

*POMPA: Publications of the Mississippi  
Philological Association*

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**Volume 33  
2016**

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# Editor's Note

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*By Lorie Watkins*

It is with a glad heart that I write the editor's note for this, the thirty-third volume of the *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association (POMPA)*. The Mississippi University for Women hosted the 2016 conference from February 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>. Conference organizer Kim Whitehead designed an outstanding program which included a catered banquet in the student union and an enlightening plenary session in which Dr. Robert Luckett, Director of the Margaret Walker Center for the Study of the African American Experience at Jackson State University, discussed Walker's role in the Black Arts Movement. Support from the English Department and the University helped to create a conference full of surprises, not the least of which (for me at least) included an impromptu recitation of his own poetry by Sterling Plumpp on the critical panel devoted to examining his work. Other highlights included a glimpse of the dorm room Eudora Welty occupied while she was a student at the "W" and a tour of the Tennessee Williams Home and Welcome Center in Columbus.

As we move forward and embrace our identity as an online journal, I've begun the process of making all issues available online. I was missing three copies, but located issues at Ole Miss this past summer; fittingly, the very first issue in the archives at Ole Miss is signed by none other than Ben Fisher himself, former editor of POMPA and long-time supporter of MPA. I have copies of all issues now, and I hope to have them online by the 2018 conference. To them I add this volume, in which you will find several critical essays, pedagogical essays, and creative works presented at the 2016 conference that offer thought-provoking discussions on a broad range of subjects.

In 2017, we look forward to returning to the Mississippi Delta as Mississippi Valley State University's Dr. John Zheng hosts his third conference. I look forward to seeing many old friends there.

Lorie Watkins

# 2016 Program

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## Mississippi Philological Association Annual Conference



**February 12-13, 2016**  
**Mississippi University for Women**  
**Columbus, Mississippi**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12**

*Registration (Painter 114)*

*12:00-1:00 Executive Council Meeting (Painter 107)*

*1:00-2:15*

**Panel A (Painter 107): *Sterling Plump: A Blues Poet Who Represents Cultural Heritage***

Moderator: **John Zheng, Mississippi Valley State University**

- ✦ **Tiffany Austin, Mississippi Valley State University:** *Axing the Blues: Sterling Plump's Sonic Cosmology*

- ✦ **Jo Baldwin, Mississippi Valley State University:** Sterling Plumpp and Blues People
- ✦ **John Zheng, Mississippi Valley State University:** Sterling Plumpp: The Dichotomy of His Blues Poetry

**Panel B (Painter 113):** *Broken Affect: Space, Power, Art*

Moderator: **Michelle Wait, Mississippi State University**

- ✦ **Alaina Griffin, Mississippi State University:** The Crumbling Architecture of Biopolitics: That Which Remains
- ✦ **Kevin Kovacevich, Mississippi State University:** Surveillance and Power: The Modern Panopticon in *Broken Monsters*
- ✦ **Greg Marcus, Mississippi State University:** Monsters of Affect
- ✦ **Sam Kealhofer, Mississippi State University:** District 9: Stigmatization and Social Orchestration in the Urban Landscape

**Panel C (Carrier Chapel):** *Creative Writing: Poetry and Short Fiction*

Moderator:

- ✦ **Tamara Rutledge, Mississippi University for Women**
- ✦ **Jeanna Graves, Mississippi University for Women**
- ✦ **Katrina Byrd, Mississippi University for Women**
- ✦ **Deb Payne Purnell, Mississippi Valley State University**

*Friday, February 12*

**2:30-3:45**

**Panel A (Painter 107):** *Mississippi Writers and Literary Legacy*

Moderator: **Lorie Watkins, William Carey University**

- ✦ **Monica Flippin Wynn, Jackson State University:** Mentorship within Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Margaret Walker Alexander: An Engaged Illustration
- ✦ **Jia Junying, Zhejiang Normal University (China) / Mississippi Valley State University:** The Lost World of Mississippi in the Great Depression—Visual Analysis of Eudora Welty's *One Time, One Place*
- ✦ **Helen Crump, Jackson State University:** Navigating the Roots/Routes of the Southern in Jesmyn Ward's *Men We Reaped*
- ✦ **Lorie Watkins, William Carey University:** Everybody Knows about Mississippi?

**Panel B (Painter 113):** *Students as Writers and Readers: Creative Pedagogies*

Moderator: **Bridget Pieschel, Mississippi University for Women**

- ✦ **Preselfannie W. McDaniels, Jackson State University:** Teaching Cross-Cultural Narratives

- ✦ **Breana Miller, University of Memphis:** “Our Apartheid” and Consequent Reactions: Composition, Containment, and Controversy
- ✦ **Shanell Bailey, Mississippi Valley State University:** Enhancing the Academic Culture: Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom with the Use of Student Facilitators

**Panel C (Carrier Chapel):** *Creative Writing: Short Fiction*

Moderator:

- ✦ **Jeffrey Condran, University of Arkansas at Little Rock**
- ✦ **Rusty Rogers, University of Central Arkansas**
- ✦ **T.K. Lee, Mississippi University for Women**
- ✦ **Lawrence Sledge, Jackson State University**

*Friday, February 12*

**4:00-5:15**

**Panel A (Painter 107):** *Latin American Poetry, Fiction, and Folk Ballads*

Moderator:

- ✦ **Ruben Gonzalez, Alabama State University:** The World through the Eyes of the Antipoet Nicanor Parra and How the Antipoetic Tradition Lives on in Modern Poets
- ✦ **Craig Albin, Missouri State University:** Boats, Bats, and Immigrant Dreams: Tim Wendel’s *Habana Libre*
- ✦ **Delilah Dotremon, Alabama State University:** An Analysis of the Lyrics of Mexican Folk Ballads

**Panel B (Painter 113):** *Human Animals in Contemporary World Literature*

Moderator: **Andrea Spain, Mississippi State University**

- ✦ **Annie Trinh, Mississippi State University:** Mirroring of Gazes in Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People*
- ✦ **Allison Wiltshire, Mississippi State University:** Perceptions of Native and Foreign Species in Gordimer’s *The Conservationist*
- ✦ **Ashleah Wimberly, Mississippi State University:** “I Substitute Images for Events”: Representations of Corrective Training in Bhanu Kapil’s *Humanimal*

**Panel C (Carrier Chapel):** *Creative Writing: Poetry*

Moderator:

- ✦ **Seprela Ellis, Mississippi Valley State University**
- ✦ **Sterling D. Plumpp, Mississippi Valley State University**
- ✦ **John Zheng, Mississippi Valley State University**

**5:15-6:15: Wine and Hors d’Oeuvres Reception, Presidents Dining Room,**

## Hogarth Dining Center

**6:15-7:15: Banquet, Pope Banquet Room, Hogarth Dining Center**

**7:30: Plenary Session, Kossen Auditorium, Poindexter Hall**

**Dr. Robert Luckett, Director of the Margaret Walker Center for the Study of the African-American Experience at Jackson State University**

**This Is My Century: Margaret Walker and the Black Arts Movement**

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13

**8:00-9:00 Coffee (Painter 114)**

**9:00-10:15**

**Panel A (Painter 107): *Author and Influence in Pop Culture Texts***

Moderator:

- ✦ **Lucita Foster, Grambling State University:** Cinematography of Control: Analysis of Subjective Femininity in *Fifty Shades of Grey*
- ✦ **Melanie R. Anderson, University of Mississippi:** Doctors, Detectives, and Ghostbusters: Occult Detective Fiction's Influence on *Doctor Who*
- ✦ **Elizabeth Varvel, Mississippi University for Women:** Transforming Literature

**Panel B (Painter 113): *History, Place, and the Self in Southern Fiction***

Moderator: **Phillip Gordon, University of Wisconsin-Platteville**

- ✦ **Allen Berry, University of Alabama Huntsville:** "Nobody Wants to be Here and Nobody Wants to Leave": Maslow's Hierarchy at Work in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*
- ✦ **Nancy Barnard, William Carey University:** The Powerful Presence of Absence: Addie Bundren's Desire for "Doing" Fulfilled in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*
- ✦ **Phillip Gordon, University of Wisconsin-Platteville:** "It's Typical South": Parallels between Maycomb in *Go Set a Watchman* and Yoknapatawpha in *Requiem for a Nun*
- ✦ **Allison Chestnut, William Carey University:** Ice, Ice Baby: A Look at Imagery in Moira Crone's *The Ice Garden*

**Panel C (Carrier Chapel): *Creative Writing: Poetry***

Moderator: **James Fowler, University of Central Arkansas**

- ✦ **John J. Han, Missouri Baptist University**
- ✦ **James Fowler, University of Central Arkansas**
- ✦ **Kendall Dunkelberg, Mississippi University for Women**
- ✦ **Thomas Richardson, Mississippi University for Women**



*Saturday, February 13*

**10:30-11:45**

**Panel A (Painter 107):** *Filming Power, Framing Identity*

Moderator: **Andrew Nelson, University of Arkansas at Monticello**

- ✦ **Dr. Mica Gould, Grambling State University:** Framing Madness: Photography in *American Horror Story: Asylum*
- ✦ **Kameron S. Berkley, Grambling State University:** The Angle of Power in *American Horror Story: Coven*
- ✦ **Andrew Nelson, University of Arkansas at Monticello:** *Pulp Fiction* and the Rhetoric of Charity

**Panel B (Painter 113):** *Voice and Power(lessness) in the African-American Experience*

Moderator: **Rico Self, Louisiana State University**

- ✦ **Rico Self, Louisiana State University:** “You’ve got to know your place”: Panoptic Spaces Within the Veil in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*
- ✦ **Antoinette Hayden, Mississippi State University:** The “Useless” Subject: The Black Subject in Agee’s and Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- ✦ **John J. Han, Missouri Baptist University:** Celebratory and Defiant: Sonia Sanchez’s Ethnographic Haiku
- ✦ **Hayley Hampton, Mississippi University for Women:** Uncle Tom: The Good and Faithful Servant

**Panel C (Carrier Chapel):** *Creative Writing: Short Fiction*

Moderator: **Kendall Dunkelberg, Mississippi University for Women**

- ✦ **Todd Bunnell, Mississippi University for Women**
- ✦ **Frank Thurmond, University of Arkansas at Little Rock**
- ✦ **RaShell R. Smith-Spears, Jackson State University**
- ✦ **John Gibbs, Mississippi University for Women**

**11:45-1:30 Lunch** (directions and suggestions provided in registration packet)

*Saturday, February 13*

**1:30-2:45**

**Panel A (Painter 107):** *Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Terror, and Self-Determination*

Moderator:

- ✦ **Autumn Barnard, William Carey University:** Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*: A Celebration of Tragedy
- ✦ **Greg Marcus, Mississippi State University:** Cyclical Violence in Anna Burn’s *No Bones*

- ✦ **Paul Crutcher, University of Arkansas at Little Rock:** *Je suis Charlie: On the Rhetoric of Terror*

**Panel B (Painter 108):** *Horror and the Sublime in Poe, Lovecraft, and Collins*

Moderator: **Nora Corrigan, Mississippi University for Women**

- ✦ **Shelby M. Gresham, William Carey University:** The Indestructible Nature of The Sublime: Era Embodiment in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia"
- ✦ **Alan Brown, University of West Alabama:** *At the Mountains of Madness:* H.P. Lovecraft's Homage to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*
- ✦ **E. Kate Stewart, University of Arkansas at Monticello:** A Bleak Episode: Wilkie Collins and Spontaneous Combustion

**Panel C (Painter 113):** *The Lived Experience of "Blackness" in the Biopolitical Now*

Moderator: **Annie Trinh, Mississippi State University**

- ✦ **Andrea Spain, Mississippi State University:** Multitudes at the End of Daybreak: Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*
- ✦ **Michelle Wait, Mississippi State University:** Immortal Man: The Resurrection of Tupac, Introspection, and Identity or "Holler if Ya Hear Me": Black Lives Matter
- ✦ **Kylie Dennis, Mississippi State University:** "[H]ow the folds of my flesh do not confine me": Inscription, Stigmatization, and Transformation in Transgender Poetics

*Saturday, February 13*

**3:00-4:15**

**Panel A (Painter 107):** *Cruel Optimism and Filmic Bodies*

Moderator: **Kylie Dennis, Mississippi State University**

- ✦ **Brittany Smith, Mississippi State University:** Toxic Relationships: *Cruel Optimism* Through the Lens of Independent Films
- ✦ **Lauren Mapp, Mississippi State University:** Examining the Body as a Marketable Resource in Jason Reitman's *Men, Women, and Children*
- ✦ **Emily Haven, Mississippi State University:** Outside In: Pixar's *Inside Out* and Sociocultural Injunction to Joy

**Panel B (Painter 108):** *Christ and Community*

Moderator: **E. Kate Stewart, University of Arkansas at Monticello**

- ✦ **Benjamin F. Fisher, University of Mississippi:** Judas Iscariot among the Victorians
- ✦ **Mikki Galliher, Assistant Professor of English, Blue Mountain College:** Universalism, Evangelicals, and Child Abuse: Alice Cary's Religious Critique of Childrearing in "Peter Harris" and "Uncle Christopher's"
- ✦ **Joy Hunter Austin, University of Memphis Lambuth:** "Mutual Forbearance" in the Stories of Flannery O'Connor

**Panel C (Painter 113): *The Returnee and the Struggle for Home***

Moderator: **Helen Chukwuma, Jackson State University**

- ✦ **Laura L. Miller, Jackson State University:** Yearning to Belonging: Leaving a Citizen, Adopting New Citizenship, Returning Home a Foreigner
- ✦ **Noel Didla, Jackson State University:** Warshan Shire's Home in the Context of the Refugee Crises
- ✦ **Helen Crump, Jackson State University:** The Returnee and the Struggle for Home: Returning to a Place I've Never Been to Find a Home I've Never Known
- ✦ **Helen Chukwuma, Jackson State University:** The Returnee and the Struggle for Home in Pede Hollist's *So The Path Does Not Die*

# Creative Work

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# Justice is Blind

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*By Katrina Byrd*

Tall, sturdy oaks lined the town square sparsely, protecting the townspeople from the unforgiving sun which broke through the oak leaves and formed patterns on the bricked streets. Paved walks, offset by thick rows of pink and white petunias, weaved through plush carpeted lawns. A statue of Charles Willow Point, the town's founder, stood in front of the courthouse, his outstretched arm seemingly pointing the way for the lone woman who stood under a live oak near the Willow Point Police Department.

The woman was Detective Justice Robertson. Medium height. Flawless peanut butter complexion. She kept her long, black hair pinned in a ball which rested at the nape of her neck, a look that gave most people the idea that she was in control. She was. Her point of interest was the police department. The building stood directly in front of her. Gray. Huge white columns. White mums rested on either side of the building. Justice wasn't privy to those details. She'd been blind since the accident four years ago.

Justice jerked her head toward the east at the unified ringing of two school bells. One bell came from Willow Point School (K-12) located a block off of the square. The other came from the Willow Point School for the Blind three blocks east of the police department. This was the only school for the blind in this part of the state. The three-story, bricked building housed twenty five students. A weeping willow stood on the front lawn. A bank of yellow mums rested near its drooped limbs. Just beyond the willow, a wooden arbor with a blanket of blood red roses stood near a small fountain. A picture of loveliness

all grayed by the four slain women. All found in wooded areas, beaten, bound, gagged, and all pregnant.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when Justice started toward the police department. She never wore a watch. For this cause, she didn't need one. When the air grew still, no traffic, no hurried footsteps, no voices from faceless people, she knew it was nine o'clock. A set of fastidious footsteps mingled with the light tapping of her cane. Stilettos. Size eight or eight and a half. Female. 5'6" to 5'6 1/2". One hundred twenty to one hundred twenty-five pounds. The woman brushed past Justice leaving behind a thick cloud of perfume. She turned east at the end of the walk. People were often awed at Justice's ability to innately catalog and file sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Many thought it was a way to compensate for her loss of sight, but it wasn't. Not entirely. She grew up in a small community. Everyone was poor. No father. Four sisters and two brothers. She was the oldest. Being sensitive to details was a matter of life or death.

She entered the building slightly winded from the twenty-five steps that led her to the front door. She barely had time to wipe the sweat from her brow and curse the heat when a man spoke.

“Can I help you, ma'am?”

Instantly she felt like a dab of doo doo under a ragged shoe. His voice filled the room, and the way he said “ma'am” felt like it left a bitter taste in his mouth. She took a few steps forward, her shoes resounding on the wooden planks beneath her. “Captain Skinner, please.” Her voice bounced around the spacious room, mingling with the fried coffee scent that all but singed her nose hairs.

The man crossed to her taking heavy steps. When he came to a stop, he let out a rush of air. "I'm Captain Skinner." He took her outstretched hand.

She could tell he was a formidable man. 6'4". 250 pounds of muscle.

"Justice Robertson," she said. "I've been sent to help solve the recent murders."

He dropped her hand, took a step or two away from her, cleared his throat then said, "Pardon me for saying so, ma'am, but you're blind."

There was an awkward silence.

She heard him breathe. Hard, agitated breaths. Before the accident, she would've been sorry for disrupting this good man's day. Today, she couldn't give a damn about him or his day. "I know my condition, sir." She put emphasis on "sir" saying it with a mixture of sarcasm and disdain.

"You can't work with us. Why, if somebody was to point a gun at you...you wouldn't even know it."

He had a lot to learn about blind people in general and her specifically. Back in Jackson, she was responsible for single-handedly bringing down the Taylor Street gang. Twelve hoodlums who harassed old women, sold crack, and killed anybody who got in their way. She arrested each member personally. Had a bullet in the ass to prove it.

"Central office sent me. They said you needed a detective down here to help solve these murders."

"I didn't figure they'd send me a cripple."

"What you figured and what I'm here to do are miles apart."

She assumed he was giving her the evil eye. That was one of the things she missed about being sighted, being able to see the faces of people she'd pissed off. Priceless. "If you'll show me to my office, I can get started--"

"You ain't got no office here, gal."

