to this
my kiss on cold bronze.

*Theodore Haddin*
*University of Alabama at Birmingham*

**It Whispered in the Night**

It whispered in the night
its winds came to pin leaves against trees
then silence filled the air
still later dry leaves rose up
in the patio scuttling like cardboard
they whirled about with muttering voices
a sudden sense I had then in bed of no direction
and everything being blown against and about
steady now the dawn says let winds play
as they will and I am to make of this
still some answer if I can
between these silences and the wind's beginning to roar
Be ready is all I can say go for cover
when the freight train blows its horn

**Alabama, April 1998**

After the storm
wrecks of trees
roofs lifted off
boards nails splintered glass
in cold wind and dismal rain
fingering broken homes
nothing else could fall
yet this morning
april's dogwood
lets go as if in answer
a thousand petals
softly down
like great flakes
of snow

**Taking the Trees**

She was in her kitchen
when it fell, the big pine
struck by lightning spiraling down
that mashed the roof above the dining room
and sent her chandelier crashing to the floor
so next day she got the roofers out
to hack and pillage shingles to make
a roof against all future falls and scares
then two weeks later twelve men came
to take all twelve trees that remained
the eighty- and ninety-year-old pines
whirring and burping through chips and dust
they went, and the cutters threw them back
into the woods to rot by day and get rats
by night this was bad enough he thought
to see his woods behind his house disappear
till this week the burping and ripping began
again across the street a whole hill of big trees
now eaten up by a machine that takes a whole tree
and today they begin on another set uphill
one of the oldest trees here going the same way
the old neighbors are cutting down their trees
fear has caught them all and trees that remember
with their rings don't know why humans say
you have to go, the humans themselves don't know why

**You Have To Have Been**

You have to have been
in a stream wide enough and deep enough
to have known the shoals
where big browns come up for the night
turning and twisting against the current
so as to catch quickly whatever comes down
and you might have cast your royal coachman
or dun fly to lure one away to your line
while sweetfern and pine wafted on air
and the slow winding down of the stream
kept glints of the now disappearing sun

to find here in Springville Alabama
the small clear stream going under a road
in the middle of town pushing its waters
over white stones and deep grass
and sudden flourish watercress
winnowing a way towards a far bend
dark in the greenleaves and whispering home

**She Grew Them From Seeds**

She grew them from seeds
and trained them to grow everywhere
on white trellises so mornings brought
heavenly blue scarlet and red-pink
and hollyhocks beside our house
the neighbors didn't like because
they brought bumble bees and honey bees
that made them bend and wave dangerously
she allowed the big box elder in front
till the house began to be arrayed
with box elder beetles so many the house
seemed red instead of white and Mr. McConnell's
house below surrounded with bigger box elders
sent these red bugs to hit our wall beside
the driveway and something in our house then
perhaps my brother longing after girls
made loud voices and arguments that somehow
were mimicked by the bluejays in the elders
so loud we lost our morning's sleep
and my mother went back to counting seeds

*Peter R. Malik*
*Alcorn State University*

**Florida Lizard**

There is a lizard in my living room in Fort Lauderdale.
I have seen it every night for the last six weeks.
I work a lot and keep the apartment closed up tight.
It is oven hot, good for lizard sleep.

I tried to catch him once.
He was too fast and I gave up.
The size of my finger, he lies stock still on the coffee table,
Staring and daring me to chase him.

I have no wife or children anymore; they left because I drank.
At night, I listen to the Doors and read the *Miami Herald.*
The lizard lies there until the room cools,
Then silently vanishes into the gathering gloom.

**Ely, Nevada**

Smoke's out the chimney
Wash is on the line
It's just another day
In Ely, Nevada.

I drink on Saturday.
I go to church on Sunday.
I fix transmissions
Rest of the week.

My woman wants to know
If I really love her,
We got three kids
And one's on the way.

I really wish I knew
The answer to that question.
Just say "yeah,"
And walk out the door.

Smoke's out the chimney
The wash is on the line
Guess I'll *never* leave
Ely, Nevada.

*Joshua Gordon*
*Hinds Community College*

**Antenna**

Voiceless, I'm stood between the guywires of
immobility. Currents pass through and with
them the echoes and frequencies of your
transmissions. Though eavesdropping, I know
when to boost the low signals, pass along
the higher order language of lovers sent
electronically, on thin air as it were. Nothing
is garbled, a scrambled thunderstorm of static,
though my own messages delay, remain silent.
Next to the iron rust of my girders, the red
beacons blinking along my length are the only
tools left for me to effect your epiphany.
They are constant; they are steady. Illuminating
at night the precise geometry of my waiting.

*Larry D. Griffin*
*Dyersburg State Community College*

**Jane Dreams of Rocks**

Jane dreams of rocks and water,
how one may dissolve the other,
move them from one place to another,
enter a crevice, freeze, crack,
and split, roll and tumble,
smooth and shape, into spheres,
perfect, like falling drops of water.

**That Night in Jane's Arms**

All night long Jane held me in her arms,
so that I was hard in longing against her.
She brushed my cheek with fingernails
and asked, Will this be another of those
I want to love you poems or some other

serenade before you tell me of a mountain,
the aspens shimmering in autumn, as if
hung with gold coins, not the golden
leaves catching the light, and why you
brought me there alone this time of year?

Now I bring you here this time of year
alone, for whom else could I get to go,
and what the light shines for you
depends upon where you cast your glance.
I'm not leaving this or anything to chance.

I want to love some other or you, and poems
acquire their own seduction in being done.
When I press your nails to my cheek, I speak
of that longing in my heart, your body willing,
all that long night you hold me in your arms.