Gal. The word assaulted her presence. It sizzled like hot coals doused with ice water. Her muscles tightened; she pushed her chin forward, a movement that signaled that she was ready to step up to the plate. No man, any race, color, creed, or size scared her any more. She had two bullets put in her. One in the head, the other in the ass. The latter she got when she arrested Mathis T., the head of the Taylor Street gang. The first she got from her husband. It would've been ex-husband, but she shot him before she got a chance to divorce him. The day she stood up to him, she got a set of brass balls.

*Gal.*

She moved closer to the captain. "Where I come from, my only pastime was whoopin' ass." She folded her cane in one smooth motion. *Click! Click! Click!* It echoed throughout the room, sounding like a glass marble dropped onto the floor.

"Is that so?" Captain Skinner rushed forward.

Two large hands gripped both her arms, moved her entire body upward. It was a struggle for her to remain calm. *One gun shot.* She thought. It only took one gun shot to kill a man. At least that was the case four years ago. She could kill this Captain Skinner with her bare hands. A rush of foul air in her face. It stank of old coffee and stale doughnuts. She took a deep breath and waited.

"Now how are you gonna protect yourself?" he goaded.

He repeated the question rapidly. More times than she could count.



*How are you gonna protect yourself? How are you gonna protect yourself?* The words rattled off like machine gun fire. Tat! Tat! Tat! Quick, staccato bullets ripping through her integrity, mangling her life's work, twisting and turning her insides until the sour taste of fear crept into her throat. Each repeated sentence less understood than the first. An intimidation tactic. Her husband tried those. Now he was in a pine box in Oak Grove Cemetery.

Other people were in the room, too. She heard the laughing, the mumbling, the jeering. A door opened and closed. Unhurried footsteps came to a halt. "Put her in her place, Skinner," a man yelled from somewhere off to her far right.

Her place was right here. She tucked her folded cane under Captain Skinner's neck. Steady, calculated, force. Woman against man. Black against White. Blind against sighted. Ragged breaths. Bones and tendons stretched beyond their limits. A knee to the groin. A small yip, (his). For an instant, there was no sound. The room was as still as a dark country night. Her chest rose and fell. Her ears ached from the quiet, and if she could see, she would've seen the blood rush to Captain Skinner's face. A rush of red overtaking his milky-white complexion. His hand, the one that touched hers seconds earlier, rested below his belt. Disbelief on his sweaty face as he doubled forward, knees buckling then making a unified sound on the floor. *Whap!*

"Now that we've had play time," she said. "Let's get started on the case."

"You gonna let that nigger woman run all over you?"

Justice recognized the voice. The man who told the captain to "put her in her place."

"Git on way from here, Buck," Captain Skinner said between breaths. Then he called for Henderson and McAlley to help him to a chair.

"What kind of lawman is you to let this--"

“I said get on away from here, Buck!” His deafening voice delivered the command with the force of a clap of thunder. It was no secret that he was the final authority in this town. A hush fell over the lobby.

“I...I come to tell you ‘bout the girl,” Buck said softly. “Found her this morning ‘bout a half a mile from my trailer.

“Dead?” Captain Skinner asked.

# Mammygram

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*By Katrina Byrd*

(PHYLLIS enters dramatically It is as if  
she's just left the mammogram  
procedure.)

Didn't your mama give you any home training? Geez! Some people don't know how to treat a lady. Ladies, you wanna watch out. There's a joker back there who will get a holt to you and won't let go. I like to have as much fun as the next gal but .... Let me explain. I went to my doctor last week. He said, "Phyllis, you need to get a mammogram." I said "What I got to have a mammygram for? " He said "It's called a mamm O gram." Well, I found out where that O fits in. O is about all you can say when you stand there half naked with your woman thang in a vise.

Anyway, Dr. Harris scheduled the Mamm-O-gram for today. I just left the clinic.

(laughs a bit.)

Actually, I just left the shopping center. I had to go and buy me a two piece. Honey that's a whole other story.

When I got to the clinic there was a pretty gal at the desk. She gave me some papers to fill out then she said she'd be with me in a moment. I sat down in one of those big expensive

chairs for exactly twelve minutes and thirty three and a half seconds before another pretty gal called my name. Didn't sit down hard the whole time.

I followed the gal down a little narrow hallway. She stopped in front of this little room that wasn't no bigger than my cupboard. Then she says to me, "Miss Marshall--" I stopped her right there. One thing my mama always taught me was that we was all created equal and when a person start answering to titles that's the beginning of uppittiness. So, I says to her, "Call me Phyllis. We all on the same level here." She smiles then she says. "Phyllis, take off your clothes and--" "Take off my clothes? What's your name?" She took a step back then said her name was Gale. So I said, "Gale, I ain't the type of woman to just take her clothes off on command!"

(to the audience)

My heavenly days!! My husband hasn't even seen me in--

(Pauses. When she speaks again, she lowers her voice speaking in a hushed tone.)

...in an unclothed way.

So I turned to this Gale, who is half my age, half my cup size and who probably didn't know nothin' about pluckin' a chicken and I said , "Honey, it took me five hours to put myself together this morning and you want me to --"

"Calm down, Phyllis," Gale said. Then she went to pattin' my hand. Ain't that something.? Have you noticed that the people that tell you to calm down are the ones who got you upset in the first place? "I AIN"T UPSET!" I said. I felt a little bad right then and there. Gale was scared. Her face dropped. I mean it just dropped like a cow patty. SPLAT! She started trembling and her little round face was all red and sweaty. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" She said. Then I patted her hand and I said, "Calm down, baby."

So after I took my clothes off and put on that thin gown that opened in the front, I walked down the hall to the mammygram area. "Phyllis, I need you to open your gown and place your breast right here," Gale said. She was standing in front of a machine pointing to this thing that looked to me like a table for one. You all know me. I'm the type of gal who likes to put her breast foot forward. So I opened my gown and Gale let out a big breath.

"What?" I asked. Gale just stood there staring at me a minute then she said, "We usually ask our patients to wear a two piece." "A two piece?" I said. "I didn't plan on going swimming!" "No, no," she said. "I mean a blouse and a skirt." I looked down at myself nothing between me and the world but a pair of white, cotton, Christian panties and I said, "Oh."

Then things got to moving pretty fast. I heard the hum of the machine as it pressed my breast flat. I had pancakes that were fluffier. I remember thinking if I lived through this mamm-o-gram I would ask if they offered a butt-o-gram. Gale came bouncing back in and positioned my other breast and off she went. She was moving pretty fast too. The machine hummed again and BAM! My left breast was mashed as flat as the right. Almost like a matching set of china.

When I got back to the little room I had to wait a few minutes before getting dressed. So I sat on the little bench, made sure the thin curtain was pulled tight then I took a peek at my woman thangs to see if they had fluffed back up yet.

“You’re all done,” Gale said when I was dressed. “Now, that wasn’t so bad, now was it?”  
“No, it wasn’t,” I said. I was feeling good. Who would’ve thought you could feel good about being mashed flat. “As a matter of fact,” I said to Gale. “I’ll be back next week.”  
“Phyllis, you don’t have to come back till next year,” she said. “Good,” I said. “It’ll give time to get me one of them two piece deals.

# Dirty Girl

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*By Jeanna Graves*

She read the word acrid in a book once, and sitting here now, nose checkered from pressing it against the window screen, acrid best described the smell of the summer rain ready to burst from the pulsing bladder of clouds overhead. Baby Girl stared out into the backyard at cat tails and dandelion blooms swaying in the promise of moisture. She'd stand out in the coming deluge, but stickers hid in what little grass grew there. The storm began as a grumbling rumble of thunder in the south, the same rumble she heard whenever Papaw let her lay her head on his chest. The black line of clouds rolled forward and the heat became even more oppressive. The sky cast a dirty gray color across everything. A fat rain drop made an explosion in the powdery dirt just below the window sill. Seemingly large enough to dodge at first, the bombardment came faster and faster until after only a few seconds you would be wet to the bone. The rain washed the red dust that covered Papaw's truck away into tiny red rivers that ran under the back porch.

Within minutes, the muddy water started to collect in pools throughout the yard. It must have cooled off by twenty degrees within just a few minutes. She loved to play in the rain, in Papaw's pond or with Mamaw's water hose. The first person to drink from that hose every summer got a mouthful of bitter, hot water. But this water falling from the sky, loud and triumphant, was cleansing rain, water sent from God to nourish the ground and purify the dirty.

Baby Girl was not her Bible name as Mamaw called it. Her Bible name was the one written in elegant hand in the black leather Bible none of us were allowed to touch. Her

Bible name was Caroline, but Daddy called her Baby Girl because the first time he saw her, the hospital had written Baby Girl Lancaster on the side of her bed. The name did not make her feel special though. Nothing really did anymore. Sissy didn't know what had happened exactly, but she thought she knew when it did. Uncle Stanley had taken pictures at Christmas with a fancy Kodak camera you had to wind the film into. It would set off a burst of light bright enough to make you feel like you had just run into Mamaw's dark kitchen from the dazzling sunshine of a summer day. You'd have to stand there for the longest time as an orb of blackness disappeared in front of your eyes. Uncle Stanley got the film developed sometime in late February after using up the leftover Christmas film taking Valentine pictures of "that woman" as Mamaw and Papaw called her. "That Woman," or as I later found out, Linda Gail, was apparently a good friend of Uncle Stanley's. I always figured she could not be all that bad because Papaw always smiled just a little whenever anybody mentioned her name. I heard Uncle Stanley describe her to my cousin Howard once, and to this day, I envision Dolly Parton in blue jeans whenever I think of her. Anyway, Baby Girl changed somewhere around that time.

We were sitting on the porch looking through them pictures, minus the ones of the Valentine's Party at Uncle Stanley's, and Baby Girl kept looking at one of her opening a pack of blue eye shadow from Mamaw. In the picture, Baby Girl was looking at the gift, caught in the instant where you just realized what you've been given, but not quite done pulling off the wrapping. It was a nice picture of her, although she didn't like it because you could see her white panties a little because she was sitting Indian style and her gown had slid up.



Baby Girl pulled away from the window and flopped back onto the wrought iron bed. The springs bonked and squawked. Everyone had noticed the change in her, the quiet brooding and aloofness. She felt an uncomfortable pride in being able to keep all the secrets she had from them. It was a heavy burden, but it was hers alone. No one could ever know the road she was led down and as long as she could hang on, maybe another way would present itself. It was not having a time limit that bothered her the most. When would this dirty feeling stop? How long could she hold out?

Uncle Stanley's friend was named Burl. He was a funny man who laughed easily and he always smelled so good, like Lava soap and mint. He hung out around Mamaw and Papaw's often and had become like one of the family. Nobody really noticed that Baby Girl didn't stay around long whenever he was around. There was always an excuse. She had homework, or wanted to sit next to Papaw so she could feel the box fan sucking in air from the outside. The truth was that Burl had on occasion made Baby Girl feel dirty. She couldn't quite explain it at first, but the feeling was uncomfortable, nervous, sad and angry. If someone had asked her to explain it, she would have been hard-pressed to put it in words.

One time, she was standing out in the yard when he drove up. They weren't alone. Mamaw was shelling peas on the porch and Papaw was raking around the roses. Burl put his arms out to hug Baby Girl, but as she started to hug him, he closed his arms just enough that they slid past the sides of her chest, under her arms at armpit level. It was just intimate enough to feel awkward but benign enough to seem innocent. He held her a second or two longer than she liked, and, as he pulled away, she was the one who felt guilty, as if she had done something wrong and had gotten away with it. Sometimes he would kiss her on the cheek, too close to the corner of her mouth. She didn't like it, but he rarely did it, so she

found herself excusing it. What could she do? Burl was Uncle Stanley and Daddy's friend. He had never hurt her or been mean to her. There had to be something wrong with Baby Girl to feel dirty when a nice man showed her love. She didn't feel that way when Papaw hugged her before school, or when Daddy tucked her in at night.

It must have been an accident when Burl touched her behind at the river. They were swimming in cold brown water. His strokes were stronger than hers, he kept winding up right up behind her. Floating with parts of his body uncomfortably touching her. And it wasn't his fault she didn't lock the bathroom door when she took a bath and he saw her sitting in the tub. Something must be wrong with her. Burl even said, "Something as pretty as you should lock this door."

Years later in school, Benji Stockstill stuck his tongue in her mouth. That was her fault too. He told Baby Girl that he'd kiss her only if she never told anybody. She thought that sounded strange, but maybe it was supposed to be romantic, she wasn't sure. His breath smelled sweet and although she felt as if her heart would jump out of her chest, Baby Girl thought she liked kissing. It was hard to tell as she stood alone behind the dumpster holding what was left of Benji's bottled coke. He must have forgotten it in his rush to return to his friends.

Benji wasn't the only boy to use her. She acted as if she didn't mind, and it became easier as time passed. If she gave these boys what they wanted, eventually one would see her in a different way, maybe love her, make her believe she could be. Rumors swirled about how easy she was. She didn't care. Their words didn't hurt as bad as the bile burning her throat. She didn't need her throat.

There wasn't anybody to tell. She couldn't take the chance that Mamaw, Papaw, Daddy or even Uncle Stanley would look at her the way they looked at Linda Gail. The dirty feeling inside grew and she pushed it down with lies, secrecy and quiet. The hush gave her refuge. The hush felt like peace.

At eighteen years old, Baby Girl had graduated high school but seemed listless in preparing for her future. She never mentioned wanting to further her education or move off anywhere and start a life of her own. There had been dreams at one time, but secrets and darkness hid them.

In her twenties, her reputation grew. Good men in the county wouldn't have anything to do with her and the bad men lined up at the front door. Desperate to feel something good, she gave in to countless mistakes and regrets. Baby Girl never believed that the break ups and fights were not her fault. If she had been pretty enough, respectable enough, just barely enough. Damaged goods, a dented can, marked less than by an accident of fate or injustice.

At 31, Baby Girl sat on a squeaky bed and stared out into the rain. For a moment she thought that she might be coming down with a cold. Her throat felt tight. She had been experiencing sinus pressure a lot lately and wrote it off as problems from cleaning up the old house. It was hers now that Mamaw and Papaw were gone. She was alone in it but found solace. Her throat burned a little as she felt herself get off the bed and press her face to the window she planned to scrub clean with bleach tomorrow. Her heart beat faster as she turned her head from side to side, the years of aching need, the confidences a child was forced to conceal because of the weaknesses and predilections of disgusting men, the dirty feelings inside and out.

Baby Girl ran bare footed through the house. Strangled and gagging, she threw open the screen door, crossed the porch and sprinted toward the vegetable garden. She was running for her life. Her feet slipped out from under her in the grass and mud and she landed on her side with enough force to release the grip on her throat. She croaked and desperately gulped at air. Rain rushed in her mouth and she screamed. She screamed for the little girl who should have never been touched. She screamed forth every secret, every shameful and dirty piece of herself. She rolled onto her back and cried to the wet Heavens. The rain came down stronger and the wind blew pellets of it into her cheeks. It hurt like a sandblast and she rolled onto her stomach again. Baby Girl could not get up, could not return to the relative safety of the house. She and God, the wind and the rain, had a reckoning. It was a long time coming.

A lifetime of hurt spewed out of her. The wind carried her memories and nightmares across the yard, through the forest and over the playground of the elementary school. Rain ran around her back and pooled under her chest. Her makeup ran down her chin and water touched her everywhere. She needed to get a hold of herself, but Baby Girl was being coached. A feeling so small and quiet was stirring under everything she forced out. If she didn't grasp it now, she would be lost forever. She came back from somewhere long ago, slowly as if waking from a dream. The rain still crashed down and the wind still howled, but she realized that she had stopped screaming. Her voice nothing but a whisper now. She heard herself talking to Him. She was praying. Low, but aloud, she whispered and sobbed. He sent the rain to clean her. The wind blew the past away. She gulped sobs as He accepted this dirty girl. He gave her peace for the sins against her that she had endured and He forgave the mistakes she made on her own. He missed her, and He loved her. Her eyes

closed. It was all too much. Years trickled away with the rain and soaked into the grass. The storm raged on.

The sun came over the old barn about 6:17 a.m. and just enough of it came through the window and caught Baby Girl as she yawned and rolled over. Her head felt too heavy for her neck and she realized that she felt weak. Maybe she was coming down with something. The storm left nothing but scattered leaves and puddles behind and she heard the chickens clucking in a muddy pen. She pulled the sheets back and swung her legs over the side and froze. Shaking she turned and knelt by the bed resting her weight on the mattress frame like she did as a child. Dried grass and caked mud fell from her legs and landed on the floor. She closed her eyes.

There was no fevered state, no bad dream. Baby Girl had run into a storm that God had sent for her. She felt lighter somehow, cleaner. She whispered to Him, soft words, and the tears came. They would for a while. He had forgiven her, but Baby Girl would need time to forgive herself. She would need time to forgive the dirty girl.

The End

# “Spring Ducks” and Other Poems

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*By John J. Han*

## **Spring Ducks** (Haiku)

coming of spring  
a duck stretches  
its neck

spring dizziness  
a baby duck stands  
motionless

a mind of one's own  
four ducks face  
four different directions

chaos  
a duck pecks at a fellow duck  
which pecks at another

peace talks  
fighting ducks now  
float in a circle



## **Autumn Haiku**

migrating geese  
thousands...  
ten thousands

stubble fields  
starlings fly up  
and down

foliage  
a speeding ticket  
tinged with red

autumn rain  
my old dog and I  
listen together



### **Student Retention** (Senryu)

retention—  
it is hard, it is  
very hard

retention meeting  
gloomy faces around  
the table

retaining is bad—  
it makes faculty become  
sluggish

retaining is bad—  
it makes students become  
complacent

brainstorming—  
many ideas are shared,  
we've heard them before

a brilliant idea—  
flunk two-thirds of  
the students!

meeting ends  
we think we now have  
better ideas

until we have

another retention meeting  
next time

sleepless nights—  
dog-tired, yet our VP  
tosses and turns



**Here We Go Again**  
(Senryu)

Halloween—  
someone wants to know  
if I celebrate it

Christmas—  
someone else wants to know  
if I celebrate it

I ask them  
if they celebrate  
Buddha's Birthday

look of confusion—  
they ask me what Buddha's  
Birthday is

instead of an answer  
I wear an inscrutable smile  
on my face

they debate  
on Buddha's birthplace—  
India or Nepal?

with a smile  
I remain silent, deepening  
their confusion





**Shame on Her—Not Really**  
(Etheree)

hair  
salon—  
I say to  
myself that I  
shall be bald in ten  
years. My hairstylist smiles,  
concurring, “I think so, too.”  
I thought I might lose all hair in  
ten years but was not really looking  
for a willing, hasty confirmation.

In the mirror, my hair looks grayer than  
a few weeks ago. I ask her if  
half of my hair is gray. She says  
sixty percent are still black,  
adding that gray hair has  
nothing to do with  
longevity.  
I know but  
still feel  
good.

# The Call

---

*By Frank Thurmond*

*“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.”*

*-T.S. Eliot, from *Four Quartets**

The late afternoon sun had finally impaled the English clouds, revealing wisps of blue sky after a dull grey morning of cold drizzle. A spring breeze scented with jasmine wafted its way through an open window, where nascent sunlight transformed raindrops lining the panes into pearls of liquid silver. The light suffused my tiny student room with sudden warmth, and through the window across the desk I watched a moving grove of bright umbrellas transfigure into human faces along the street below.

I sat back in my chair and took a deep breath. The lowering clouds in the distance swirled above a row of red-bricked Victorian rooftops, and the fresh air and sunlight seemed a welcome sign that a break from academic work was in order. The phone suddenly announced its presence like a herald, and I was pleased to hear my mother’s voice, although surprised to hear from her so unexpectedly outside of our usual Sunday chat. But her voice revealed that something was not quite right.

After I hung up the phone, I sat back in a daze. On the walls of my room the orange glimmer of sunset painted a glowing patina of serrated light before fading with dusk to a dim, crimson glow. A drop of warm dampness upon my arm startled me from deep reverie. I had not noticed the tears in my eyes, through which the growing darkness painted for my imagination an impressionistic forest of blurry images. I switched on the lamp by the phone and quickly dialed a number.

#

When Brad found me at a table in the Gloucester Arms pub half an hour later, I was studying a shamrock drawn upon the creamy top of a cool thick pint of dark stout. He sat down across from me.

“You okay?”

As I looked up I realized too late my face was streaked once more with tears, and my friend was taken aback. We’d known each other several years now, fellow Yanks at Oxford who’d connected as being both from the South—with all its associated idiosyncrasies that few other compatriots seemed to appreciate.

“I just heard from my father...” I hardly spoke the words before I found it difficult to go on. “I think I told you once that I never knew him.”

Brad nodded thoughtfully. “Yes, I remember your mentioning that.”

“Not since I was three years old at least, when he left.” I paused again to regain composure as Brad waited. As I struggled to express my predicament, I felt a profound sense of gratitude simply for having a friend there to listen. I drank a deep sip of beer, savoring its cool, bitter taste as someone put a song on the jukebox behind us and a heavy rock ballad started to play. I took a deep breath and continued.

“My mother called to say she’d heard from him. Or from his family, rather. They said my father’s on his death bed dying of lung cancer. The doctor says he’s got less than a week to live, and now he wants to speak with me before he dies.”

I had told my mother that I would accept my father’s call. She said they had asked about the time difference and when would be the best time for him to call me, and I asked her to set the time for three in the afternoon the next day. After I’d recounted this I lost my composure once more, as the significance of this fateful news fully manifested itself in thought. Once I had recovered, Brad’s next comment threw me for a loop.

“You have to go see him.”

“What?”

“You should get on the next flight home to the States and meet your father before he dies. You’ll always regret it if you don’t.”

I told him I had already suggested this to my mother, but she was adamant that I should not do so. She wondered why I should I fly across the ocean to meet a father who, as it turned out, had spent the last three decades in Hot Springs, Arkansas— just

up the road from our home in Little Rock—without making any effort to contact me. That point so angered me that any desire to meet this permanently absent biological father (apart from a quick chat by phone for the sake of closure) felt completely removed.

But Brad was likewise insistent that I should meet my birth father. He explained that not doing so when I had this one chance would haunt me for the rest of my life. And he was speaking from experience, having lost his own father prematurely. The only way I could ever confront the lifelong sense of emptiness I had endured was to finally meet, just once before he died, the father I had never known. This was the only way I might achieve a true sense of closure.

By the end of the evening, I had made my decision. I would travel home to meet my father.

The next day brought a fine May afternoon, the kind of day that makes a whole year's worth of English weather worth the wait. I walked down the street to a small park in Wellington Square and sat in the green grass beneath an ancient, sprawling oak.

I looked at my watch. Forty-five minutes. In forty-five minutes, the phone on my desk would be ringing, and on the other end of the line would be the voice of my father. A voice I had never known in my conscious life. What would it sound like? What would he say? What would *I* say? These were questions that must have been buried within my subconscious my whole lifetime up to that very moment—along

with the ever-haunting question of his permanent absence. Everything else that had preoccupied my mind only a day earlier, before my mother's call, had suddenly vanished. It was as if all my daily preoccupations, the day to day reality that normally seemed so damned important, had melted away in the mists of memory: memories of forgotten mystery, of a lifetime unaware I was waiting all along for this one phone call—as if all my waking, superficial being of daily trivial, egoistic concerns and petty pursuits—had met an abrupt, untimely death, swallowed by the depths of a forgotten consciousness suddenly now ripped to the surface. Memories of earliest childhood, long forgotten, flooded my mind, as a lifetime of experiences flashed before my mind's eye like the fabled moment of death.

In the park, the roses were in full bloom—yellow, red and white. I walked over to a rose bush and inhaled, slowly, deeply and deliberately, its pungent sweetness. As I bent down and smelled each rose in turn, their redolence transported me to a place far away. A place all but forgotten outside of dreams.

#

*Sunlight streamed through parting clouds after a heavy rain, and the humid Delta air hung thick beneath the ancient live oak. From below, its leaves glistened like emerald stars illuminating a panoply of green sky. The tree's gnarled roots seemed magical, grasping outward from the trunk like*

*multifarious tentacles, their various crevices now filled with rainwater that I imagined as tiny oceans filled with fish. And that reminded me that my cousin had promised to take me fishing down at the pond as soon as the storm broke.*

*The sound of clippers stirred me from my reverie, and I looked to see my grandmother resuming her work in the garden. She was pruning the rose bushes. I ran over to her, delighting in the flowers' radiant colors after the rain: pink, white, yellow and scarlet red, all dripping with the sunlit sparkle of rainwater. I pulled a rose toward me and inhaled the sweet scent. From beneath her old wide-brimmed straw hat, my grandmother's eyes glanced quickly at me with a look of concern.*

*"Now you be careful of those thorns, they're sharper than they look."*

*"Yes, ma'am," I answered perfunctorily, carefully allowing my hand to move backward with the stem until it found a smooth place between two thorns. My grandmother hadn't missed a beat, remaining engrossed in her gardening. She had moved over to the next rose bush, oblivious to the iridescent halo of butterflies flitting among the flowers.*

*I watched her curiously, always fascinated by her solemn work ethic. "Where's Mama?"*

*"Up in Paragould. But she'll be home directly, I reckon." My grandmother remained a study in concentration as she carefully trimmed another rose bush, like a sculptor at work in the studio. It was clear that this was the best answer I was going to get today, so I ran along to the swing in the front yard. A window air-conditioning unit whirred to life, and I knew my grandfather must be up from his nap. I excitedly jumped from the swing and ran across the yard as fast as my three year old legs would carry me, up the wooden front steps and into the front hall of the old house. The living room door was closed to seal in the precious cool air, and I could already hear my grandfather inside*

*tapping his pipe on the glass ashtray. I opened the door and enjoyed the sensation of feeling the stuffy heat of the hall mix with the frigid cold air streaming from the air conditioner. In the living room, my grandfather had just settled into his new reclining chair by the window, and as usual focused immediately on filling his pipe from a small red tin can of Prince Albert tobacco.*

*In the thin sliver of natural light slanting through the window was caught a galaxy of dust motes orbiting my grandfather's face. They vanished suddenly as he switched on the lamp.*

*"Hey, buddy!" he mumbled affably upon seeing me, holding the pipe stem to his mouth with one hand while lighting a wooden match with the other. After a few puffs the tobacco in his pipe glowed crimson, as several sparks flew off in various directions—the sort of sparks that had, to my grandmother's chagrin, left burn marks on the furniture and floors, and that would one day set the whole house ablaze, burning it completely to the ground along with everything in it.*

*But now I sat contentedly on the old red couch next to my grandfather in his chair, savoring the smell of his tobacco and the gentle hum of the air conditioner that rendered silent the motion of tree branches and flowers swaying in a hot breeze outside the window. I still wasn't sure where my mother was, but here inside with my grandfather, I felt safe.*

#

As I sat in the rose-filled garden of Wellington Square lost in these thoughts, I nearly lost track of the time. 2:55! The call from my father was set for 3:00, so I ran around the corner and upstairs to my room and sat staring, breathless, at the phone



on my desk. At exactly 3:00, it rang. When I picked up the receiver, the voice on the other end was that of my birth father.

I tried to act and sound as if this were just any casual phone conversation with an old acquaintance. I could never have prepared myself for the emotional maelstrom upon hearing, as a grown man, the voice of the father I'd never known. But it was a voice in pain, this I could tell. He was in the advanced stage of lung cancer, and—whether because of this or the context or perhaps a bit of both—his words did not come easily. I found myself doing most of the talking, and what he wanted to know was how I'd spent the last 30 years of my life. At one point he abruptly changed the subject.

“Do you smoke?” he asked.

“Only sometimes, when I've had a few drinks.”

“Don't,” he said, and as if by illustration fell into a fit of coughing. “It's not worth it, let me tell you. I quit smoking ten years ago, but it still caught up with me now.”

I could tell it was getting difficult for him to continue the conversation, and I recalled Brad's advice that I must try to meet my father at all cost. But despite my fear of rejection even at the last, I told him I wanted to fly home to Arkansas and meet him. He simply answered that it wouldn't be necessary. Yet there was something in his voice that seemed uncertain. So I said again that I really meant it—I wanted us to meet while we still could.

“If you want to come,” he answered, “we’ll be glad to have you.”

#

Since I knew that in a matter of days it would be too late, I went immediately to a travel agency and booked the trip. During the flight home, I thought mostly about what I would say to my adoptive father, Russell. I had asked my mother to ensure that he was present for dinner on the night before my journey to Hot Springs, and I knew I had this one chance to express things just right. The weight of this challenge felt almost overwhelming; in our whole life together as a family, the subject of my biological father had not come up even once in conversation—not even after Dad formally adopted me. But I’d always felt it as a topic hovering just beneath the surface, waiting for the moment when it (or my birth father himself) would suddenly and unexpectedly appear. And that moment was now.

As we sat around the formal dining table enjoying casual conversation about my latest adventures abroad, the sense of expectancy was palpable. Everyone knew why I suddenly returned home, but the onus was on me to bring it up. Finally, I did. I explained that I’d learned my birth father was on his death bed with a matter of days to live, and that I’d decided I must meet him before he died to close this empty gap in my life. Then I turned and looked at Dad.

“I want you to know that I’m only meeting him because he’s my biological father, and that I have to do this before he dies. But it’s you I consider my real father. You’re the only one who was there for me. You’ve always been, and always will be, my only true father.”

Dad nodded with understanding. “You’re doing the right thing, son,” he said. “You need this sense of closure.”

#

My old school friend Robert offered to travel with me from Little Rock to Hot Springs so I wouldn’t have to journey there alone. We drove up the day before my appointment with my father and stayed the night in a hotel on Lake Hamilton. The next morning we drove to the house where my father had lived with his girlfriend and her family for many years. I was greeted in the front yard by a man of about my own age named Randall.

“I know exactly what you’re experiencing,” he said. “I met my own birth father later in life too.” By the time we entered the house, Randall explained how he was brought up in turn by my biological father like a son of his own. (My father had otherwise had no further children.) I was still processing this when I was greeted at the door by Randall’s mother, Monica. She welcomed me graciously and led me into the living room, where several other women—including Randall’s wife and sister—waited.

“He’s in the back room,” said Monica. “He’s expecting you.” Robert waited with Randall as I followed Monica into the back of the house. We entered the back room and there he was, sitting in a chair waiting for me. Randall had quickly explained that the only reason my father wasn’t in a hospital bed hooked up to a ventilator was that he’d wanted to meet me with dignity. So they’d had the machine set up here, next to his chair.

Monica showed me to a seat and then discreetly left the room. I didn’t know what to say, but I knew an attempt at small talk would seem, under the circumstances, bathetic. But he spoke first.

“You’re studying English literature?”

I could tell from his voice that his health had already declined rapidly in the three days since we had last spoken.

“Yes, I’m studying medieval and Renaissance drama.” Then to my surprise he began to recite Chaucer in Middle English:

*Whan that April with his showres soote*

*The droughte of March hath perced to the roote...*

I suddenly realized the room we were in was a private study full of books. There were books everywhere, with every imaginable title from Dostoevsky to Chomsky to a treatise on the art of growing marijuana. He told me of his archaeological research in England and showed me photographs from his travels. He then commended me for my academic success, and said he’d been pleased to hear it.

“I guess you gave me some good genes,” I said.

“You got your genes from your mother.”

Then he finally asked me about her. I told him what a wonderful mother she had been to me, and how she’d encouraged and supported me in my every endeavor throughout my life. Suddenly he began coughing violently, and Monica rushed into the room to adjust the ventilator.

I looked into his eyes and was struck by a strange sense of familiarity, and then realized his eyes seemed the mirror image of my own. Yet they now betrayed something else too—something he would finally express before we said goodbye. I told my father simply how glad I was finally to have met him. I told him that I would one day write about our meeting, so that this occasion (and he) would not be forgotten. It was now my turn to quote poetry, and I recalled two lines which seemed to fit the sentiment perfectly:

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,*

*So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

My father nodded. Then I said, “I want you to know that as you are my father, I love you.”

Just as I turned to leave, he seemed to be struggling to summon up one last word.

“Don’t die bitter,” he said.

Then he looked deeply into my eyes before saying the last words I would ever hear from him: “I regret.”

With this he abruptly dropped his chin to his chest with a look of final resignation. As I turned away my eyes filled with tears, and when they saw my face the women in the room began to weep. Randall accompanied me outside where Robert was waiting at the car, and I thanked him for helping make my visit such a warm one. Then Monica came out and said she had something for me from my father.

“He insisted on this,” she said, handing me a check to cover the cost of my trip from London. On the check he had written: “For love and travel.”

#

The next day Randall called to say that my father had died that night. He had left me all his books. He’d been worried what to do with them and at the end said he was pleased to find he had a son who read.

“He spent the last few days of his life trying to tie up all the loose ends before you arrived,” Randall explained. “We told him he should just rest and save energy, and that we’d take care of everything. Yet he insisted, and just kept saying—*but I have promises to keep.*”

I smiled, and said I’d be happy to have my father’s books. Then I recited softly to myself: *And miles to go before I sleep.*

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# Critical Essays

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# Boats, Bats, and Immigrant Dreams: Tim Wendel's *Habana Libre*

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*By C. D. Albin*

In 2013 novelist and noted baseball writer Tim Wendel published a novella entitled *Habana Libre*—or, in English, *Free Havana*. To date the book has received little scholarly attention, perhaps owing to the size and limited reach of its nonprofit publisher, Baltimore's CityLit Press. Yet recent changes in the relationship between the United States and Cuba have imparted a timely significance to this tale, which deserves a wider audience than it has garnered thus far.

Although the text of *Habana Libre* is flawed, with several distracting typographical errors and more than one wrenching, inexplicable mid-sentence shift from third to first person, the novella proves a compelling read. It relays the story of Pilar Silva, a comely Havana showgirl named after Hemingway's famous boat and recently wed to Cuba's finest third baseman. The deprivations of her country's "special period in time of peace"—deprivations derived from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of its economic support for Cuba, and the U.S. embargo—vex Pilar's restless soul, making her so desperate to reach the United States she will risk crossing the Florida Straits in a craft captained by an inexperienced sixteen-year-old hotel employee. In contrast stands her husband, Omar, who loves both his country and Pilar, a dual affection that traps him in a tug-of-war between his own desire to remain in Cuba and his wife's impassioned insistence that he defect. By dramatizing the struggles of this couple and the people who love them, Wendel humanizes



political difference and renders the American Dream from the perspective of immigrants whose only hope of entry is to set foot on a Florida beach.

Humanizing controversial political topics does not mean Wendel avoids a political stance on the issue of Cuba. In fact, at the end of the novella's acknowledgments page he expresses the following sentiment: "The dysfunctional political relationship between the United States and Cuba has extended well into its fifth decade. Change is coming—someday. Anybody who visits the island can see that. But why wait any longer? Why not blow the trumpets and watch the wall between our two nations, real and imagined, fall away forever?" (99) In his actual fiction, however, Wendel tends to sketch the concreteness of lived experience rather than political abstraction.

A similar tactic can be seen in his journalism. For instance, in the December 24, 2014, *USA Today* column entitled "Cubans Eager to See America Up Close," (composed, incidentally, only one week after President Obama announced that the United States would open its embassy to Havana), Wendel relates an anecdote from a 1999 visit to Havana's Central Park. On this trip he took along copies of *USA Today Baseball Weekly*, which featured a cover story about aging American baseball players—players of prominence, but also men clearly past their athletic prime. Wendel was amazed at how quickly the Cubans grabbed those issues, so starved were they for news from the Major Leagues. Yet the incident he found most instructive occurred when he was approached by a man confused by a picture of Baltimore's 6'5" shortstop Cal Ripken. "He thought Ripken was smaller in stature," Wendel relates. "After all, he [Ripken] had played shortstop, right? That's when I realized the average baseball-crazy Cuban wouldn't recognize Cal Ripken if he visited Esquina Caliente himself. Once again, I was reminded of one of the major contradictions

about Cuba: They may hear what is going on elsewhere in the world, but they are rarely afforded a good look.” One of Wendel’s purposes in *Habana Libre* is to provide the world a glimpse into the lives of those Cuban citizens.