*Paula J. Lambert-Neidigh*
*Holmes Community College*

**Confessional**

> *He would know the sins . . . of others, hearing them murmured into his ears . . . by the lips of women and of girls . . .*
>
> —*Joyce*

Stumbling through the Act of Contrition,
whispering in the dark through tiny
starlight holes just big enough to accept
my naked, trembling sins *Oh my God,*
*I am heartily sorry for having offended you . . .*
I say aloud, and finally, that I gave up my virtue
on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.
I say aloud, and finally, that I felt nothing
then and only loss since. I say aloud that I cry
each and every time and I hear back, finally,
that this is sadness and not shame. At last,
my tears have a name and I need not lick them
back before they fall off my chin and land
on your shoulder, a warning, an omen,
a chastisement that raises your ire and softens
your resolve and leaves me alone while we are
yet together that leaves me alone and so lonely
that pain is all that will stop it and I let you go on.
I say aloud that it hurts and the priest says good
we are getting somewhere now and I say aloud
that there is someone else who loves me. There is
someone with whom it does not hurt and someone
with whom I do not cry and someone who,
if the tears did fall, would lick them clean
before they hit my chin and they would never hit
his shoulder. I say aloud that it does not hurt
and I confess that I am not sorry and I wait
for forgiveness to filter back through—through
the tiny starlight holes, through the priest, through you,
through him, and through me.

*Terry Everett*
*Delta State University*

**Day for Water Birds**

Heavy clouds hang low
over the lake, a gentle
breeze fondles the leaves
and on the water
geese paddle and on the shores
Great Blue and Great White
herons wait for something to rise
or float into view—
the water, the trees, the birds:
early November
under heavy clouds.

**Walking-Writing**

The sun throws up light
from below the horizon
and I pace these halls
while the light changes
in layers of red, silver,
gray interrupted

by layers of clouds
changing from French blue to gray
while I change rhythm

as my heart rouses
and muscles and bones relax
into morning song

moving now in groups
of seventeen syllables
as I walk to write

remembering blue
and green and chardonnay
and Indian Grass

waving between us
and the setting sun changing
from gold to crimson.

*Jeffrey DeLotto*
*Texas Wesleyan University*

**A Great Blue Heron**

Floats down, handkerchief-like
With a hoarse pterodactyl squawk and
Suddenly the skies open up and giant ferns
Are brushed aside by a massive toothed head,
The Cretaceous earth trembling underfoot
At the heavy tread of three-toed creatures;
Under the same sun, a few moments older, at
Scott's Landing Marina, the heron steps high
To clear his toes, as if the finger piers are sticky
Or at least distasteful to his touch; he darts his
Pale-billed head with dashing black plume raked
Out behind like a musketeer, to one side, and
Then another, until, frozen-eyed, down drives
The poniard head atop a long and lithe arm-like
Neck, and the coil springs back with a silvery
Shad pinioned and flapping on the pier.

Shift and twist, turn and bite bite bite, lining up
The fish's head and black hole of throat until
Down the wriggling body slides, the feathered
Tube swelling like an egg-swallowing snake.

And blessed as a bishop, I hold my breath
Confronted with such procession.

**English Sparrows**

The flock of a dozen sparrows
Pecked about the grit and fallen leaves,
And suddenly frighted, perhaps by
Some imagined cat, flung themselves
Up yard as a single body into
The branches of a horse chestnut,
Like a mad fisherman instantly
Throwing upward a spreading
Casting net, the surface of
Crisp leaves settling.

*Jo Ann Nye*
*Greenville, MS*

**Doyenne**

Keep those cards and letters coming because
she saves them.
Birthday, special occasion,
Letters of affection or appreciation
compliments on paper
sentiment in script
stacked in bottom drawers
to be drawn upon in the down times
when the phone doesn't ring
and there's no mail in the box.

**Father**

A man in a white shirt
gazes at a baby in his arms.
The faded photo does not disguise
the awe and adoration in his eyes.
Love, enough for a lifetime,
binding him to fidelity, labor, sacrifice—
willingly accepted—
Joy, so unexpected,
did not bear questioning.

*Maura Gage*
*Louisiana State University, Eunice*

**Riding**

So lost in fog we ride
by Braille, the horse familiar
with its trails and footing; wet hair
droops over my shoulders as we go,
chills crossing a spine like snow drifting
over an early landscape.
There is no hurry; suspend worry and fear
here in this unusual day of clouds.
Bones and tendons creak like grandmother's

front door that always opens
to smiles and warm soup,
pumpkin bread, kind words.
I dream of her fireplace all the while
we are in the woods; as my horse
keeps walking an easy pace
the frozen meadows that normally unfold
are hidden in so much dampness,
yet horse and rider know they are there.

Nothing threatens our travel,
no memories break this easy spell;
we know dry warmth awaits us both,
cold noses and ears,
my fingers almost frozen to the reins,
but none of the world's blood wars
come close to us in our American field
of beauty, beauty hidden by clouds,

beauty saved for sunnier days,
preserved for summer sunlight dreams
when we will ride together in lush greenery;
the ground rolls out and out as we go,
waterfalls frozen down to a trickle we can hear,
wet hair and mane curling,
a bright promise of clarity in the distance;
no hurry, easy riding, we can wait
to see flowers come up.

*Sandra H. Bounds*
*East Mississippi Community College, Golden Triangle Campus*

**When Sadness Whispers**

There is a sadness in the sweetest thing.
Beyond the sun's red glow a misty rain,
The bite of Winter in the breeze of Spring,
And in our soul's deep joy, a twinge of pain.
The nipping frost dulls Autumn's richest gold
And sears and subdues Summer's lavish green.
The whole world lapses into dormant cold,
The dark season before rebirth is seen.
Even the strongest heart suffers some fears,
Its calm abraded by worry's foment.
Our broadest smiles burdened by unshed tears
As sorrow labors to gain its moment.
Edenic perfection succumbs to grief,
So we must wait for God's gracious relief.

*Jeanne S. Kelly*
*Holmes Community College at Ridgeland*

**Flaming Star**

The day he died was a hot one.
I heard the news as I had listened
to his music—on the car radio.
Spinning back in time I relived my youth's summer days:
a California beach, transistor radio squawking
"It's Now or Never"; drugstore magazine rack
in Tennessee, new idol's picture on a cover;
Colorado Rockies, radio stations' give-away games
for tickets to *Love Me Tender*;
rural Mississippi, shelling butter beans
as stereo boomed "Teddy Bear."