### **Boats**

*Habana Libre* opens with echoes of an earlier novella of Cuba, Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*. Sixteen-year-old Pablo Ortiz Llanas puts the reader somewhat in mind of a teenage Manolin when, clearing breakwater in a boat he doesn’t have permission to sail, he encounters strong winds that catch him off guard. His instinct is to let “the sails flap in the wind, just as the old man had taught him not so long ago” (3). Pablo’s old man—his Santiago—is not a fisherman, but rather a former hotel employee who had been in charge of “the beach at the Cayo Coco” before one day being led away by guards, never to be heard from again. This old man taught Pablo how to sail, but Pablo believes the lessons entailed more than seamanship, so much so that he credits the old man with revealing “how the world really worked. That there were forces out on the ocean that people couldn’t see, but anybody can use them to his advantage if he watched and waited for his chance” (40).

*Habana Libre* is set in 1999, exactly half a century after the 1949 setting of *The Old Man and the Sea*, and Castro’s revolution has starkly changed the forces at work in Cuba. In response, young Pablo has become surreptitious, someone who watches and waits, in this case practicing his skills and hoping for a chance to defect in the Hotel Habana Libre’s newest rental boat, the Hobie Cat. Yet in the Cuba of 1999, watchers often find themselves watched, and when strong winds force Pablo back to shore, he is met by the showgirl Pilar Silva, who notices “the three plastic jugs of water and the cooler of food” (4) that Pablo has

tied to the Hobie's deck. Pilar is quick to use this information to her own advantage, insisting not only that Pablo intended to defect, but that he will try again, with Pilar as his passenger. "When you go," she says, "I will go with you. I'm thinking perhaps we should go soon" (31).

Pilar's forcefulness with Pablo resembles the determination she displays in her relationship with her husband. Since childhood she has been, to use her mother's word, "willful" (19). Now, as a married woman, she manifests such willfulness in her plan for her husband to defect in Baltimore when the Cuban National Team travels there to play an exhibition game with the Orioles. From Omar's perspective, this plan, which Pilar announces on their honeymoon, is "crazy" (11), and distinctly his wife's. He points out he has had a superb performance in the last Olympics and is under no obligation to play the Baltimore exhibition. "Remember *our* (emphasis added) plan," Pilar replies. When Omar tells her, "My God, if I did such a thing they would make life miserable for you here," she snaps back, "I would survive it" (12).

Pointedly, moments later they see a biplane heading out over the ocean and watch it bank, then head back to Havana. Pilar is angered by the plane's return to her city and calls the pilot stupid. "If I was at the controls," she says, "I'd keep going, no matter how many fighter planes Fidel called into the sky" (13).

Pilar's words may sound brash, the easy assertions of someone for whom the stakes are not as high as the person on whom she urges risk. After all, Omar knows more of the world beyond Cuba, having traveled as a member of the National Team. His caution is surely not unfounded. Yet Pilar knows herself, knows that the depth of her desire is lifelong, even when her longings and her essence prove inexplicable to others. Her mother, for instance, is

troubled by a story an old friend, the head maid at the hotel where Pilar performs, relays to her. According to the maid's story, Pilar had acquired a special shade of pink lipstick left behind by a tourist, and she is willing to trade the lipstick if the maid will "sneak her into a guestroom every now and then. Maria," she tells Pilar's mother, "your daughter loves to watch these shows—MTV, HBO, even CNN Headline News" (26). Later, after the maid departs, Maria cannot hold back the tears. "Since Pilar had been a small girl," she thinks, "she had been infatuated with worlds she had no business being in" (26).

Similarly, Pilar's Uncle Luis, who considers her his favorite niece, believes that even her name has been suggested by those conversant with a world Pilar has never seen. One day Luis is moved to stop by "the old writer's home," which has now been converted into a museum "with tours given thrice daily by the local home guard" (67). He wanders up the stone steps and peers in, noting Hemingway's writing desk and typewriter. "He never knew why his brother and Maria had named their oldest after the old man's boat. His brother had never been much of a reader, so that couldn't be it. But the name, Pilar, did roll off the tongue. It had to be a name Jaime had heard while driving a visitor out to this tourist stop" (67).

### **Bats**

To be a visitor in a city like Baltimore is, for a player of Omar Silva's caliber, to be the object of intense interest—not so much by the typical U.S. baseball fan, whose attention is captivated by already established major leaguers—but rather by a cadre of scouts, agents, and facilitators of sundry motives and intentions. When Omar's Cuban National Team arrives for the exhibition game with the Orioles, he quickly spots someone waiting for him

outside the team hotel. “The agent that Pilar had told Omar to look for was there—Rene Tovar. He had winked at Omar from across the street last night. Even from a distance, the gold bracelet and the chains around his neck sparkled from the glow of the streetlight. He watched the slugger’s every move. Ready, if Omar was” (71).

Yet to be ready to defect, to leave behind friends, family, the seeming stability of what is known in exchange for new circumstances that may prove no more than a mirage—such decisions have consequences that ripple outward from the source, and Omar remains uncertain. The results of a choice like the one before him do not manifest in the stark clarity of a box score, not even the one that this night records a victory for the Cuban National Team. True, there is great pride in such a victory. “Team Cuba,” thinks Omar, “had proven that it could beat major leaguers. Never again would its players have to listen to the Yanqui sportswriters, the ones who stole onto the island to write about baseball in the socialist state. Never again would they have to listen to them pass judgment on Cuban ball” (75). Yet Omar can’t savor the victory without pondering the various protests that had interrupted the game.

In the first protest, three people had bolted onto the field carrying a Cuban flag and a Free Cuba sign. In the second, a man had managed to make it onto the field carrying a “Cuba,si; Castro, no” (74) sign. The contrast between winning the game and witnessing the protests casts Omar into an emotional muddle, and what solace he finds lies in the aesthetics of the ballpark itself—Orioles Ballpark at Camden Yards—which after the game he studies from the vantage point of his hotel window. “Omar had been told that it was one of the most beautiful ballparks in the major leagues, and he saw now that it was true. The lights above the outfield seats were still on and he could see the outline of the ancient red-

stone warehouse that overlooked the field. He could slip outside and reach the place in minutes, and the Orioles would take him in” (76).

Omar could do this—as one of his teammates, a lesser player than he, does by slipping away during the team’s victory celebration. However, the next morning Omar chooses to board the team bus with the remainder of his teammates, trying “not to look back at that beautiful ballpark ever again” (79).

### **Immigrant Dreams**

The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 has spawned a distinctive phrase, “wet foot, dry foot,” which refers to the fact that a person arriving in the U.S. through the Florida Straits need only “get one foot on dry U.S. soil” to be allowed to stay and to be “offered permanent legal status in a year” (Sanchez). The policy, which was obviously crafted to favor Cubans and annoy Castro, has become a source of frustration for some Latinos. However, it plays a crucial role in the plot of *Habana Libre*.

While Omar Silva is in Baltimore declining his opportunity to defect, Pilar and the sixteen-year-old Pablo Llanes steal the Hobie Cat and set sail for the Florida Straits, despite a threatening night sky. Their journey proves harrowing, as have similar attempts by other Cuban defectors. Sometime after midnight of the second day, the Hobie capsizes amid strong waves, water “sloshing angrily over what was left of the Hobie. ‘Die,’ it sang to them. ‘Just die.’ The boy appeared grateful to meet his end, but Pilar would have none of it” (69). Displaying in a moment of crisis the fortitude and determination she previously predicted would sustain her, Pilar manages to get Pablo and herself back to one of the Hobie’s hulls. In this way they weather the first great crisis of their journey, but supplies like food and water are lost, their only possessions now Pilar’s compass and Pablo’s

knapsack. In the knapsack he has stored, of all things, a copy of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, which had been abandoned by a former tourist at the Cayo Coco Hotel.

The presence of the book, especially one written in English, seems to annoy Pilar. "What good is that going to do now?" she berates the boy, taunting him that his English isn't good enough when he suggests he might read aloud. Eventually, though, she relents, and is even moved enough to request that Pablo re-read the following passage: ". . . the only people for me are the mad ones . . . , the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who . . . burn, burn, burn like fabulous roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars" (84). Through the use of this quote, Wendel not so subtly suggests that Pablo and Pilar are mad for freedom, that they will do what is required in order to seek the shelter of American soil.

Their determination kindled by Kerouac's rhetoric, Pablo and Pilar "set the broken mast atop the Hobie's good hull and hoisted aloft what they could of the small sail" (85). The passage seems offered in homage to Santiago's humble journey home in *The Old Man and the Sea*. For Pablo and Pilar, however, there will be opposition to overcome. After nightfall they spot not only the lights of Key West, but also a Coast Guard vessel making its way toward them. Fearful they will be caught at sea, and thus deprived of the legal status afforded by the Cuban Adjustment Act, Pilar tells Pablo, "We have to make land. Only then can we stay" (86). And so, despite the danger of sharks, she pulls Pablo behind her into the sea. They are separated as they swim, and Pilar reaches shore in a state of near exhaustion. As Wendel writes, "The left side of her face was the first side of her body to reach America" (87).

Rather than close *Habana Libre* on this note of achievement and a dream fulfilled, Wendel pushes on for two more chapters, countering any momentary excess of romanticism by showing us the wary dance that Pilar must do with Rene Tovar, Omar's would-be-agent. Both Pilar and Rene are animated by self-interest—Pilar living on Rene's largesse while she attempts to mend her broken plans for Omar's defection, and Rene attempting to force her hand by declaring, "right now the only hook you have in this country is that you're married to the best living ballplayer who hasn't signed a major-league contract" (90). Pilar's answer may be mad, but it is a madness of the kind described by Kerouac: to escape Rene's control she steals one of his cars, re-unites with Pablo Llanes, and presents the boy with a new copy of *On the Road*. And, fittingly, she and Pablo take to the road, driving Rene's car west toward Phoenix, Arizona. In Arizona, the Spanish-speaking population is large, but Arizona is also the state where a greater number of major league teams now hold spring training than in Florida. Apparently Pilar still nurtures her plan for Omar to defect, and in so doing she continues the quest to fulfill her version of the American Dream.



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# Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: A Celebration of Tragedy

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*By Autumn Barnard*

*This is the king who solved the famous riddle  
And towered up, most powerful of men.  
No mortal eyes but looked on him with envy,  
Yet in the end ruin swept over him.*

*Let every man in mankind's frailty  
Consider his last day; and let none  
Presume on his good fortune until he find  
Life, at his death, a memory without pain (Sophocles 440).*

These closing lines of the famous Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, present a dismal picture of life and fate; Aphra Behn closes her novella, *Oroonoko*, with a celebration of the tragedy against which Sophocles warns:

Thus Dy'd this Great Man, worthy of a better Fate, and a more sublime Wit than mine to write his Praise; yet, I hope, the Reputation of my Pen is considerable enough to make his Glorious Name to survive to all ages; with that of the Brave, the Beautiful, and the Constant *Imoinda* (Behn 100).

In *Oroonoko*, the Enlightenment theme of self-indulgence takes on the appearance of fate, as the protagonist helplessly follows his uncontrollable passions until they lead him to a violent death. From the involvement of a hateful father-figure to the final self-mutilation, Aphra Behn's novella, *Oroonoko*, follows the structure of *Oedipus Rex*, presenting an Enlightenment version of fate as a story of heroism in contrast to the Greek view of fate as a cruel but unavoidable power.

The King of Coramantien and Laius, King of Thebes, control the plots of *Oroonoko* and *Oedipus Rex*. Both kings serve partially as fathers to the protagonists of their respective narratives. The king of Coramantien has adopted Oroonoko and acts as his father but is actually his grandfather. In Laius' case, he rejects his rightful role as Oedipus' father, leaving Polybos of Corinth to adopt him. Laius and the king of Coramantien share a jealousy for power and a vengeance against their sons, both robbing their sons of their rightful roles and sending them to miserable fates. Oedipus' mother/wife, Jocasta, recalls Apollo's oracle concerning Laius, "that his doom would be death at the hands of his own son." Laius attempts to protect himself against such a fate, having his three-day-old son's ankles pierced and leaving him on a mountain to die (Sophocles 423). When Oedipus returns to Thebes as an adult, he marries Jocasta and claims the throne. Lauren Silberman's article, "God and Man in 'Oedipus Rex,'" reminds the reader that "the kingship Oedipus thinks he holds by institutional choice is really his by natural succession" (293). Oedipus simply reclaims the throne of which Laius robs him.

Unlike Oedipus, Oroonoko sees clearly what belongs to him and who has wronged him, the novella taking place from the viewpoint of perfect hindsight. The king, like Laius, acts out of jealousy. Upon hearing that Oroonoko plans to marry Imoinda, "his old Heart," according to the narrator, "like an extinguish'd Brand, most apt to take Fire, felt new Sparks of Love, and began to kindle; and now grown to his second Childhood, long'd with Impatience to behold this gay thing" (Behn 46). From the implication that the king has yet to see Oroonoko's bride, one can assume that his sudden feelings for her result more from a power struggle than from irrepressible love. After Imoinda and Oroonoko defy him, he sees her "as a polluted thing, wholly unfit for his embrace; nor would he resign her to his

grandson.” Rather, the king sells Imoinda into slavery, an insult “worse than Death” (58). Thus, both kings set into motion the painful fates of Oroonoko and Oedipus.

According to tradition, Oedipus’ fate derives from the gods. Silberman explains the difference between Oedipus’ diachronic and the gods’ synchronic view of time: “What seems contingent, accidental, and chaotic from the human perspective is the perfect consummation of divine will” (293). She says later that “the course of his entire life has been the working-out of the gods’ curse” (295). Nevertheless, Silberman expresses reluctance to blame the gods for Oedipus’ fate. She states, “Oedipus’ fate is shown to be the direct result of his actions” (296). E. R. Dodds’ essay, “*On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex*,” says of Oedipus, “No oracle said that he must discover the truth” (71). Michel Foucault, in “Truth and Juridical Forms,” describes him as “the one who knew too much” (24). Jocasta implores Oedipus, “Set your mind at rest. If it is a question of soothsayers, I tell you that you will find no man whose craft gives knowledge of the unknowable” (Sophocles 423). Clay Diskin devotes his article, “Unspeakable Words in Greek Tragedy,” to Teiresias’ reluctance to reveal the truth to Oedipus. Teiresias warns, “How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be when there’s no help in truth!” (Sophocles 414). The shepherd also shows reluctance to admit his knowledge of Oedipus’ birth (432-433). Despite the warnings, Oedipus presses toward his doom through want of knowledge. As Silberman says, he “pursue[s] his destiny to the catastrophe of full knowledge” (295).

If Oedipus’ fate derives partially from his own choice, Oroonoko’s fate certainly arises from his own decisions. After the king takes Imoinda into his harem, he hosts a party, which Oroonoko attends and at which Imoinda, with the other ladies, dances. Imoinda falls near Oroonoko, and he catches her in the king’s presence, having “quite

forgot[ten] that Reverence that was due to the Mistress of a King” and having “not the Presence of Mind of *Imoinda*” (Behn 54). Behn’s novella tells the story of a man who, contrary to the ideals of the Age of Reason, cannot control his passions. He leaves his army to a near defeat while he pines away for Imoinda (60). After his failed slave rebellion and having, for the first time, experienced the humiliation of a whip and the treatment of a slave, Oroonoko falls into a raging passion against Governor Byam, threatening revenge. He thinks of the danger that his revenge could cause for Imoinda, but rather than sacrifice revenge for his wife’s sake, Oroonoko plans, with her approval, to kill Imoinda before enacting his vengeance. Having done so, he falls into a fit of grief. One moment, he falls down by her dead body, unable to leave; the next, he struggles to free himself to fulfill the rest of his plan, lest her death should be in vain (Behn 94-96). In these moments of passion, Oroonoko, like Oedipus, resigns to a fate he seems powerless to change.

Oroonoko appears innately royal, even while attempting to conceal his royalty (Behn 2157). Richard Kroll’s article, “Tales of Love and Gallantry,” compares him to James II and the belief in his divine kingship. Moira Ferguson’s article, “Oroonoko: Birth of a Paradigm,” compares his violent death with that of Charles I (355), attributing his need for vengeance to his aristocratic nature (352). Ferguson argues against the more popular abolitionist interpretation of *Oroonoko*, suggesting, instead, that it argues specifically against the enslavement of African royalty, rather than of the race, as a whole (345-346). Behn creates, for Oroonoko, an in-born fate of royalty, which he cannot escape even as a slave.

As Oroonoko’s and Oedipus’ lives unfold, both struggling with a clash of fate and personal responsibility, both protagonists follow the paths that their fathers have set into motion, meeting similar bloody, violent ends. Oroonoko faces his captors a final time and

attempts to take his own life. The narrator says, “At that, he rip’d up his own Belly; and took his Bowels and pull’d them out . . . if before we thought him so beautiful a Sight, he was now so alter’d, that his Face was like a Death’s Head black’d over; nothing but Teeth, and Eyeholes” (97-98). A similar scene occurs at the end of Sophocles’ play, as Oedipus, having discovered the truth, finds that Jocasta has hanged herself. A messenger reports, “The King ripped from her gown the golden brooches that were her ornament, and raised them, and plunged them down straight into his own eyeballs” (435). Oroonoko’s fate continues even beyond his own self-mutilation. His executioners “cut his Ears, and his Nose, and burn’d them; he still Smoak’d on, as if nothing had touch’d him.” They continue, cutting off his arms and legs, quartering him and sending his body parts to various plantations (Behn 99).

Rather than present a picture of a mighty, royal king, Sophocles presents Oedipus as a helpless, wretched victim from beginning to end. The king’s opening speech describes a city in mourning: “The breath of incense rises from the city with a sound of prayer and lamentation” (Sophocles 407). Even his promise to discover the source of Thebes’ plague, he softens with a doubtful, “if he can” (408), and his promise to discover and avenge the death of Laius, he combines with a fearful, “Whoever killed King Laius might—who knows?—Decide at any moment to kill me as well” (411). The play’s conclusion offers no redemption. In answer to Oedipus’ wish that he had died as an infant, the leader of the chorus says, “I would have wished the same,” adding that “you were better dead than alive and blind.” Oedipus describes himself as “thrice miserable” (437). Creon advises, “Think no longer that you are in command here, but rather think how, when you were, you served your own destruction” (440).

In contrast to Oedipus, Oroonoko serves as a heroic figure throughout Behn's entire story. In her dedication of *Oroonoko*, Behn claims, "This is a true Story, of a Man Gallant enough to merit your Protection." She describes Oroonoko as a "Royal Slave:" "Tis purely the Merit of my Slave that must render it worthy of the Honour it begs." Her opening sentence, "I do not pretend, in giving you the History of this *Royal Slave*, to entertain my Reader with the Adventures of a feign'd *Hero*," reinforces the implications of her novella's subtitle, *The Royal Slave A True History* (37). Behn reveals first about Oroonoko that his testimony merits credibility. She argues for the truth of her story that "what I cou'd not be Witness of, I receiv'd from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History" (37). As Vernon Guy Dickson states, in "Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn's 'Oroonoko,'" the authority of Behn's work rests on "the unimpeachable moral character of Oroonoko" (576). Behn describes Oroonoko as "great and just," one who experienced affliction at the death of the military general who gave his life for him and whom he succeeded as general. His first encounter with Imoinda results from his respect for this general, her father, as he feels the need to pay his respects to her (42-44).

When the king abducts Imoinda, Oroonoko laments, "[W]ere she in wall'd Cities, or confin'd from me in Fortifications . . . I wou'd venture through any Hazard to free her." In his case, however, he expresses feelings of powerlessness:

*"If I wou'd wait tedious Years, till Fate shou'd bow the old King to his Grave; even that wou'd not leave me Imoinda free; but still that Custom that makes it so vile a Crime for a Son to marry his Father's Wives or Mistresses, wou'd hinder my Happiness; unless I wou'd either ignobly set an ill Precedent to my Successors, or*

*abandon my Country, and fly with her to some unknown World, who never heard our Story” (48).*

Oroonoko finds himself victim of another’s dishonorable acts, which he cannot imagine himself having the right to defy. As Dickson notes, Oroonoko “is not just concerned about Imoinda, his circumstances, or his own fate . . . . He seems equally repulsed about setting a poor example as abandoning his story, losing the chance to set an example of any kind” (582-583). Oroonoko’s innocence makes him vulnerable to a second trick as he accepts a slave trader’s invitation to see his ship and becomes a prisoner. The captain expresses his regrets and promises to free Oroonoko at the next land stop, and “*Oroonoko, whose Honour was such as he never had violated a Word in his Life himself,*” immediately believes the captain. He then takes extreme offense at the captain’s hesitance to believe that he will act peaceably without fetters. The captain explains that Oroonoko lacks the motivation of a Christian, who believes everlasting torment will repay him for dishonesty, to which Oroonoko replies, “*Is that all the Obligation he has to be Just to his Oath . . .? Let him know I Swear by my Honour, which to violate,*” Oroonoko continues, “*wou’d not only render me contemptible and despised by all brave and honest Men, and so give my self perpetual pain, but it wou’d be eternally offending and diseasing all Mankind*” (Behn 64-65).

Behn continues to establish Oroonoko’s heroic nature, not only emphasizing his character, but also his excellent skill and courage as a military captain, as well as his natural beauty. Because of “his natural Inclination to Arms,” the narrator says that Oroonoko became one “of the most expert Captains, and bravest Soldiers, that ever saw the Field of *Mars*: so that he was ador’d as the Wonder of all that World” at the young age of seventeen. She describes him as having “a native Beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy Race,



that he struck an Awe and Reverence, even in those that knew not his Quality” (42). Dickson describes Oroonoko as representative of “a paragon of body, language, and character” (581), asserting that “Oroonoko himself always embodies divinity” (584). When he leads in battle, Oroonoko “appear[s] like some Divine Power descended to save his Country from Destruction . . . and did such things as will not be believ’d that Humane Strength cou’d perform” (Behn 61). Trefry sees that he is “something greater than he confess’d” (67), and the slaves Oroonoko meets in Surinam “cast themselves at his feet, crying out, in their language, *Live, O King! Long live, O King!* And kissing his Feet, paid him even Divine Homage” (70). Anita Pacheco’s article, “Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” attributes Oroonoko’s natural virtue, strength, and beauty to his “exalted birth” (495). She also points out that “his central motive for instigating the slave revolt is a concern to vindicate the honor of his royal line—an end he can achieve only by inciting the other slaves to rebellion” (498). Even his miserable end signifies his strength, valor, and royalty. The account of his death reflects Surinam natives’ method of choosing a war captain. Behn’s narrator describes a competition in which a challenger “Cuts off his Nose, and throws it contemptibly on the ground.” His competitor responds by doing “something to himself that he thinks surpasses him, and perhaps deprives himself of Lips and an Eye.” The narrator says that “they Slash on till one gives out, and many have dy’d in this Debate.” The reader receives a glimpse into Oroonoko’s opinion of this practice, “a sort of Courage too Brutal to be applauded by our Black Hero; nevertheless he express’d his Esteem of ‘em” (84). Thus, by cutting off and burning his ears and nose, Oroonoko’s executioners challenge him to prove himself a warrior. Oroonoko’s response demonstrates his resolve, and in

Pacheco's article, he earns the title of a martyr (503-504), as he accepts the challenge and reclaims the honor of his noble birth.

Oroonoko's valiant death distinguishes him from Oedipus, who blinds himself out of fear, saying, "I do not know how I could bear the sight of my father, when I came to the house of death, or my mother: for I have sinned against them both" (Sophocles 437). Whereas his audience may perceive his actions as foolish, Oroonoko "cannot forbear" to pursue Imoinda, freedom, and honor, even to his death. He represents the concept of passion, especially of love, as a "loss of self." According to Edgar Landgraf's article, "Romantic Love and the Enlightenment: From Gallantry and Seduction to Authenticity and Self-Validation," society has rejected this view of love in favor of love as "self-validation." Landgraf suggests, against the more popular belief that the shift in perspectives on love and passion occurred after World War II, that the change began during the Enlightenment, culminating in the Age of Romanticism (29-30). As an early Enlightenment work, *Oroonoko* reflects the traditional view of love and passion, celebrating his lack of restraint, from beginning to end, not as a sign of weakness or a contradiction of Enlightenment humanism, but as empowerment. Unlike Oedipus, who believes he must resign himself to a life of misery, Oroonoko, as an enlightened individual, chooses his own fate. He recognizes Imoinda's value and the value of freedom and willingly loses himself.

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# The Powerful Presence of Absence: Addie Bundren's Desire for "Doing" Fulfilled in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

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*By Nancy Barnard*

Addie Bundren in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* claims that, "words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and...doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other" (Faulkner 173). Cormac McCarthy epitomizes this statement in *The Road*, making central to his story a winding horizontal road, along which the two protagonists continually progress, while they themselves possess no names—no empty words to dissolve vertically into the air. Aside from brief necessary dialog of short declarative responses, one must define the nameless characters only by what they do, just as Addie and Cash do not need the word for love as they embody love itself. While Faulkner creates a world painfully haunted by the emptiness and superfluity of words, McCarthy creates one devoid of nearly all conventional names, stripping the prose down to the bare necessities. Thus, one can read *The Road* as a response to Faulkner's novel, fulfilling Addie's desire for life without unnecessary words. Both novels use pervasive powerful symbolism. Amongst the distant voices interwoven throughout Faulkner's novel, many recurring images appear throughout, connecting Faulkner's central themes of the novel. Unlike Faulkner's novel, though, which uses the physical presence of animals to symbolize the absence of substantial relationships between the characters, McCarthy uses symbols in absentia to emphasize the powerful *presence* of human bonds in the midst of a desolate and horrific landscape.

In Addie's section of *As I Lay Dying*, she makes clear her strong distaste for words, which she considers empty replacements for the actual substance of life and love. In the text, she writes, "That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (Faulkner 171). This declaration manifests itself copiously throughout the Bundren family's journey to Jefferson for Addie's burial. Clearly the family suffers from communication issues—or rather, perhaps, too many words with too few reinforcing actions. Faulkner's loosely structured narration perhaps also analogizes the characters' relationships with each other.

Ironically, Darl, whose narrative sections perhaps contain the most eloquently detailed prose, possesses an emotionless stare that disturbs so many, and abnormal behavior which lands him in a Jackson asylum. Yet his and the many other voices often give way to symbolic images of animals peppering their narratives and interrupting their human dialogues. Christopher T. White, in an article titled, "The Modern Magnetic Animal," discusses the many occurrences of animal imagery employed throughout the novel. As he points out, perhaps the most obvious image asserts itself in the young Vardaman's one sentence narrative section, "My mother is a fish" (Faulkner 84), in which the boy, traumatized by the very idea of death, associates Addie's death with the fish he killed earlier in the day. Other animals become Addie's replacements as well, as is the case with Jewel's horse, which he ultimately sells to pay for her burial. Horses, in fact, become prominent symbols throughout the novel, appearing at crucial, emotionally charged moments in the story, as representatives of the animal voice usurping human linguistic abilities. After seeing his mother die, Vardaman goes to the barn to take out his anger on Dr. Peabody's team, yet he first has an encounter with Jewel's horse, which Faulkner describes: "Then I can breathe

again, in the warm smelling. I enter the stall, trying to touch him, and then I can cry...I can smell the life running up from under my hands, up my arms, and then I can leave the stall” (54). In Dewey Dell’s narrative describing her visit to the barn during this same incident, she carries on a conversation with the cow which in some ways, analogizes her own problems of concealing her pregnancy. In the text, she says, “She nuzzles at me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress...moaning. ‘You got to wait a little while. Then I’ll tend to you’” (Faulkner 61). According to White, “Dewey Dell’s desperation, her struggle alone to hide and bear her secret, is juxtaposed with the cow’s desperate need to be milked, relieved of its own burden. Similarly juxtaposed is Dewey Dell’s urgent confession—her utterance of Lefe’s name—and the cow’s impressible lowing” (89).

This tension between sophisticated language and animal presence culminates in Darl’s description of the crossing of the river, in which he constantly vacillates between eloquent description and literal delineation of the bodies of the horses and mules. Darl writes, “The head of one mule appears, its eyes wide; it looks back at us for an instant, making a sound almost human. The head vanishes again” (Faulkner 149). The juxtaposing of this description with Darl’s elaborate prose demonstrates the intense emotion for which words are simply inadequate. Perhaps, then, by using animals as symbolic voices throughout the text, Faulkner agrees with Addie’s declaration of the superficiality of words, indicating the tense feeling and emotion manifested in the fearful cries of the animals who cannot speak.

The symbolic animal presence also serves to illustrate life as defined by opposites. They become double images; their assertive presence symbolizes an emptiness—a lack of real communication, which is ironically most prevalent in an excess of refined language.

Thus, the lack of words of the animals, asserts their preponderating presence over the empty, falsifying words of the human characters in the story, which reveals their lack of living. In Addie's section of the story, she beautifully analogizes this dualism, as well as her concept of the relationship between words and actions, distinguishing the two by their vertical and horizontal natures, respectively. Perhaps, then, the imagery of the mules and horses again come into play here; horses also symbolize power and motion—they race across the earth, much like Darl's description of the silhouette of Jewel and his horse. The horses asserting themselves in various points throughout the story represent animals who “go along the earth,” while the members of the Bundren family seem terribly still, isolated, and trapped by words that go idly up “in a thin line.” Addie wants most desperately to simply be—to live and have relationships with people that are deeper and transcend words—unlike the empty substance of Anse, filling the shape of his name. Constance Pierce, in an article titled, “Being, Knowing, and Saying,” writes, “Addie knows that we can never hope to create what we ‘are’ (that is, the Being she thinks we have beneath our social fictions), or even what we think, in words, the arbitrary symbols conceived by people who have never experienced the idea or act they are trying to tag” (295). Throughout her narrative section, Addie symbolizes her desires for “being” both with animal imagery, such as the lonely cries of the wild geese, as well as with that of blood, which represents actual relationships, and contrasts words, which represent hypocrisy. Addie's desire for wholeness and physical connection first manifests itself in her perverted obsession with punishing her young students so that, as she says, she is “something in [their] secret and selfish life, who [has] marked [their] blood with [her] own for ever and ever” (Faulkner 170). This contrasts strangely her own child's traumatic response to her death, as he describes in his first section,



“[The fish] is cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls” (Faulkner 53). In a somewhat unsettling way, causing the children to shed blood symbolizes for Addie some form of a physical connection not bound by empty words. Similarly, the absence of blood on Vardaman’s hands and clothes symbolizes his jarring realization of the permanence of Addie’s absence.

Blood represents both living and dying, which in Addie’s mind relate far more to each other than do either of these activities with words. Addie wants a physical connection—a relationship that goes deeper than useless words, and which Anse can never satisfy, as he lives by only the word of love. Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman, in turn, express themselves most deeply and come closest to “being” when they encounter the physicality of animals, more so, even, than when they use actual language.

Words also lose their significance in McCarthy’s novel. As “The Man” and “The Boy” progress along the empty road, pushing the shopping cart holding their only possessions, and fighting to survive in the post-apocalyptic ruins, the reader soon notices the absence of an aspect generally taken for granted in a text—proper names. The characters’ anonymity forces the reader to identify them for what they do. Not only do they not have names, we also find no physical descriptions of them, save their filthiness and deteriorating bodies; we know nothing of their individual physical attributes, a noticeable absence given the verisimilitude applied to the landscape around them.

The closest thing to a name The Man and The Boy possess is the title, the “good guys,” which clearly does not refer exclusively to them, as they continually express hope of meeting other “good guys,” who share their responsibility of “carrying the fire.” By giving The Man and The Boy no individual names to compete with “good guys,” then, McCarthy

defines them only as manifestations of goodness; “good” becomes a noun, rather than an adjective, yet one denoting action, rather than a descriptive title. As a result, their “goodness”—the father and son’s intense love for each other and will to survive—manifests itself in action verbs, usurping the expected need for proper nouns. Ashley Kunsa, in an article titled, ““Maps of the World in Its Becoming,”” carries this idea further, suggesting that the absence of names both for the two protagonists, as well as for the few other human beings they encounter reinforces the notion of good and evil, in McCarthy’s reliance on personal pronouns (often without antecedents) in potentially confusing dialogs and encounters. She cites the scene in which The Man shoots a bandit attempting to kill The Boy. During the ensuing struggle, McCarthy oscillates between The Man, The Boy, and the bandit, identified only by pronouns, and alternately refers to both the father and the bandit as “the man,” with no distinction between the two (McCarthy 66). Kunsa writes, “The confusion we might first feel (or at least expect) about pronouns and agency, about who is doing what, is subverted because the characters’ actions make clear who they are” (Kunsa 61). Thus, in this and similar passages, McCarthy deliberately confuses nominal identity of characters to emphasize an identity of their actions. McCarthy’s grammar, even, manifests this idea, in his short, terse dialogs lacking conventional identifiers, such as quotation marks and indicators of who is speaking. Just as the reader must determine identity by action alone in the scene with the bandit, one must separate a character’s voice from the surrounding text merely by its content—by the substance of the character’s words.

The clear separation of characters’ actions both from each other, as well as from their contexts in the absence of grammatical distinctions analogizes The Man and The Boy’s distinction from their own bleak context. McCarthy does not reserve his anonymity to the

people in the story. For all McCarthy's vivid descriptions, he leaves few clues to the actual setting of the story; we only know what the landscape is like in a host of rich detail, but not what it is. Just as the action verbs replace the proper nouns which would refer to The Man and The Boy, the adjectives describing the nature of the landscape replace the specificity of the setting. McCarthy uses various aspects of the landscape, though, to symbolize the irrelevance of the names used to define things before the apocalyptic disaster. For instance, the metaphor of "I'll be in the neighborhood," to indicate "nearby," means nothing to The Boy, born after the extinction of such luxuries as neighborhoods. Laura Gruber Godfrey, in an article titled, "'The World He'd Lost,'" illustrates McCarthy's placement of certain iconic plants, such as mayapple, pipsissewa, and ginseng, generally epitomizing luscious vegetation, as The Man and The Boy trudge through the blackened woods. She also points out the placement of the cannibals' slaughtering, evidenced by the "shapes of dried blood in the stubble grass," and the "frieze of human heads" (90-91), in the middle of an "orchard," a word previously connoting life and nourishment. These allusions of "ruined" landscape, as well as the mention of the word "meadow" amongst the "charred and limbless trunks of trees and the sagging hands of blind wire," reveal the haunting confrontation of the new substance of things with the old names rendered completely empty and irrelevant. Names, then, do pervade the landscape, though absent when referencing the characters. Thus, the charred landscape contrasts the saga of The Man and The Boy, as it has many empty names, yet no longer possesses the substance to which those names once referred; the protagonists have no *names*, yet they embody the act of love and the meaning of life in their "doing."

Another symbol whose absence McCarthy asserts throughout, is that of color. One feels this absence in McCarthy's ubiquitous use of achromatic adjectives, as in "the first gray light" (4), the "thin black trees" (37), or "the gray beach" (215). McCarthy writes of The Man's reflections as he looks out across the road in the opening scene, "He studied what he could see...Looking for anything of color" (4). The alternative to this felt absence, though, appears in The Man's dreams and flashbacks, such as the memories of his wife, "His pale bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy" (McCarthy 18). McCarthy connects the only other remnants of color with The Boy, such as his yellow truck or golden hair "good to house a god" (McCarthy 75), perhaps presenting The Boy as a redemptive character. Like the empty names of the landscape, color words, then, become adjectives rendered meaningless in this new, empty world, yet somehow kept alive by the people in the story.