I thought he must be a god because he was everywhere.
With magnetic force he sang to a nation of teens
expressing simmering, sultry feelings,
shaking his body and gripping our souls.
Labeled *forbidden* by preachers,
he was the serpent in Eden—oh, so enticing.
His music made us dance.
His movies made us laugh, swoon, and cry.
His long sideburns set masculine style,
one he sacrificed for his country.

I didn't know my youth had ended until he died.
As radio stations memorialized him,
song after song brought back parts of me
long buried by life's mundane responsibilities.
That afternoon my feet danced to his rhythms
while I cried for him and for lost dreams.
Though his body was mortal, legend lives on,
the king's faults forgiven, forgotten.
New generations go to Graceland.
Television documentaries preserve
what preachers condemned.

Instead of being the serpent,
he was Adam driven from Eden by spotlights,
finding isolation in adulation.

The day he died was a hot one
seared in memory with repetition of his music,
his star flaming brightly again.

# FICTION

# OF BEING CLOSELY TIED TO ANOTHER, BY AFFECTION OR BY FAITH

*Paula J. Lambert-Neidigh*
*Holmes Community College*

New

Suzannah Nicholson, later known as Suki, had her first slow dance with a boy when she was twelve years old and in the seventh grade. Her partner was Billy Whimm, it was the second-to-the-last dance of the evening, and the song was "I Honestly Love You" by Olivia Newton-John. Suzannah put her hands on Billy's shoulders, and Billy put his hands on Suzannah's waist. They kept a full arm's length of space between them and rocked stiffly from side to side at the same time that they spun themselves in slow, uneven circles. That was at the Christmas dance. Later that year, when she was twelve-and-three-quarters, Suzannah slow-danced three more times, none of them with Billy Whimm but each of them successively closing up the space between her and her partner so that, by the end of the evening, her arms were wrapped around Ricky Clemens' neck and she knew at last what it was to press her body close against a boy.

By eighth grade, her bra size had swelled from 32A to 32B and she received her first kiss before the Christmas dance had even been planned; it happened in the end zone of the Pop Warner football field, right after the Rams had beat the Chargers. Chad Palmer's nose was cold and his lips were chapped. By the night of the spring dance, Chad's lips had healed and she knew the taste of his tongue. It was her freshman year of high school before she discovered the sticky joy of having a tongue in her ear and a hand on her breast at the same time, and her sophomore year before she'd danced for the first time with a drunken senior and discovered what her friends meant when they said Stephen Heeley was a grinder. It was the very first slow dance of the evening and the song was "Stairway to Heaven." The song lasted ten minutes fifty-eight seconds. She danced with Stephen Heeley six more times before the night was over. She didn't care for the reek of alcohol, and she was a little scared by the way his eyes didn't seem to focus right, but she liked what he felt like, sealed against her so tightly that every roll of hips and groin, every sway of chest and breasts, every movement of their two bodies seemed more and more like the meshing, melting of one.

And this, perhaps, was her first real introduction to sex, for though nothing went farther than the darkened dance floor, and not one thing occurred that was not under the unhappy, uncomfortable eye of the faculty chaperone, still she'd been introduced to the sacred mysteries of sweat and

stir, the dance of life. It would be much later still, two years into college, before she'd make it all the way into intercourse, and that would follow its own slow route of shy fingers and slips of tongues and the tender, electric touch that sets alight each downy hair upon smooth and silken skin.

Sex, for Suki, was always new. There was something that went beyond the personal and even beyond the intimate—beyond either one of the two people involved and beyond the couple together. There was, it seemed to her, always a third entity. Sex, after all, was an act of creation and by this she did not mean procreation. It was rather the conception of a new spirit, a living soul, that existed only in the combined and aware presence of both the self and the beyond-self. Sex, for Suki, was holy.

## Old

Fred Davide grew up in the shadow of a rollercoaster. It was a wooden rollercoaster, painted white, antique now and very rare, sought after by the most avid amusement park historians and cult coaster fans. Once, the old wood rollercoaster had shown up on a PBS documentary and, as the camera had pulled back for a long shot, Fred saw his tiny house beneath it, just the other side of the small picnic ground and over a chain link fence. The house was clapboard and brick, the clapboard painted blue, and on the television screen was just exactly half the size of his smallest fingernail.

Fred remembered locking his fingers into the cool silver diamonds of the fence and watching the swell and shake of the whitewashed scaffold as the train of cars climbed the first hill with a slow-pendulum clack . . . clack . . . clack . . . clack, a ticking metronome of rising energy that let loose in the passengers' loud aaahhEEEEEEEEEEE as they crested the top and began to fall. From there was the predictable clackita-lacklacklack of the horizontal curve and after that, a smaller hill and then a tighter curve. The structure groaned and shuddered through the whole of the three-minute ride, two hundred and forty-three rides per sunny day, every day from April first to the close of Labor Day weekend.

Fred was tucked into bed each summer night beside a screened window propped open with a piece of wood. The screen was torn and let insects in along with stubborn breezes heavy with the smell of fried dough and cotton candy. He fell asleep, always, to the bite of mosquitoes and the sounds of carousel music and shrill screams, and he had a recurring dream of the rollercoaster cars let loose from the tracks and sailing into the black-night sky.

As he matured, he interpreted the combination of the calliope and screams as a terror involved with the loss of his physical grounding to the earth, and he ventured into his adult years under the mistaken belief that flight

was connected to fall.

It was not until later in life that Fred began to record his dreams, following a metaphorical overdose of talk therapy and tricyclic drugs, both of which had started when he tried to nurse his way through art school tied to the notion that the release of his soul meant the loss of it. He never guessed that the false interpretation of the dreams he was so careful of collecting, seeing them as literal images rather than symbols, might be the cause of his depression and the reason his art had no life of its own.

## Familiar

Suki met Fred at an art opening. She owned a gallery, or was rather partners in a gallery, that showcased work by regional artists. They were introducing a new artist, one they felt they could fairly say they'd discovered, who'd never been formally trained and whose innocence, despite her middle age, was evident in the materials she used, unfinished wood and brown paper, tempera and acrylic and homemade dyes, and found objects like buttons and beads and bits of gauze.