The one symbol, though, that actually materializes at the novel's end, ironically is a fish which symbolizes the life and posterity of The Boy, just as Vardaman equates *his* fish with his dead mother. Yet unlike Vardaman's, the fish begin in absentia—similar to Vardaman's cut up pieces of "not fish," and "not blood." Early in the novel as the two encounter a lake, The Man flatly responds to The Boy's question of the possibility of it housing fish with, "No. There's nothing in the lake" (McCarthy 20). The seemingly extinct fish appear only in the last passage, in which McCarthy writes, "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimped softly in the flow" (286-287). The trout "appear" just at the end, as The Boy finds a family to take him in and, though his father has died and the world remains the same gray, bleak, unfriendly place it has been, he has hope of continued protection and camaraderie; he continues to "carry the fire."

The trout, like the benevolence of The Boy, and like The Man's love and protection of his son, become the tiny threads of redemption, whose presence dominates the many absences felt throughout the novel. Godfrey writes of the uselessness of previously given names, "How can the father communicate with his son when so many of the meanings of the physical and emotional world he knew have been erased?" (170). The Man himself confirms this query, observing, "The names of things slowly followed those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true...How much was gone already?" (McCarthy 89). Yet clearly throughout the novel, The Man does effectively communicate to his son. He tells him everything that really matters by carrying him, doing with less food so The Boy can have more, and always standing between his son and any potential dangers. Both protagonists, especially The Boy, can see beyond the useless names of the past. According to Stefan Skrimshire, in an article titled, "'There Is No God and We Are His Prophets': Deconstructing Redemptions in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," "If there is redemption in *The Road*, perhaps all we can say of it is that it is the ability to ask questions of the future...the ability to imagine that what one sees now is not all that there is" (10). Addie Bundren envisions a world of only "doing," and one without empty words; McCarthy creates a world in which the actions of nameless characters preponderate the charred substance filling the empty names of their surroundings. Though McCarthy gives his story a much more horrific situation than that of *As I Lay Dying*, perhaps the charred blackened landscape of *The Road* affords far more redemption than any of the characters in Faulkner's novel ever experience.

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# At the Mountains of Madness: L.P. Lovecraft's Homage to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*

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*By Alan Brown*

Most scholars agree that Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft are the greatest writers of horror fiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were primarily short story writers who wrote only one short novel. Anyone who has read the short stories of H.P. Lovecraft is aware of the influence Edgar Allan Poe had on his works. Lovecraft admitted his debt to Poe in his letters. For example, in a letter written to Reinhart Kleiner, Lovecraft said, “When I write stories, Edgar Allan Poe is my model” (20 January 1916). In another letter to Reinhart Kleiner, Lovecraft called Poe his “God of fiction (2 February 1916).” Lovecraft told Clark Ashton Smith, “Since Poe affected me most of all horror writers, I can never feel that a tale starts our right unless it has something of his manner” (18 November 1930). Lovecraft was more specific about Poe’s influence in his letter to Vernon Shea: “Poe has probably influenced me more than any other one person. If I have ever been able to approximate that kind of thrill, it is only because he paved the way by creating a whole atmosphere and method which lesser men can follow with relative ease” (19 June 1931). Lovecraft’s similarity to Poe extends beyond the fact that they are the greatest writers of American horror fiction in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively. Poe’s influence on Lovecraft’s work is most noticeable in his novel *At the Mountains of Madness*, which bears a striking resemblance to Poe’s *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*.

A few installments of Poe's *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* was first serialized in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The novella was not published in its entirety until July 1838 (Sova 167). Apparently, Poe turned to the longer form because of his lack of success as a writer of short stories. This strange little book was greeted with largely unfavorable reviews by the critics of his day, largely because of the novel's rambling plot. Critic Daniel Hoffman points out that many of his contemporaries viewed Poe's venture into the longer form as "shapeless and chaotic, a sprawling mass of compulsive repetitions" (261). Even Poe called it a "very silly book" (Sova 167). Hoffman disagrees: "I would not hold that Poe is everywhere in control of what he writes but that he desperately tries to control what is almost beyond control. And that struggle to master the uncontrollable is the very theme of Pym's narrative" (261).

The novel begins with Arthur Gordon Pym and a respectable friend of his, Augustus, who hit the bars and then go for a moonlight cruise in a sloop, which is crushed by a whaler. After barely surviving their ordeal, Pym stows away on a whaler, the *Grampus*, which is owned by Augustus' grandfather and commanded by Augustus' father. Pym hides in the hold until Augustus informs him that the ship has been taken over by mutineers and that Augustus escaped only because he befriended one of the mutineers, Dirk Peters. Pym, Peters, and Augustus eventually take over control of the *Grampus*. All of the mutineers are killed except for Richard Parker, who serves as the pilot of the ship. After surviving a turbulent storm, the men are wracked by hunger and thirst. In desperation, the men draw straws and kill and eat Parker. Augustus dies from his wounds he suffered in the struggle to re-take the *Grampus*.



The only survivors of the *Grampus*, Pym and Peters are rescued by a ship out of Liverpool called the *Jane Guy*. The pair becomes part of the crew, who hunt seal calves and seals for fur. After sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, the captain steers his ship southward to the unexplored terrain of the Antarctic. The ship arrives at a mysterious island called Tsalal. Even though the island is close to the South Pole, it has a warm climate. Tsala is inhabited by a tribe of black natives who detest the color white. Pym is fascinated by the island's previously undiscovered species of flora and fauna. The water surrounding the island is weird as well, a thick mass streaked with multicolored veins. The seemingly friendly natives attack the crew in a narrow gorge just prior to the *Jane Guy's* departure. They slaughter the crew and burn the *Jane Grey*.

Pym and Peters escape to the mountains, where they find a labyrinth of tunnels in the hills. As they explore this subterranean world, they marvel at the hieroglyphs on the walls. Urged on by hunger, the men steal a canoe and escape with one of the natives they have taken prisoner, Nu-Nu. The water becomes milky-white as the pirogue drifts farther south. A few days after their departure from the island, they encounter a shower of ashes just before entering a huge cataract of fog. Suddenly, the wall of fog splits open to reveal a huge shrouded white figure. At this point, the novel ends abruptly.

H.P. Lovecraft's homage to *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, the novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, was written in February and March 1931. It was originally rejected by *Weird Tales* but was eventually published in the February/March 1936 issue of *Astounding Stories*. Lovecraft admiration for Poe is revealed in his insertion of Lines 15-19 from Poe's "Ulalume":

The lavas that restlessly roll

Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek  
In the ultimate climes of that pole—  
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek  
In the realms of that boreal pole”(15-19)

Poe’s reference to the fictional mount Yaanek—which sounds like a Lovecraft word--and to the “boreal pole” serve as a sort of introduction to *At the Mountains of Madness*. Like the concluding section of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, Lovecraft’s book deals with a journey to a frozen landscape. Whereas Poe’s protagonists travel in wooden ships, Lovecraft’s explorers fly planes. The narrative is related by the geologist William Dyer, a geology professor at Miskatonic University, who leads an expedition to Antarctica in September 1930. An advance group led by Professor Lake discovered the remains of fourteen primeval life forms, eight of which are almost perfectly preserved. By the time Dyer and a graduate student named Danforth reach Lake’s base camp, they are shocked to find the tents and equipment in ruins and most of the men and dogs mutilated almost beyond recognition. Dyer and Danforth also notice that the frozen carcasses of the eight strange creatures are missing and that the bodies of a dog and one of the men have been dissected.

Horrified by the devastation of Lake’s camp, Dyer and Danforth return to their plane and fly across the nearby mountains, which are actually the outers of an ancient, abandoned stone city. The explorers learn from the hieroglyphic murals on the walls that the original inhabitants, dubbed “The Elder Things” by Dyer, erected their cities with the assistance of primitive creatures called “Shoggoths.” As time passes, the Shoggoths rebel, even though they were created to serve the Elder Things. Upon further examination, the men notice that the etchings and carvings on the walls become increasingly haphazard and that the murals

appear to depict a horror beyond the mountains. Upon analyzing the ancient writing and artwork, Dyer and Danforth conclude that the frozen creatures unearthed by Lake's group are the remains of eight of the "Elder Things."

Following their examination of the frozen corpse of one member of the lake expedition, Gedney, and his missing dog, the duo proceeds down a tunnel into the subterranean region depicted in the murals. The men find the remains of several "Elder Things" killed in battle as well as blind, six-foot-tall penguins which seem to have been bred as food. When they stumble upon a black, bubbling mass which they assume is a Shoggoth, Dyer and Danforth rush back through the tunnel and board their plane. While they are flying over the ruins of the ancient stone city, Danforth looks through the window and sees something that drives him mad. Dyer ends his narrative with a warning to future explorers to avoid this site at all costs.

The influence of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* on *At the Mountains of Madness* goes beyond the fact that Lovecraft mentions Poe's novel twice in his book. Aside from the fact that both novels deal with arduous journeys to Arctic wastelands, they also expound on the Hollow Earth Theory, which British astronomer Edmond Halley put forth in 1692. He theorized that the Earth was composed of two concentric shells which enveloped an innermost core. He also believed that life thrived within the inner core. John Cleves Symmes, Jr., an American Army officer and lecturer, developed Halley's theory even further. He described the earth as consisting of five concentric spheres. His unique contribution to Hollow earth lore was his theory that the Earth's surface was connected to the inner Earth by polar openings, which came to be known as "Symmes Holes." Symmes even proposed setting up an expedition to the North Pole to search for the "Symmes Holes"

and thereby prove his theory (The Unmuseum). Symmes, received the support of U.S. President John Quincy Adams, but Adams left office before the expedition could be arranged. Adams' successor, Andrew Jackson, was not a believer in Symmes' Hollow Earth Theory, and he canceled the plans for an arctic expedition (Roadside America). The explorer Jeremiah Reynolds, who was one of Symmes' most renowned followers and who published an article on Symmes' Hollow Earth Theory, was an important influence on Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Poe reviewed Reynolds' *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and the South Seas* in January 1837 while working for *The Messenger* (Meyers 96). Poe could quite possibly have been thinking about the theories when he wrote his novel.

Another element that Lovecraft transfers from *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* to *At the Mountains of Madness* is the white birds. In Poe's novel, "Tekeli-li" is the cry of the huge white birds that flew out of the vapory white curtain of the South. "Tekeli-li" is also the exclamation of the sailors' Tslaian captive, Nu-Nue, upon seeing the white linen on board the canoe. The color white, for the Tslanians, is abhorrent, possibly because the fearsome creature that surfaces in the end of the novel is also white. In Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*, the explorers encounter six-foot-tall albino penguins, which scatter when the musical piping of "Tekeli-li" echoes through the chamber. Lovecraft even emphasizes that this strange cry is a link between his novel and Poe's: "It will be remembered that in that fantastic tale [*The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*], there is a word of unknown but terrible and prodigious significance connected with the Antarctic and screamed eternally by the gigantic, spectrally snowy birds of that malign region's core. 'Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!'" (88). In both novels, the strange cry presages the appearances of a

primordial being. After the large white birds screaming “Tekeli-li” and fly away from the boat, Poe’s protagonists behold a “a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of snow” (371). In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the explorers witness the scattering of the panic-stricken penguins just before encountering what Lovecraft calls “the utter, objective, embodiment of the fantastic novelist’s thing that should not be” (91-92), a reference to Poe’s fantastic being. Like Nu-Nu in the conclusion of Poe’s novel, Danforth in *At the Mountains of Madness* is pushed to the brink of madness when he shrieks, “Tekeli-li!” as he and the narrator fly over the mountains on their way home.

By writing a more linear narrative, Lovecraft escapes the charge leveled at Poe’s work that it was a silly, rambling novel with an abrupt, enigmatic conclusion. Critics deplored Poe’s inclusion of gruesome details, such as the removal of a leg from a decomposing corpse, simply for the shock effect. They also attacked Poe for presenting his tale as a true story. Because Poe’s name did not appear in the first edition, readers were led to believe that the book was written by A. Gordon Pym (Sova 167). A reviewer for the *Metropolitan Magazine* noted that “when palmed upon the public as a true thing, [Poe’s story] cannot appear in any other light than that of a bungling business—an impudent attempt at imposing on the credulity of the ignorant” (Thomas and Jackson 258). Indeed, some of Poe’s readers, especially those in England, assumed that parts of the novella were true (Bittner 133). Poe’s seeming acceptance of the Hollow Earth theory would have been particularly appealing for those readers who were looking for substantiation of Halley’s, Reynolds’, and Symmes’ theories. For Lovecraft, however, the Hollow Earth Theory seems to have been nothing more than the fanciful basis for a continuation of his Cthulu

Mythos. Devotees of Lovecraft who recognize Lovecraft's references to the monsters of his own creation, such as the Old One, accept the tale as a superior addition to the Cthulu mythos.

Whereas Poe devotes only the last quarter of his novel to the arctic exploration, Lovecraft's entire novel is set in the Arctic. Poe's protagonists end up in the Arctic. Lovecraft's explorers, on the other hand, go there intentionally with a definite purpose in mind. Poe's characters are concerned primarily with their own survival, making their encounters with the strange beings of the underworld seem random, even though Pym does seem to share Dyer's fascination with the underworld. For the most part, the survivors view the denizens of the subterranean labyrinth as obstacles to avoid or, if necessary, overcome. Lovecraft's scientists, however, travel to the arctic to collect rock and soil samples. Their scientific curiosity is fascinated by the strange beings they stumble upon. The narrator, Professor, is intrigued by the barrel-shaped fossils the team discovers to mythical creatures mentioned in *The Necronomicon*, Lovecraft's fictional grimoire], which first appeared in his short story "The Hound."

In a sense, the ending of *At the Mountains of Madness* is a vast improvement over the conclusion of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*. In a letter to August Derleth, Lovecraft wrote that he was trying to achieve with his ending an effect similar to what Poe accomplished in *Pym* (Lovecraft's letter to August Derleth, May 16, 1931). However, Poe's ending is much more unsatisfying than Lovecraft's. Scholar Harry Lee Poe calls the conclusion of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* weak because "it didn't match the kind of clear ending they expected from a novel" (72). Some fans of Poe's fiction who are desperate to extol the virtues of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* suggest that the conclusion is intentionally murky

because Poe was inviting the readers to engage their imaginations and speculate on the meaning of the ending. The fate of the narrator is also troubling. Some critics have suggested that Pym died in the end and that the narrative is being told posthumously by someone else. Whereas Poe's ending is best described as perplexing, Lovecraft's conclusion is a logical resolution of the sequence of events that led up to it.

Lovecraft received his inspiration from Poe's flawed attempt at novel writing to create a work that is, in the minds of Lovecraft fans, superior to that of the master of 19<sup>th</sup> American horror fiction. Even though many of Poe's fans view his novella as a misfire, one cannot deny its power and influence. Scholars like Patrick F. Quinn have noted parallels between Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* (Quinn 585). Melville's discussion of "the horror of whiteness" in Chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale," appears to be particularly evocative of Poe's novella. French science fiction writer Jules Verne published a sequel to Poe's novella titled *An Antarctic Mystery*. Indeed, Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* may have been inspired by *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* (Sova 238) Without a doubt, though, no novel written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been influenced more by Poe's *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* than Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*.

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# The “The Returnee and the Struggle for Home: Returning to a Place I’ve Never Been to Find a Home I’ve Never Known”

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*By helen j. crump\**

According to Jana Evans Braziel, “Remembrance, or historical memory, is a creative act of diasporic longing, if not the actual recovery of a lost ancestral African homeland, yet it remains a necessary creative act” (17). Thus, Braziel emphasizes the interconnectivity of remembrance, the link between memory and diasporicity (diasporic identity), specifically suggesting that having or accessing historical or ancestral memory becomes a means of fulfilling or satiating the “diasporic longing” of the diasporic being. Such longing is often characterized as a desire for a sense of origin, a sense of connection that extends across generations and contemporary manifestations of home. Historical memory is or becomes, as Braziel indicates, “a necessary creative act” in that the character or diasporic being has to “imagine” or create a sense of ancestral homeland or origin based on having access to the following: 1) any potential knowledge of the point of origin, typically based on historical narratives & research; 2) potential knowledge based on information shared or passed down directly from an ancestor who once actually lived in or at the point of origin or based on information derived from stories about ancestors (specifically or generally speaking) and shared with descendants; and 3) an imagined sense of homeland based on a combination of

\*Dr. crump’s name appears in lowercase letters at her request.

literary and historical narratives, potential familial or ancestral narratives, and one's own imagined sense of what "home" would be. Of course, one of the potential issues of this last instance is that too often the "imagined" or created space is constructed based on "past" ideas or representations of the point of origin rather than on what "home" looks and feels like in the current moment. It exemplifies what Caroline Rody in *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fiction of History* refers to as "history [as] reimagined in the form of a romance" (3), as based on an idealistic sense of homeland / motherland / origin.

Therefore, the sense or expectation of return can result in disappointment rather than accomplishment, rejection rather than welcome. For, similar to a river (represented in Sandra Jackson Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born*), if we view time and one's own initial self as the river and home as that "stepping in place" we wish to recover, then time and self are constantly moving, shifting, and evolving based on experiences, contexts, and more. Thus, the diasporic being can never step into the same sense of home twice. Even more, the diasporan can never step into the same notion and narrative of home that an ancestor, generations removed, knew and lived in. And this seems to answer the question of whether one can "go home again." But of course, this response, again, depends on the definition and anticipations of "home," as well as of "returnee," that are under consideration.

Taken from the perspective of the diasporic being, this discussion of the returnee and considerations of home raise a number of questions, specifically the questions of 1) return and the possibility of return; 2) how return works for diasporic beings who were never "technically" at home in the first place – specifically, those born outside of the "place of

origin” and, even more, those who are several generations removed from the last ancestor who was actually from the “place of origin”; and 3) the meaning of “home” – in light of those who are considered to be “returning” and for those who have “never been” (to) home in the first place. And if one has never been to home or known home, how does one know it or claim it as “home”? What would one expect or be looking for in the concept and experience of “home”?