Fred stepped into the showroom wearing his leathers, worn heavy boots and studded pants and a many-zippered jacket he removed when he came in, revealing a plain but presentable black T-shirt. Suki, immediately, thought he was fabulous.

She approached him in welcome, offering to take his coat and his helmet, and was pleasantly surprised by his shy intimacy. He leaned close and lowered his voice, apologizing for the way he was dressed, explaining that he was on his way to a rally but felt compelled to see the show first, hoped his appearance would not offend but there wouldn't be time to change. He ran his fingers through the front of his hair as he spoke—it was thick and black and curly—and his hand served as a sort of mask, shielding his face from the others in the room but not from her so that Suki felt herself locked into a private space. She assured him he needn't apologize, her own voice quietly intimate, and in the movement of transferring his belongings from his arms to hers, something in her stomach tightened. There was fragrance in the movement, a smell both enticing and familiar, something related to the leather but separate from it, heavier and more human. It was the smell of still, hot water, she decided, a drawn bath, partly the scent of soap and shampoo but more strongly that of the sweat that rises in response to the steam, not offensive, but personal, sweetly and intensely personal.

"Come in," she said. "I'll show you around."

She explained the organization of the exhibit and offered to introduce him to the artist, though he held up his hand and said thank you, no, or at least not yet, he'd like to view the work first. She took that as a clue that he'd like

to view it alone and excused herself to tend to the other guests and to the artist, who though flushed with excitement was also shy and inept in the art of conversation. Suki managed, in working her way through the gallery, to position herself at every turn so that Fred was within her view, and easily caught his eye when he looked up from a painting and glanced anxiously around the room.

"What is it?" she said when she reached him.

"It's this," he said. "I want to buy it."

He was excited about the piece, she could see it in the shine of his face. She recognized the look, had seen it in patrons before, and knew how to draw it out by standing alongside him and murmuring, "It's great, isn't it?" And it was—a whimsical piece, wood and tempera and found objects, painted matchsticks glued to the surface and forming the framework of a wooden rollercoaster. It stood out from the surface of the board not only by its three-dimensionality but also by the effect of the bright white sticks on a blue-black sky. The rest of the painting was filled with color, pinks and reds and yellows and blues making up the booths and rides and flashing lights of an amusement park, one big park sign prominent, a smiling black whale spouting blue water and the words that formed the title of the piece, "Have a Whale of a Time."

Fred pointed to the small silver cars that crested the top of the coaster, delicate pieces of tin foil, and exclaimed over the minuscule dots of paint that formed the occupants, circles for heads and tiny triangle arms, raised up high. His bare arm brushed against her as he pointed and explained, and when she nodded in agreement, he stepped closer and lowered his voice again, enclosing them both in that private space and the lingering, familiar smell.

"It's like you can hear them screaming," he said.

Suki nodded. "Yes," she said, and then, "Yes," again. She thought that she knew what he meant.

## Funny

The next time Suki saw him, Fred was wearing relaxed-fit Levi's and Timberlands, and an untucked, dark blue Chamois-cloth shirt. The look was yuppie-grunge and gave no hint of the biker get-up he'd apologized for at the gallery. It was their first date and they'd agreed to meet at a coffee bar, one of the less trendy places at the center of town.

Suki got there first and was sipping cappuccino when he arrived. He ordered himself a hot chocolate, and when the waitress asked him amaretto, butter rum, peppermint or raspberry, he'd asked in return, "Can you make it just plain?" Suki found the order endearing and teased him about it, sending them straight from the awkward, first-date interview to a friendly, comfortable banter that led more naturally later to the serious questions of aspirations and

inspirations, background baggage and present-day plans, musings on the necessity of relationships, the nature of art, and the driving, human need to ascertain what was generally referred to as the meaning of life.

It was funny, she thought, the way they seemed to have so much in common, and yet she knew she'd been fooled by this notion before, lulled into romance by what she would later find was just an unusually successful initial attempt at finding common ground. She was wise enough to recognize something else between them, a chasm of difference she could not yet point to, but which was still not so vast as to discount their physical attraction, a connection someone else might attribute to "chemistry," but which Suki believed an omen, a promise of spiritual gifts even stronger than sensual reward.

## True

The only woman Fred had ever clicked with, really clicked with, before he met Suki was a chick named Alison during his first year of art school. She dropped out at the beginning of their second year, though, and moved to Colorado. It had nothing to do with her feelings for him, she said, and he understood. By then he'd come to expect life's plummeting lows to follow each rise of happiness, and he saw each successive descent and its accompanying pain as proof of life itself. He welcomed the pain her leaving caused as a dark energy he could channel into his work.

Alison had understood about his dreams. She had kept a record of her own dreams since the fourth grade and explained them as the guiding force of her work, kinetic sculpture designed for outdoors and powered by the heat of the sun. Her art was the interpretation of her visions, she said, and that was almost what Fred believed. Almost.

He believed his art to be the embodiment of his visions, and that was something different. For thirty-four years he'd been trying to paint the recurring image of those rollercoaster cars leaving the tracks for the black-night sky, working at first from an outsider's point-of-view, somebody watching it happen, and then finally, more correctly, from the eyes of a person sitting in the lead car and feeling it happen. His most recent canvas, smaller than some of the others had been, this one eight by eight feet, was a swirling tempest of iridescent black, its sheen carefully developed through the layering of deep violets and ultramarine blues. It was a *living* black he was going for, he said when he showed it to Suki, a *living* black, and she said, "Yes, but you're doing it backward."

He was trying to embody an image, she explained, by lending it life. What made more sense to her, what seemed the truer calling of art, was trying to embody life by lending it an image.

After that, he started seeing red. Not figuratively, but literally, streaks of red, swaths of it, but he didn't know how to add it to the canvas, was afraid to add it, even locked the doors of his studio so he couldn't add it after Suki suggested he simply live with it a while and see what else it might connect to.