Angeletta K.M. Gourdine seems to take up this question in her text *The Difference Place Makes: Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora Identity*. She examines the significance of location or place to the concept of diaspora identity, noting that “diaspora places [are] always linked to the past” (3). Consequently, then, for the diasporan being, the historicity of African heritage informs how those in the Diaspora view the concept of home: what it means, how it influences the diasporan being, and the context in which “home” is understood, imagined, and expected to be should the diasporan consider a “return” home. Even more then for one born and living in the Diaspora, that ancestry, as well as the idea of return, is informed by ancestral memory that has been passed down across generations. This passing down tends to take place through a sharing or teaching of oral histories, storytelling, letter writing, photography, quilting, and the like. In this way, from the ancestors and the place of origin to the current generation of descendants in the Diaspora, ancestral memory or remembrance is constructed and subsequently inherited based on the narratives created and transferred across each generation of lineal descent.

Ultimately, remembering (in something of a broad form, one that is based on actual memory of a place, as well as memory based on, constructed from, and expanded in response to someone else’s shared narratives about home) is often key to the process of

returning to a place, whether that be “home” – in its various manifestations and meanings – or just to a location one has been previously, and this could be a literal or figurative, physical or psychological visit or return. In either case, one’s sense of place stems from one’s knowledge of that location and memories of the place. Too, it originates from one’s awareness of that space and any abstract, potential, and/or real memories or knowledge one might have of a particular place. And for the returnee, such connections influence how or whether one sees that place as home. For the “returnee” who has never been to “home” (such as with many diasporic beings generations removed from an initial, ancestral experience of movement / migration from the continent), never been to that place of origin, home takes on a nuanced meaning, one of what Saidiya Hartman and others refer to as an “imagined” homeland or motherland. It suggests a person’s or character’s attempt at a return across time and space, of sorts, to a place of origin, a mythical place where blacks of the diaspora might recover a lost or disrupted part of their identity (as with my earlier reference to the river and the impossibility of stepping into the same place twice).

For characters in *The River Where Blood Is Born*, specifically those who are several generations removed from the last time their lineage was actually at home, the sense of home is based on familial historical / ancestral narratives of where, what, and who home was and on a generational narrative of separation, removal, loss, and absence that has affected the later generations and left them with a complicated and disrupted sense of identity and belonging. Even more, in Jackson-Opoku’s novel, the narrative of home is very gender-specific in that home and the narratives associated with it are positioned around the women in the novel, the matrilineage at the center of the text and its construction of (a matrilineal) diaspora. To use Rody’s phrase, “[A] returning daughter” becomes central to

the discussion of return, belonging, and identity and the re-envisioning of an “inherited history” (3) that makes return possible for the daughter in the Diaspora. Speaking of diasporan black women writers, Rody views them as relocating the diasporan being through their fiction. She contends that the women write, “[c]oming back like daughters – intensely devoted and yet convinced of the arrival of their own moment – African American and Caribbean women writers recast the conventions of historical fiction as well as received narratives of their peoples’ founding trauma, New World slavery, staging the mother-daughter relationship as the site of transhistorical contact” (3). These diaspora writers, themselves diasporan beings, then attempt, through their writing, to return to a point of origin, even from a point prior to and leading into slavery, becoming and providing a connection between home and Diaspora and home and return. This is demonstrated in Jackson-Opoku’s narrative that focuses on the protagonist Alma (née Allie Mae) as she seeks to fill the void left by the father who abandoned the family when Alma was very young, an emptiness that comes to have a much greater meaning.

Throughout the novel, Alma’s void is juxtaposed to her sense of self, sense of belonging, and question of ancestry. Thus, in her search for wholeness (an understanding or resolution of her identity), Alma attempts to address these concepts through specific acts. First, for example, Alma becomes fascinated with her family’s ancestry, as shared with her through quilting as a familial historical narrative, by her great grandmother Big Momma. Specifically, Big Momma explains to Alma that Proud Mary, Alma’s great-great-great grandmother, was stolen from Africa and eventually ended up in American slavery before gaining her freedom. In her journey from Africa to slavery to escape, Proud Mary carried cultural items – a set of multi-shade blue beads and a piece of *kente* cloth – which Alma

eventually uses in her attempt to trace her lineage back to Africa. As such, Alma is positioned as a “daughter of return,” allowing Jackson-Opoku to theorize the possibility of a diasporan daughter’s “return” to a place she has never been in order to find a home she has never known. Next, Alma has an affair with Trevor, her professor turned lover – whose appeal stems from Alma’s fascination with his study of Africa and African and Diasporan identities, which reflect a location that Alma learned to appreciate from Big Momma and her stories about enslaved African Proud Mary. Even more though, such connections to Africa for Alma as a diasporan being echo her search for answers regarding her own identity and sense of belonging, in addition to her search concerning her ancestral identity, quests that she ultimately views as intertwined. Thus, her search for or exploration of her heritage is linked to discovering and defining home as / in the Diaspora and through the stories she has inherited of her ancestral home in (West) Africa.

In Jackson-Opoku’s novel, diasporic identity is tied to a certain comprehension of home as a place of familial origin, experiences, and tradition / culture that make up the foundation of one’s identity. As a matter of fact, Jackson-Opoku demonstrates this through the inclusion of a visible family lineage at the beginning of the novel – the opening pages depict a family tree that establishes and traces the start of Alma’s lineage and narrate a chant by the Priestess who aids the First Wife in starting her legacy, naming the wife’s generational “daughters”: “ama emilene / big momma earlene / sara Darlene / cinnamon alma” (Jackson-Opoku 19). She further emphasizes the interconnection of place, identity, and heritage via comments throughout the novel of the need for a daughter, a gendered descendant at that, to return the family line (extended to mean the ancestors who reside in a

kind of holding space / limbo in an ancestral home yet are clearly not settled “in the homeland”) to the point of origin: the continent of Africa.

Quite specifically, for several of the women characters (the many diaspora daughters of the novel) across generations and across diasporic locations, home is both that physical space and a metaphorical concept mentioned earlier. It is a place of origin for diasporic beings, and it is associated with multiple narratives of loss, absence, disconnection, and disruption because it engages not just the contemporary experiences of the character(s) reflecting on the current idea of home, returning, and generational connections; rather, as demonstrated in Alma’s journey, it incorporates the multiple narratives, artifacts (blue beads and kente cloth), and experiences of ancestors who are remembered in order to define and provide a sense of home for the diaspora beings.

Since the novel *The River Where Blood Is Born* traces the diasporic formations of a particular family and its many branches, yet does so through the daughters’ experiences, this analysis considers the concept of return from that perspective – that of a diasporic daughter looking to “return” to her diasporic origins, an initial site of beginning and often known to her through the stories and experiences of another family member rather than her own, presented in the novel as “mother Africa,” specifically West Africa, and for Jackson-Opoku, Ghana. As a result, the narrative traces the experiences and journeys of the diasporic daughters to return to their “mother” country as a means of regaining (as well as establishing) a sense of identity that extends beyond the contemporary constructions of family as expressing a sense of self. Because of the absence / loss and otherwise complicatedness of her present sense of being, Alma is the central daughter positioned as the one who *must* return home in order to return her ancestors (recent and generations past) to



their ancestral home. Even more, she is positioned as a representative 20<sup>th</sup> century African Diaspora daughter who has a limited knowledge of self – read as culture, pride, blackness, family, and/or ancestry, and general belonging – because she, as well as others like her that are similarly and generationally located, lacks a literal connection to and understanding of her heritage or place of origin. Here, the concept of a “place of origin” can be read and expressed as a need to remember one’s ancestry – a narrative and physical history ripped from Alma’s family’s heritage through the experiences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and following migratory circumstances associated with race relations, inequality, gender and identity, for example.

In addition to the severance of her ancestral narrative and history positioned as a casualty of the slave trade, Alma also experiences disruptions of her more current family in the absence of a paternal figure. While her grandfather was a temporary surrogate (and her stepfather can never truly be such for her), it is not enough to assuage Alma’s search for something to fill that absence. With regard to the maternal, Alma’s mother Callie Mae is present but works multiple jobs to provide for her family; later, she takes care of and caters to her second husband. All of this stresses the mother-daughter relationship, especially when Alma is expected to serve as something of a surrogate mother to assist with her older brother, who has special needs and requires constant vigilance. That somewhat dual role of child and adult becomes a difficult one for Alma to balance. Yet, such a complication precipitates Alma’s summer visits to her great-great grandmother’s home, which becomes the site of Alma discovering and learning about her maternal ancestry. Quite significantly, she discovers her great grandmother’s practice of “recording” family history through quilting, specifically by using scraps and pieces of cloth from different family members’

clothing or blankets, such as a soldier's uniform, a girl's dress or a young woman's wedding dress, a favorite pair of pants or shirt, etc. – all of which are gathered and connected in part and with intention via red thread running throughout the quilt to indicate bloodlines and familial connections, generational linkages, journeys, and experiences.

The visits become a foundation for Alma's desire and means to know and recover her heritage. Alma takes what she learns about her great-great-great grandmother, the last maternal descendant with direct ties to Africa as homeland and Ghana as home country, including the ancestor's multi-blue-hued trade beads and piece of *kente* cloth, pieces brought by this ancestor directly from the motherland to the Americas and passed down across generations, and uses them to gain access to her past, to her origins, and so to return "home." Consequently, Alma realizes and suggests that the family story or herstory has been lost, is incomplete, and takes it upon herself to complete that ancestral narrative by becoming a daughter of return, a diasporan "returnee," and returning to the unknown-place-as-home-never-known, therefore, simultaneously returning her ancestor(s) to home-as-place-of-origin. Carole Boyce Davies suggests that "home becomes a critical link in the articulation of identity" (115), and this becomes obvious through Alma's efforts to find her heritage in Africa. Ultimately, after years of studying black and African Studies (in part through Trevor), Alma makes the journey to West Africa in an effort to find her lost self, something she views as now possible through literally and physically tracing her African roots back to their beginnings. In this way, then, Jackson-Opoku suggests that finding and returning home *is* possible for the returnee who has never been, and even more, it is a necessity. For how can a being, a diasporan being, be complete if she has no knowledge of

home, has not been (at least figuratively if not literally) home, and is not allowed to return home in some capacity?

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# Universalism, Evangelicals, and Child Abuse: Cary's Religious Critique of Childrearing in "Peter Harris" and "Uncle Christopher's"

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*By Mikki Galliher*

Alice Cary, whom Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse claim to be America's "first" regionalist, has been a long-neglected writer. However, Cary's regionalism coupled with her identity as a Christian Universalist, offer critics a unique insight to an often neglected period of regionalist writing and the ideological influence of a forgotten religious minority that differs from the more commonly explored evangelical writings of writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe. One of the most interesting aspects of Cary's writings is her critique of the American family, and that concept, particularly in regard to childhood was evolving during her lifetime. The legal and social status of children was undergoing radical alteration, and responding to these changes, Cary engages this cultural redefinition; however, not one Cary critic has really addressed her presentation of children as a response to her historical context. In fact, analyses of Cary's depictions of children and childhood have most often been subsumed in a discussion of class. For example, Elizabeth Schultz, in her analysis of "Uncle Christopher's" states that Cary shares with Herman Melville "a concern with class inequalities and with wage slavery engendered by capitalistic production" (82). Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse also conflate the issues of childhood and class declaring that in Cary's fiction, "parents form one class and children another" (299). In truth, Cary does display an awareness of class in her works as she populates her fiction with a variety of

personages living in a socially stratified society. She reveals this preoccupation with class in the preface to her second collection of *Clovernook* sketches when she expresses concern about both the public's lack of "sympathy for the poor and humble"(vi) and the prejudicial stereotypes which characterize the rural farming classes as "different," "inferior," and "entitled to only . . . peculiar praise" (vii). In contrast, she states a desire for representing the rural farming class as they actually are rather than as conforming to the stereotypes presented by the "masters of literature" (vi). Nonetheless, reducing Cary's depictions of child abuse and neglect to class commentary, as critics like Fetterley and Pryse have done, undermines Cary's interest in her culture's redefinition of childhood and her concern over the mistreatment of children. Further, in interpreting family dynamics merely as class dynamics, these critics ignore the way in which the children in Cary's texts sometimes function metaphorically to enhance her religious ideals. Indeed, Cary's presentation of childhood is one of the most important aspects of her fiction, and it is deeply influenced by her identity as a Christian Universalist. While she questions the rigid discipline of conservative evangelicals, she disputes the more romantic portrayals of children as angelic saviors. As a Universalist writer holding the belief that all people regardless of age, class, or race are a part of the family of God, Cary uses her portrayals of children, particularly those in "Uncle Christopher's" and "Peter Harris," to criticize both evangelical attitudes toward rearing and the emergent Romantic depictions of childhood.

At the heart of Cary's critique regarding the treatment of children is her belief in Christian Universalism. While most frontier children were typically raised in evangelical homes, Cary's early religious and moral education, according to Mary Clemmer Ames's biography, was provided by Universalist teachings. Therefore, Cary's religious beliefs do

not reflect the evangelical Christianity at the heart of most sentimental works. The friction between evangelical and Universalist teaching and practices, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century, was quite pronounced. Having emerged from a liberalized form of Calvinism, Universalists publicly rejected and openly criticized the evangelical doctrines of Arminian theologians and preachers, whom Universalists characterized as irrational “soul hunters.” In contrast, Universalists like Cary embraced the concept that a sovereign God, rather than a person’s individual choice, led people to repentance (Bressler 56).

Universalism was highly influenced by the Enlightenment’s emphasis on rationalism: “Reason, Universalists argued, dictated that a benevolent God would redeem all of creation” (Bressler 9). Drawing upon comparisons of “imperfect” human parents to a divine and perfect Father, Universalists reasoned that if human parents could not conceive of turning their own children into the torturous world of hell described by evangelicals and earlier Puritans, then God, as a perfect being and perfect Father, would never condemn any of his children to eternal suffering. This belief in both God’s fatherhood and the universal salvation of all people was at the heart of Christian Universalist teaching.

In addition to rejecting evangelicalism, Universalists also ridiculed Unitarianism. For modern scholars familiar with the Unitarian Universalist denomination, this tension between the denominations would be surprising, but the two denominations actually did not officially unite until 1961. In the nineteenth century, the two movements formed distinct organizations. While both the Unitarian and Universalist churches “shared significant elements of belief—and disbelief—they represented two quite different, even opposed, strains in American religious culture” (Bressler 4). According to Bressler, Unitarian teachings emerged from liberal Arminian theology and rationalism that held that humans

were created in the likeness of God and had the responsibility to maintain a moral life. In contrast, Universalists emphasized God's compelling and universal love which overwhelmed humanity and led individuals and communities into pious reverence for God and humanity. Thus, while Unitarians emphasized that humans were too much like God to be eternally condemned, Universalists emphasized that God was too perfect to allow humans to be condemned (5-7).

The emphasis upon communal piety mingled with the rationalist conclusion of universal salvation to outline the core beliefs of the Universalist denomination. The "Winchester Profession," the earliest coordinated statement of Universalist faith outlines the faith's principle beliefs:

We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain a revelation of the character of God and of the duty, interest and final destination of mankind.

We believe that there is one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.

We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works; for these things are good and profitable unto men.

In addition to their principle belief in the eternal character of God and the final restoration of all mankind, the "Winchester Profession" also emphasizes the role of personal behavior and service. According to this statement of faith, people can only achieve true happiness when engaged in service to others. Further, this statement expands upon this connection



using the repetition of “holiness” and “happiness” to hint at a utopian vision which involved human action and would aid the spirit in uniting the family of God. Later, Adin Ballou, a nineteenth century Universalist reformer, added to this statement of belief outlining the principles of personal righteousness and social order inherent in Universalism. According to Ballou, personal righteousness is linked to the following attributes:

1. Reverence for the Divine and spiritual.
2. Self-denial for righteousness' sake.
3. Justice to all beings.
4. Truth in all manifestations of mind.
5. Love in all spiritual relations.
6. Purity in all things.
7. Patience in all right aims and pursuits.
8. Unceasing progress towards perfection.

This list is premised upon God’s fatherhood and the “blood” connection of all humans regardless of race, class, gender, or creed. However, Universalists also viewed humans as naturally selfish. It was only through God’s grace and universal salvation that God transformed “human affections and [turned] naturally self-centered human beings to the love of God and the greater creation” (Bressler 9). Thus, Universalists emphasized the power of God to transform the obedient and thereby transform the society at large. By the time of Cary’s childhood and early adulthood, the denomination was increasingly coming to emphasize personal development through service to the community and moral activism. Universalists worked in a number of social causes including prison reform, abolition, women’s rights, and universal education (Bressler 77).

At her most obvious, Cary's depictions of children renounce the beliefs of Christian evangelicals who held that children were base, animalistic creatures in need of religious discipline and salvation. Although most modern readers would find such a negative view of infancy and childhood foreign or even monstrous, such unsympathetic portrayals of childhood were commonly understood as truth in seventeenth and eighteenth century America. Although these beliefs largely gave way to more liberal ideas sparked by Enlightenment and Romantic writers as communities became more urbanized, the Western frontier, Cary's childhood home and the setting for nearly all of her fiction, experienced a very different reality. This region was undergoing a "revival" of evangelical fervor as non-formalist evangelicals like Baptists and Methodists took root (Johnson 17). The influence of evangelical doctrines held children, even newborn infants were "filthy, guilty, odious, abominable . . . both by nature and practice" (Mintz 11). To counter this perceived evil in children, families began religious instruction as soon as possible, and fathers served as the supreme religious and material authority over their children (Mintz 15). Spurred by dicta such as "Better whipt, than damn'd," evangelicals emphasized the use of physical punishment as a reformer of children's innate sinfulness (Heywood 100). Apparently, evangelical parents overwhelmingly subscribed to this prescription for violence. Colin Heywood states that in the nineteenth century about seventy-five percent of children in the U.S. experienced being beaten with instruments ranging from wooden switches to horsewhips and that although such beatings were not typically a daily occurrence, neither were they rare occurrences (100). Parents also worked to speed children through the "animalistic" period of babyhood by forcing, infants and toddlers through a number of questionable practices, which included feeding the children opiates (Russell 36), dressing

infants in stiff corsets that made them sit upright (Russell 35), requiring infants to “stand” in home-made standing and walking apparatuses (Russell 42-43), leaving children unattended for long periods in cage-like, cast-iron cribs (Russell 37), and “potty training” infants as young as two-months-old by strapping them to potty chairs for hours (Russell 44).