He found out it connected to sex. Fred and Suki talked about sex the same way they talked about art, as though it were something tangible. They theorized about the concept of creation, Suki claiming that the birth of new energy involved three things, not just two; it was the consummation of body, mind, and spirit, a trinity. Fred argued that if that were true his painting would be finished, that he believed those three forces were already present in his work, and she asked if it were really spirit involved and not just passion.

Passion, she said, is something with a history. It has a past, and it leads you into the future. You can point to the things that build passion, trace its development through people and places and personal experience. Passion was beautiful, she said, but it wasn't what was necessary, it wasn't spirit. Spirit held a separateness and spontaneity that could not be so simply defined.

The conversation troubled him and Suki offered comfort, holding him at first, tenderly, but then channeling a slow electricity that aroused his senses and hers so that they were making love before they were even aware of it, sensible only to touch and taste and rising heat, their movements faster, stronger, more intense, turning into something that transcended them both until just at the moment of climax he had another vision: a flock of birds such as he'd never seen, a thousand, a million tiny birds, red-winged black birds, rising off the field in a dark mist, flapping their wings in unison and angling toward the sun so that the whole cloud flashed, black, now red, black, now red again. The sky was thick with flight and still they came, in torpid layers that pulsed above the surface of the earth and swelled upon a cry he'd never heard, his own, and Suki's, converged and breathing life.

Suddenly he knew that what he'd been trying to paint, the cars leaving the tracks and leading inevitably to a fall, was wrong. There was freedom connected to flight, to sacrificing one's ties to the earth, an ability to soar that did not mean separation from the self, a loss of self, of never finding your way back. Rather, it seemed the truest connection to his own spirit, and he understood now Suki's concept of creation. When he tried to tell her, she nodded and smiled and, just before falling asleep, said that she understood. He believed her, and kissed her, and left to unlock the studio and finish what he'd been working on for the whole of his life.

## Also True

Suki approved of the painting. Fred had finished it by adding a center of light in the upper right quadrant, a blue-white light that answered to the

depth he'd achieved in the layering by granting the illusion of having to reach into and through the darkness in order to attain it, in order to attain the light. Six months later, her gallery did a showing of Fred's work, the breakthrough painting labeled as "sold" and later installed in her grand front foyer. By then, Fred had moved in, their relationship working in a way that seemed true to them both. The chemistry between them seemed always to produce that third entity, the one that she'd always believed in. It came through clearly, now, in Fred's work, and for Suki, in the conviction that her gallery and now, at last, her home, had taken on all the character and demeanor of a church, a cathedral of creation that was indeed holy, that was indeed all that she'd known it could be.

## GREY MOSS

*Jo LeCoeur and Robert Galloway*
*University of the Incarnate Word*

This leave was a mistake. The thought surfaces in Robert's brain with the shock of a skull unburied in the garden.

"What? That Lincoln come too close for you?" Robert's wife had seemed focused on her driving but must have seen him startle. Is she trying to start a fight?—her father drove a Lincoln.

"It's not that," he says. She looks surprised (taking his truth as backing down?) her eyes opening wide. Robert is a tall man who always stands his ground, but when the light gets into Mary's dark eyes, how beautiful she is. Tears had come to his eyes once walking down a street in Saigon, picturing her face, those heartbreak eyes.

She lets it ride. He half-listens to the car radio *whiskey and lies* . . . and thinks how it is not too late—he could tell her to take the next exit. He could get behind the wheel, could pick up his place in the family again. Too much of their time though was evaporating in his insistence, her resistance. Or vice-versa. She kept insisting he get out of the Army. It had to be tough on her alone with a seven-year-old, a three-year-old and now the baby. He can understand her wanting to punish him. He clears his throat to ask her to confirm or deny what he's been carrying, *but my levee's gone dry* . . . adlibbing instead with the radio *so it won't be today that I* . . . He likes the beat, the knowing voice, the words that had a lot more to them than what they said.

It's a long song and getting a lot of play, but it takes his mind off his legs cramped in the used Nova Mary had bought while he was away. She had insisted on driving tonight with the front seat pulled too close for her statuesque frame. Traffic is light on I-10 West out of San Antonio, but her hands square the wheel, intense as an arrow just released from a compound bow.

At seventeen he had fallen in love with her intensity—so bright it made her shine. Now at twenty-five he is no longer fearless, and she has grown more shiningly beautiful with the birth of each child. If this kept up, how could he hope to hold her? He tests the floorboard's strength trying to straighten his legs, then settles back in the cramp. Would he be reading this distance she was keeping between them as guilt if not for those letters? He adjusts the visor against the sinking sun in his eyes. They'd be moving out now, slow steps, single-file, faces camouflaged. What he wouldn't give to be with them.

Mary changes lanes rocking him sideways his shoulder bumping hard

against hers. "Sorry," the word not out good before he regrets it. She was the one who had swerved. She was the one who had knocked him off balance. Why did every act seem so consequential? Where did it come from—this sense that nothing said tonight could ever be unsaid?

"Don't sweat the small stuff," (another crude saying she'd picked up), not even glancing his way. He should have insisted on driving *the chevy out to dinner*. . . . What he should have done was show her the letters he's been carrying. But could not spoil his first night home. Next night then. After the children were fed, bathed, played with, read to, tucked into bed. Or the night after that. Or . . . God what if they were true? It was stupid to have waited until their last night together. No. This was not their last night together.

Tonight. After they got home, children collected from the sitter and squared away. Left where she'd find them. Or dropped in her lap. Or at her feet. He looks over at Mary's slim feet arched as a dancer's in those open-toed shoes so good they ought to be illegal. He leans back against his car door and stretches his legs out toward her, adlibbing softly with the radio *Let me teach you how they dance this slow* . . . the toes of his shoes wanting to touch her ankle . . . *but nothing's how it ought to be*. . . . She does not sing along like she used to. Does not turn to him with that smile that could melt Antarctica.

Losing the words—*moss can't grow on a man of stone*? he busies himself with the knobs—radio losing the station as they get out among the contours of the hill country, rounded slopes in the distance still radiant with the after light of sunset. They'd be walking slowly, single-file, equipment taped to their bodies to deaden the sound of their passing. Robert hopes to be teamed with the same spotter, a dedicated soldier deep into his third tour who has been teaching Robert to see things before they come at you, keeping always in sight of each other as they move through the jungle, sleeping boot strapped to boot like Siamese twins joined at the bootsoles so one wakes without a word if the other moves.

Enough! How had he gotten on that again? Oh yes, dedication, a word learned from his father. Robert's father was a tall man who did not back down. Ramrod straight and handsome. Even as a child, Robert could see how men respected his father walking down the street, had seen the whole room pause and grow silent when his father walked in. Was it at the NCO Club? Couldn't've been.

When he was small and his parents were away, Robert would go into their bedroom and into his father's closet. He would take out the class A uniform hat, stand on their bed and square the hat on his head, tilting it back just enough to see himself in the mirror. He would practice the salute.

God, he wanted to get back. After the Tank Platoon fiasco in his first tour, he had been made part of a hunter-killer team. And he was good at it.

Extra rods in his eyes gave him extraordinary night vision, and his consistent and spontaneous ability to hit distant targets with a rifle had impressed the Cadre at the U.S. Army Armor School at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Robert is startled that he is still in the car with his wife. The radio is off, it is almost dark outside, and they have left the interstate. How could he have missed all that? How long have they been on this steep twisting hill-country road? Why the hell are they going to this expensive restaurant way out in the middle of nowhere? Mary had made the reservations, had to make them far in advance she'd said because the place was that good. For their last night. No, that was not what she said. She had wanted something special for his last night home on leave.

How many of his ancestors had been conceived on last nights home on leave he wondered. His forefathers had fought on both sides in the Civil War, his father flown in raids over Okinawa and Japan as a seventeen-year-old radio gunner, recalled from civilian life to Korea, finished his career in Viet Nam and Thailand as the NCOIC (non-comissioned officer in charge) of the Kurat Bomb Dump where exhausted men fused and loaded bombs during the day and fought VC sappers at night.

If only Mary could see he had to go back because his uncle Vernie had stood on the deck of a disabled PT boat in the Battle of Saipan machine gunning Japanese soldiers as they swam out in Bonzai attacks. Once, sleeping over at Cousin Robbie's, Robert had pictured Uncle Vernie with black hair, body shining electric with adrenaline, veins popping out on his neck when it felt like his screams were coming from under the boys' bed. The desperation in Aunt Gladys' voice trying to comfort him into a nightmare-free sleep had been worse than the screams. How could he get Mary to understand what it all meant? And that another uncle had fought on Guadalcanal and been wounded on the beaches of Tarawa, his uniform stored in Robert's grandmother's attic, and how he, Robert, had ransacked the old trunk, taking insignia and medals that he still had to this day.

He needed the same assignment to be worthy of those men.

Stop it, he tells himself. It was ironic—his whole first tour he had thought of Mary Mary Mary. Had carried on imaginary conversations with her, with little Ann and Michael. Spent hours with their pictures, re-reading her letters, and seemed to be always on the brink with her in dreams edged with her elusive brightness. Even on this second tour when he had to stay focused, he still imagined time at home, the feel and smell of Mary and of this new baby he had not seen until now.

Mary had promised great steaks at the Grey Moss Inn, and Robert had a vague recollection of the name—his parents maybe, reminiscing about San Antonio after a move. The inn is an old rock building with heavy exposed wooden beams. They are led through it and out into the back where Mary had

specified, to sit outside in view of the cliff on the other side of the creek. It is early March, but Christmas lights outline the perimeter of the dining area and festoon the big old cedars and oaks.

Robert holds the chair for Mary. She had perfumed her hair. He catches the scent and touches the back of her neck lightly. It takes him back to when they were young together.

He studies the wine list, orders a bottle of good burgundy. Mary lets her fingertips brush the back of his hand resting on the table. She slides the tips of her long nails slowly down in between his fingers. Robert feels slightly aroused. He remembers that what he had wanted to do tonight was drop the children off with a sitter who would keep them overnight. He and Mary could've been irresponsible until morning light. Could've given their imaginations free rein and been as noisy as they'd liked.

"Get the prime rib," she says. At mention of her father's trademark cut of beef, the air goes grey and mossy. Robert's lust evaporates. They had met when she still lived in her father's house, their senior year. He had liked her full lips, straight nose, and eyes that made his heart skip. She had worn straight skirts and classic sweaters, nothing faddish. He had loved her shine. She had invited him to her birthday party the first week of school even though he was the new guy.

Robert had been acutely conscious at seventeen that his family (parents and one sister) was too small, too nuclear, too rootless. Mary's family was large and well established. A long tradition of banking and ranching had made them the scions of Copperas Cove, the small town that sounded like it should be on the coast instead of deep in the heart of Texas just west of Killeen. Her father drove his black Lincoln over country dirt roads. Traded it in every year. And talk about roots—the Republic of Texas had granted Mary's ancestors the hundred acres that had expanded into what was now their ranch. What the McPhersons didn't own, they did not recognize.

The waiter is back with the wine. Robert goes through the tasting ritual her father had taught him and nods. Neither family had approved of the marriage their freshman year in college. Both their fathers had tried to talk them out of it. Especially hers. Robert and Mary had sat on the McPherson sofa, chocolaty leather so soft it had a fleshy feel. Her father—what a stereotype—had stood over them stabbing the air with the stub of his contraband Cuban cigar, explaining all the logical and monetary reasons why they must wait. Mary had raised her resolute chin the higher. Robert and Mary had sat there beneath the old man's eyes, beneath the eyes of mounted deer heads and javelina while her father's voice crescendoed gradually taking on an almost threatening tone. Mary had met her father's eyes and not flinched. Only when the old man's voice softened, "Mary, what is it you're not telling me?" did her chin quiver. She had pulled away from Robert's arm around her

shoulder, stood and sobbed into her father's chest. Robert had sat wanting to punch the old man for making her cry. Her tears had won. Her father had taken both their hands in his, given them his blessings, and one helluva honeymoon in Hawaii.

"Happy birthday to you." Mary's glass was lifted in a toast, a small box gift wrapped in silver paper lying on the table between them. "Happy birthday my darling." He had not forgotten that today was his twenty-fifth birthday but he thought she had. God he needed her. Never mind the letters. He would take them back to Viet Nam and burn them. If true and he confronted her he might lose her. If they were lies, his doubts looked so ugly he might lose her, the children, little Ann and Michael and baby Sue. He was theirs. He was hers . . . through death and mourning.

They clink glasses and drink. She leans across the table and kisses him, a deep kiss, burgundy flavored and warm. "Now," her face still close, her eyes intent, "will you for God's sake," her voice earnest as if pleading for her life, "get out of the Army. Daddy something, something, Johnson from Cave's Creek, something, something, could fix . . . "

He interrupts her. With no precedent in all his twenty-five years of experience for how a man should go about this business of articulating deep feelings—with it deeply ingrained that a man never explains himself to anyone except under direct command by a superior officer—with a repulsion to offering (especially to a woman) anything that hinted of excuse, Robert begins to speak out of his desperate need for Mary to understand that he is powerless not to be who he is. "Mary, my father is a tall man . . . "

"What has your father's fucking height got to do with anything?" her face darkening and contracting into a new face that has stolen his Mary's shine. " . . . never hear a word I say?" Her words continue "what it's doing to you" in a torrent.

What her eyes are telling him is so loud he cannot hear her mouth. And he knows now. He knows. He knows. He unsnaps her purse lying on the table and dumps the contents. He fishes out car keys, drops them in his pocket, picks up the bottle of wine and, walking slowly and deliberately, carries it inside the expensive restaurant with its heavy dark wood beams.

She strides past him every inch her father's daughter while he is paying for the wine but he does not look at her. Still carrying the bottle, he walks out of the restaurant with the same dignity in his step as in his father's when getting another medal pinned on his chest. He opens the passenger door and holds it, waiting stiffly until his wife is seated. If she says anything as he closes the door for her, he does not hear.

He walks around and gets into the driver's seat. He pushes the seat back, as far back as it will go. He starts the motor and begins singing, making up the words, making up the truth, he does not know.

## O-DO-RI (Dance)

*Yoshiko Kayano*
*Meisei University, Tokyo*

When I first saw Magnolia trees at Ole Miss Campus, they were all covered with thick green leaves. Only a few faded flowers were left. It was the end of August.

In the fall, I saw dead flowers bear fruit. The fruit borne out of the white flowers was unbelievably red. Sometimes I saw the fruit fallen and stamped onto the ground, which often startled me. Bloody stains were there.

During the winter, when most of the trees were naked after dropping all the beautiful autumnal leaves off, Magnolia trees were covered with the same vigorous green leaves.

When the spring came, among those thick leaves, I saw needle-shaped buds coming out. They grew longer, then became thicker and round. People living here in the South seemed to be used to seeing these seasonal changes of their state tree. Every change impressed me. Magnolia was mysteriously sensual, and androgynous.

I looked forward to seeing them full in bloom, but I kept missing Mississippi summers. I spent long, hot summers back home, not here. I usually left early June and returned here late August.

* * * * *

I had a terrible flight one summer.

The music was interrupted and the announcement came: "We have discovered a leak in one of the engines and it is dangerous to continue flying to Narita. We have decided to go back to Anchorage to get that engine checked out and . . ."

I was surprised, but felt somewhat relieved. It's strange, though. More than seven hours had passed since we left San Francisco. We could get to Narita in a couple of hours and it should be much easier than to return to Anchorage. I drew a world map in my mind. The music came back. I closed my eyes, feeling a little uneasy.

Then, I thought about the car accident which my friend and I witnessed that morning on our way to Memphis airport. We only saw a wrecked car for a moment when we passed, but that scene suddenly brought back another scene in the past.

When my little cousin was killed in a car accident, I was on a short trip with my college friends. I got home in a good humor and faced the totally unexpected death of my sweet little cousin. I couldn't believe it until I saw her lying in the small coffin with her head in bandages, "like Apollinaire."

This was the phrase which my favorite writer repeatedly used in one of his novels. I felt tears welling up in my eyes and soon found myself crying like the protagonist in that novel when he saw his own baby boy with his head in bandages.

Through the tears, I realized that my little cousin in the coffin was dressed in a summer kimono patterned with small colorful butterflies. It looked familiar. It was my own kimono. My mother had remade it for her the year before. In my childhood, I had worn that kimono every summer at the Bon festival. It is said that our ancestors' spirits will come back to visit us during the Bon period. People all dressed in summer kimonos dance in a circle. Men and women, elders and children, all together, dance in darkness. The ancient sound of drums and flutes keeps reverberating far into the night.

The music was interrupted again. "We are landing at Anchorage Airport in a few minutes . . ."

In a few minutes!? We heard the first announcement just one hour ago and here we are in Anchorage already? I see. They had changed the course long before they announced. Passengers in an airplane are just like birds in a cage. We don't know anything really and just believe whatever is told to us. But in a sense, it is easy to be a bird in a cage. You don't need to think. You don't need to make any decision.

I looked around. I seemed to be the only one who looked calm during our emergency landing. I like airplanes. I felt even exhilarated at the idea that I could have an extra moment of taking-off and another nine-hour flight before starting my annual summer stay back home. One thing I really like about sitting in the airplane is that I don't need to do anything, or think of anything, while I am there. It is a precious time. It is not bad to be a bird in a cage sometimes.

Through the big glass window, I looked at the airplane which had brought us there. I could see the trace of leakage in the middle part of the body. It looked like an injured bird. The bird was bleeding.

I resumed my reminiscence.

When my grandfather died at the age of ninety, I was in America. My grandmother had died long ago and he had lived with my uncle's family since then. When I was a college student, I tutored my uncle's children and visited their place every week. I used to go upstairs, where my grandfather's room was, to say hi before or after the tutoring, and he often gave me some money out of his pension. On such occasions he always said, "You are a hard-working student, so . . . ," as if he were trying to justify what he was doing.

When I decided to come to America, he was the most enthusiastic supporter of my decision, and it was quite an interesting contrast to the opposition my parents, especially my mother, made. He himself traveled in America at the age of seventy. He was the first of my relatives that had ever

traveled abroad. I am not sure if I was the second, but if not, there were many between us. He loved traveling.

When he died, he left a pile of worn notebooks in which he had k his travel journal. I couldn't go home for his funeral. Later, when I was ba home, my mother showed me one of his notebooks with a lot of old pictur packed with his small, neat handwriting. Whom did he want to show th to? Did he spend so much time keeping a journal just for himself? For the fi time, I felt very close to him. We had something very important in commo though we had never talked about it.

Then came another announcement.

"It takes time to repair and we cannot fly tonight. All the passenge will be provided with free meal tickets and . . ."

Again, I seemed to be the only one who was enjoying this sequenc I waited in the line and made a collect call. Mother answered the phone. Sh already knew that my airplane had returned to Anchorage. Father had calle the airport before leaving home to pick me up and got the information.

"He cannot come to pick you up tomorrow. It's Monday."

She sounded affectionate and concerned. I could not believe that sh was the same person that I had talked to on the phone the day before. She hac sounded very disappointed and mad at me then, because I told her that I hac changed my original plan to go home after graduation and had found a job in the States.

"Don't worry. I'll take a taxi."

I walked into the restaurant. There were families, couples, friends, and individuals like me, having dinner. They looked excited but at the same time annoyed. Looking at a family near my table, I started to think of my own family. It has been a long time since the last time we made a family trip. When I was small, we used to make a big family trip every summer. Now my sister is busy taking care of her two little children.

I feel guilty if I say that I am a black sheep of my family, because I know they love me in their own way. I often feel, however, that I am a headache to them, not because I do something wrong, but just because I am not taking the course which they want me to take.

I started to reminisce about another death.

When my uncle, who had been sick for a long time, died of a heart attack, I was still in America and couldn't go home for his funeral. He was the closest uncle to me. He didn't have a daughter and treated me as if I were his own daughter. Then, he became quite busy in his small business, and I also became busy in my own life. I seldom saw him in the several years before he died. I couldn't feel his death as what actually happened at all. It seemed to me that he was still sitting at the counter of his small shop.

Even when I visited his grave with my mother and aunt, he was

tally alive in my mind. I poured water over his tombstone and placed two nches of flowers in the small cylindrical vases in the front. Still I felt as if were doing these things for someone else. I realized that he would never die my mind.

The first-class and business-class passengers were provided with otel accommodations, but we, the economy-class passengers, were not. ince it was a holiday season, they could not find enough vacancies at the otels in Anchorage. So, we had to sleep on folding beds in the lobby of the irport. What an experience!

I couldn't sleep that night and kept thinking.

On one late summer day when I was packing at home, my mother suddenly said as if she were speaking to herself: "You know, if, someday, something happened and killed you in America, since we've been always so far away from each other, I would not be able to believe it and would keep thinking that you are still alive there, and will come back next summer with a heavy suitcase. I might not feel sad at all. I might not even cry."

No way! She, the worrywart and the most emotional in my family, would be crying frantically at the news of my death. I could easily imagine that scene. However, I also thought that what she had said might be true. It is not easy to feel the death of someone who has always been away.

Next morning, we were informed that they could not repair the airplane after all and that we should take a different one. It meant that the leakage was quite serious. If our plane had not changed course in time, I might have been dead in the middle of the Pacific Ocean by this time. I appreciated the pilot's decision.

Finally our plane took off. I was exhausted.

After that summer, I started to teach at a small community college. On one late autumn day, we discussed various deaths in literature. I was still thinking about death when I came out of the building into the bright autumn sunshine.

When I stepped out of the building, indulging in reminiscence and miscellaneous thoughts, the trees on the campus came into view, red and golden, brilliantly shining. I held my breath for a moment.

The colors of the trees were especially brilliant that year because it had cooled down rapidly after an unusually long Indian summer. The cruel rain storm might soon turn this beautiful sight into a desolate wintry scene. I used to think that the Deep South would never have a cold winter, but now I know we do. I stood there for a while. I wanted to print this autumn scene in my memory.

While walking to my office, I thought about some people who had once been very close to me. For some reason or other, their lives had been separated from mine, and I didn't even know whether they were alive or dead.

They had no impact on my life anymore. Soon they would totally disappear from my mind. Or if, once in a while, they came back to my memory, they would not bring with them any sense of reality to me. If so, they were already dead for me, weren't they?

Then I thought about those who lived away from me but kept influencing me in various ways. After they died, they would stay alive, perhaps even more vividly alive, in my mind.

What is the difference between these two deaths? There must be something in our perception that we cannot explain just in terms of physical life and death. There can be a death in the relationship between two living people, while there can be an everlasting life in one's relationship with the dead.

I kept indulging myself in such thoughts.

It was the most beautiful autumn that I ever had in Mississippi.

* * * * *

My father died this spring. When I attended the funeral, my mother looked so small that I decided to return to Japan for good. I'll go home after spending my first summer here, which is going to be my last.

Summer came. I saw egg-shaped Magnolia buds becoming rounder and rounder. I imagined for fun that they would soon crack open like eggshells and baby birds of various colors might be there crying for food.

Finally I saw the Magnolia trees full in bloom, and Mississippi's seasonal cycle was completed in my mind. Hot, humid air, peculiar to the Deep South at this time of the year, was filled with strong fragrance flowing from countless huge flowers here and there. I felt dizzy for a moment.

Wrapped in the strong fragrance, I felt the same sensation that I had felt coming up from the depth of my body one summer, in an old rural town in Central Japan, dancing their traditional Bon dance in the crowd. It was started there more than four hundred years ago by poor farmers as solace and protest against their cruel lord, like the blues, which black slaves had started to sing similarly, as comfort and protest.

That summer, we danced crazily in the rain all night. Strong smell of rain and sweat filled the air. Men and women, elders and children, townspeople and foreigners, all together, danced till the dawn.

I kept standing there, under a big Magnolia tree.

In my imagination, I was already back home, remembering this scene, this particular moment, this very sensation, so vividly.

*POMPA* is set in Times New Roman.

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