In contrast, Universalists who urged a gentler approach to childrearing were one of the earliest American denominations to abjure corporal punishment. George S. Weaver, a prominent nineteenth century, Universalist advice writer labels “the rod” and other such implements of physical punishment as “an evil in the family” and states that instead of attempting to “break” children parents should seek to “make, or mould a child’s spirit” and to “win” obedience from children through “a calm, even-handed system of kind and gentle government, in which the persuasive power of love, directed by wisdom, mingles as the chief element” (Weaver 77-78). Cary, in keeping with her Universalist roots, shunned the rigid childrearing practices that were especially prominent on the frontier where she grew up. In fact, one of the most obvious themes that appears in her writing is her critique of child abuse, especially that which takes place in the name of religion. This type of religiously motivated child abuse is a recurrent and conspicuous feature in Cary’s writing.

In both “Uncle Christopher’s” and “Peter Harris,” Cary reveals her dissatisfaction with the evangelical notions of childrearing, which in each story result in the death of a child. One of the most obviously outwardly religious child abusers in Cary’s fiction is Uncle Christopher. Although the centerpiece of “Uncle Christopher’s” is Christopher’s physical and emotional abuse of his grandson, critics have not addressed this abuse in terms of its religious significance. Fetterley and Pryse view the story as a sort of dialectic between the patriarchal declarations of Uncle Christopher, who demands silence and obedience from others, and the feminine voice of

the narrator, who gains freedom through storytelling (39). In contrast, Schultz compares Uncle Christopher's farm to a factory and notes how the inhabitants of the household are like factory workers toiling to provide material production (91). Schultz also points out that Uncle Christopher, in addition to his lack of toil, treats himself to luxuries and vanities. He purchases for himself fine, stylish clothing, but mandates that his wife and daughters wear identical, drab brown flannel dresses, and he dresses his two wards, Mark and Andrew, poorly. For Schultz, the members of his household become merely "wage slaves" who must satisfy Uncle Christopher's desire for luxury and power (Schultz 88).

Neither of these interpretations recognizes how much conservative childrearing practices, rooted primarily in evangelical Christian doctrine, enable Uncle Christopher's extreme behavior toward his grandson Mark. While many of Uncle Christopher's behaviors emerge from his attempts at emulating masculine stereotypes, understanding Christopher's evangelical notions about childhood can help the reader see how these conceptions not only interact with Uncle Christopher's masculine stereotypes but they also help to generate these stereotypes and enable his abusive behavior. The narrator's initial description reveals this interaction:

I soon discovered by his conversation, aided by the occasional explanatory whispers of his wife, that he was one of those infatuated men who fancy themselves "called" to be teachers of religion, though he had neither talents, education, nor anything else to warrant such a notion, except a faculty for joining pompous and half scriptural phrases, from January to December. (177)

Uncle Christopher's evangelical fervor and self-proclaimed calling to evangelize is emblematic of the growing movement of uneducated bi-vocational ministers on the frontier (Johnson 17), and in this quotation, the reader learns of both the narrator's and Cary's disdain for the religious

self-righteousness Uncle Christopher embodies. Nearly all that motivates him is his belief that he is God's representative on earth, especially in his home, and that his spiritual responsibility is to save others from the fires of hell—a task he accomplishes through physical abuse, constant preaching, and quoting scripture, both real and imagined. The reader first glimpses Uncle Christopher's abusive tendencies when the narrator meets Mark. The boy enters the house laughing, but his grandfather quickly silences him by quoting verse three of Proverbs 26: "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back!" (179). Christopher views his grandson, who is an emotionally empathetic boy, as "wicked and troublesome" (180), and he declares his desire to "change the boy into a man" (181). To accomplish this task, Uncle Christopher feels perfectly justified to both threaten and enact physical violence upon the child. The grandfather believes that the use of extreme punishment—in the form of physical beatings, forcing the child to walk barefoot in the snow, and ordering the child to drown his pet kitten—will banish Mark's supposed "wickedness."

Cary chooses an interesting voice of wisdom in the narrator, who is both a child and female and who calls attention to the extreme notions of evangelical instruction that taught children were depraved and sinful while men were empowered by God to enforce His will in their families. Cary's choice of the child narrator in this sketch and others is also indicative of the Universalist belief that children could serve as teachers for adults. Universalists believed that children, like adults, were often prone to be governed by selfishness (Weaver 110), and they tended to hold the Enlightenment view of children as a blank slate which developed through mirroring the character of their parents (Weaver 106). Nonetheless, Universalist teachings also held that children had a role in helping parents achieve their potential and develop their character

as they met the regular challenges and responsibilities of childrearing. Weaver describes the coming of a child to a family as a time of training for the parents:

The birth of a child in a family is a good omen. It is sent as a teacher. It has a great moral mission. It must be guarded with *care*. It must be managed with *prudence*. It must be nurtured with *tenderness*. It must be provided for with *diligence*. It must be reared with unselfish *love*. It must be educated with *judgment*, and trained with moral *rectitude*. And this care, prudence, tenderness, diligence, love, judgment, and rectitude, are so many virtues which the little child is every day impressing upon the hearts of its parents with a steadily increasing force. (108)

Although Christopher has attempted to educate with judgment and prudence, he has failed to develop the other traits of care, love, diligence, tenderness, and rectitude. Uncle Christopher's failure to develop all the necessary traits of liberal Christian love in his childrearing has become dangerously imbalanced.

Children also had another important role within the family for Universalists. Weaver writes,

Children help to keep alive our own childhood. They will not let us forget that we were once children. They are reliving our lives before our eyes. Sad, sad, it is for a man when he forgets he was once a child. He becomes petrified,— a rock, cold, hard, unyielding. (Weaver 104)

Unlike Mark and the child narrator who make empathetic connection with others, the grandfather has become so “cold, hard, and unyielding” that he attempts to banish one of the truly spiritual qualities in Mark, his sympathy for living things—a character trait which Weaver lists as a

central responsibility in Christian children. Weaver goes even so far as stating that children who do not show sympathy are not *Christian* children (104-105). Cary takes this teaching a step further to show that such disconnection from sympathetic connection endangers life itself. The grandfather's refusal to submit to his true appointed role within the family directly contributes to Mark's death. The spiritually pure boy cannot survive in a world that demands he give up his Christian sympathy. Further, Uncle Christopher in viewing Mark, the narrator, and all other children as "wicked," has forgotten his own childhood, and it is this "forgetfulness" that Cary reveals in Christopher that is truly "wicked." Instead of protecting his grandson, Uncle Christopher's "righteous discipline" kills the grandson by the close of the story.

Similarly, the title character of "Peter Harris" is subjected to adults who desire to reform him spiritually. His aunt repeatedly refers to the child as the "heathen boy," and she and her husband see their role as "snatching" Peter "like a brand from the burning" (141). This phrase is a direct reference to God's promise in the third chapter of Zechariah. In the passage, God defends the high priest of Israel in the face of Satan's accusations. God states, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Then God goes on to have the priest's filthy garments replaced with clean white garments and promises that Joshua's sins (and the sins of Israel) will be forgiven. It is also interesting to note that John Wesley the famous Methodist evangelist often referred to himself as "a brand snatched from the burning" (Tyerman 17). In choosing this reference, Cary makes a direct critique of the evangelical family. Uncle Jason and his wife have usurped the role of God in the life of their nephew. While the Biblical reference, and indeed Wesley's own claims, use the expression to demonstrate God's grace in the life of the sinner, the aunt and uncle have decided to assume that their actions rather than God's active love will save their nephew

from his supposed wickedness and fate of damnation. In their attempts to reform him, the aunt and uncle threaten to whip him “every day” (141), force him to sleep on a pallet of hay in the coachman’s drafty apartment above the stable, and deny the child both the comfort of company and medicine when he is sick. Likewise, the school teacher’s attempts to “reform” and “educate” Peter result in abuse. Because Peter cannot sit upright for hours at a time and he cannot read, the teacher denies the child playtime, feeds his lunch to a pig, “inflict[s] upon him a merciless beating” (145), and detains Peter after school so that he is forced to walk home after dark in a downpour (145). Like Uncle Christopher’s efforts, however, these acts of discipline prove to be merely abuse and neglect and directly result in the child’s death because the aunt, uncle, and school master lack the Christian traits of love, sympathy, and kindness.

While Americans of earlier periods tended to view children as incomplete, animalistic, and sinful, by the nineteenth century a number of influences contributed to a more positive view of childhood. Enlightenment writers such as John Locke stated that children were blank slates that needed to be taught and prepared for adult life rather than beaten into submission to avoid the fires of hell. Romantic writers represented childhood as a distinct period of life to be enjoyed and prolonged (Mintz 77) and depicted children as “symbols of purity, spontaneity, and emotional expressiveness, who were free from adult inhibitions” (Mintz 76). Further, because children were seen as morally pure, writers began portraying them as moral and religious redeemers (Brewer 46). Cary’s fiction responds to this stereotype of the pure and angelic child remarkably sympathetically, at least upon superficial examination. Very seldom does Cary actually present a child with a disagreeable or evil character. Most often children in Cary’s fiction are oppressed by their parents or guardians while the child quietly endures abuse or neglect as is the case of Mark, Peter



Harris, and numerous other child characters who appear in Cary's fiction. Cary also shows children who literally give up their lives and in death provide salvation for the adults around them. Nanny's death in Cary's novel *Hagar, A Story for Today* (1852) inspires Joseph Arnold to engage in a life of Christian service. Similarly, Mark's death initiates Uncle Christopher into the world of empathetic feeling. Despite this apparent acquiescence to Romantic view of children as moral saviors or Christ-figures, Cary actually questions both the need and effectiveness of such child sacrifices. Unlike many of the sentimental writers of her time, rather than merely presenting the Christ-like child, she emphasizes instead the moral debt and blindness of adults that directly contributes to child death.

Although she does demonstrate in numerous stories that children can and do die to provide redemptive examples of righteous behavior, she also depicts children who die and whose deaths seem to serve no redemptive value because the people around them refuse to change. Peter Harris's death is a prime example of this phenomenon. Peter dies alone on a bed of damp straw in a cold room above the stable, and the only person who acknowledges his death is the Harris family's coachman, John, who, aside from Peter himself and the brief appearance of the family maid, is the only character who shows any characteristics of Christian love. The sketch ends abruptly with the coachman's recognition that the boy will no longer have to suffer, and given the actions of the other characters, particularly the refusal of Peter's aunt to provide comfort, companionship, or even a dry, warm place to sleep in his sickness, the reader is left to assume that the rest of the characters in the story—those who truly need redemption—will simply continue their lives untouched by the tragedy that has transpired.

Further, unlike the deaths of children in other nineteenth century novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Little Women*, novels that portray children dying from disease, many of Cary's child characters die as a direct result of abuse. While Little Eva's mother in Stowe's novel may not be particularly attentive to her child, she does not physically abuse the girl, but Peter's illness results directly from being denied food and being exposed to the elements. Further, Eva experiences her death surrounded by loved ones and dispenses words of love and spiritual guidance to the adults around her. In contrast, Peter (as well as many other Cary's child characters) dies cold, alone, silent, and almost unnoticed.

Part of the reason Peter's death goes unnoticed perhaps lies in the limitations of the evolving conception of childhood. Although the popular imagination was beginning to adopt a more Romantic stereotype of childhood, this angelic depiction was reserved mainly for the children of the middle and the upper classes. The nineteenth century was a time of transition, in which actual children's experiences varied widely across economic, racial, and regional boundaries. Historian Steven Mintz describes this reality: "At no point in American history was childhood as diverse as it was in the mid and late nineteenth century" (134). While childhood for middle-class urban children, like Peter's cousins, came to be a protected time of play and education, working class children were ushered into the world of physical labor and deprivation. The first appearance of Peter and his cousins displays this dichotomy well. Peter's physical appearance reflects abject poverty that contrasts with his cousins' wealth:

Sitting by the old man was a little pale-faced boy. His clothes, much too thin for the season, were patched with different colors, and ragged still. His hat was of white fur, and had as it seemed, originally been too large, but by means of

scissors, needle and thread, and the rude ingenuity, probably of some female hand, had been made to assume a reduced size. He wore no coat or jacket, but, instead, a faded shawl was wrapped about his shoulders . . . and his little naked feet . . . dangled about in a most uncomfortable sort. (139)

Peter's condition stands in stark contrast to that of his cousins who "[trundle] hoops on the path" and are dressed "in bright jackets set off with black buttons, and velvet caps with heavy tassels" (139). While his cousins appear to emerge from a nineteenth-century Romantic painting, Peter appears pale, barefoot, and wearing threadbare clothes.

In order to fuel this kind of dichotomy in regard to the treatment of children, the public conception became divided. While the middle and upper classes came to adopt the Romantic conception of childhood in regard to their own children, the children of the working class became demonized. These children were not seen through the same interpretive lens as middle-class children. At the same time that the American middle-class began to conceive of their children as angelic, innocent beings, politicians, writers, and government officials held an overriding fear of working class children and "orphans"—a term that social leaders tended to apply to all poor children, regardless of whether the children's parents were alive or not (Lang 14-15). Such poor working class children were viewed as not only morally corrupt, but they were also seen as a threat to social order (Lang 15). In contrast, Cary's works portray working class children as some of the noblest characters in her fiction, and in the few accounts in which Cary presents morally tainted children, these children are always from the middle-class or upper-class.

Cary reveals the common perception of working class children like Peter upon his presentation to his aunt and uncle. They believe that because the child is poor and lacks a formal

education, he must be both stupid and immoral. Mrs. Harris repeatedly questions Peter's morality and character, but when she asks her own son to teach Peter his evening prayers, Cary reveals the true state of affairs in the family:

Calling her little son, who sat on the floor, sticking pins in the paws of her lap-dog, the lady told him to come and teach his poor little heathen cousin to say, "Now I lay me down to sleep;" but the boy said he did not know it, and continued at his work of torment. (141-42)

Although Mrs. Harris thinks that Peter's ignorance of the prayer indicates a moral deficiency, her own son does not know the prayer either. Further, Cary reveals the cruel personality of Peter's cousin, who sits torturing a small dog. Not only does the boy torture animals, but he also emotionally tortures people, as evidenced by his repeated taunts of Peter at the opening of the sketch. Cary's presentation of Peter and his cousins flatly refutes the stereotypes of the morally bankrupt and dangerous working-class child. In fact, Cary portrays that if any child is a dangerous influence on society, it is the spoiled middle-class child who has been pampered and doted on by its parents.

In addition to these commentaries on childhood itself, "Peter Harris" takes on larger significance as Cary uses the child as a metaphoric portrayal of racial injustice. In accord with Universalist beliefs on the equality of all races, Cary uses racialized references to Peter to express her disdain for slavery and ethnic prejudice. Although Peter is a family member, he is traded like property. In fact, Peter's father states that he has come to his brother's house "to make him a present of the little 'wite-faced boy'" (140). Peter's father does not bother saying goodbye to his son or to introduce him to the members of his new home. The father simply abandons the son to the brother's coachman John stating " 'Here, John, or

whatever your name is, take this boy into the house and tell Jason that his poor old brother . . . gives this little fellow to him” (140). The father never once acknowledges that the child has a name but seems to view Peter more as an asset to be given or, in this case, discarded. The child is further coded in his cousin’s initial assessment of him. They first mistake him for an “Ingen” (139) and later make fun of him because Peter’s name is identical to that of “the black boy that tended their cows” (140). These racial references to Peter expose the artificiality of the black/white race dichotomy. Peter shares the same name as a local black man but is not a black. He may even look like an “Ingen” but he carries with him a nearly identical bloodline to those who taunt him. In fact, Peter is the blood relation to his abusers, just as many slaves in the South were actually the children or brothers of their masters. Cary’s inclusion of Peter as an actual family member (as opposed to merely an orphan who shows up on the family’s doorstep) also points to her Universalist upbringing which held that all people, including black slaves, were part of the “brotherhood of man.” Bressler indicates that although there was a minority of pro-slavery Universalists in the South, the majority of Universalists believed that slavery was a sin against God who was the father of all humans (89). Cary’s empathetic portrayal of Peter as a small abused child and family member to his white masters emphasizes this Universalist ideal that all people were children of God and members of the same family deserving of rights, respect, and protection, but not necessarily equality. Ironically, in using the metaphor of childhood to represent the injustice of slavery, Cary also infantilizes African Americans. Whether intentional or not, she indirectly affirms at least some of the more paternalistic defenses of slavery, like those of George Fitzhugh, who claimed that slaves could not survive without masters, since slavery provided guidance and protection to the enslaved (222-34).

Cary's portrayal of children and childhood works both with and against the popular stereotypes of her time and is much more complex and nuanced than readers would typically guess upon first reading. This complex depiction of childhood reveals the way in which stereotypes of children, even the more idealized and Romantic ideals have been used to oppress children. However, she also uses these same sympathetic, idealized portrayals of childhood not only to arouse sympathy on behalf of abused and oppressed children, but she also presents these portrayals metaphorically to question, however tentatively, the mistreatment of other races. While Cary's depictions may not be completely without prejudice, she does attempt to act upon her Universalist beliefs to sympathize with and protect those as she views as defenseless.

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# The Indestructible Nature of the Sublime: Era Embodiment in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia"

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*By Shelby M. Gresham*

"The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature... is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other... Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect."

—Edmund Burke, *Of the Sublime and Beautiful*

Encumbered by the fetters of romantic ideology, Edgar Allan Poe pens his masterfully gothic aphorism "Ligeia" to defend the indestructible nature and inevitable triumph of the sublime, despite the lure of reprised empiricism in early Victorian era natural science. Despite alleged demolition, Poe illustrates the unceasing power of concurrent astonishment, fear, reverence, and respect by embodying these qualities in his tall, dark, and slender first wife, Lady Ligeia. She, filling the mind of the narrator to such an extent that he cannot relent discussing her attributes long enough to remember her maiden name, offers an irresistible attraction so dark and mysterious, yet perfectly intelligent, that the narrator cannot separate himself from her fearful, yet beautiful person even after her illness delivers her into the arms of death. Following the unspecified time after Ligeia's entombment, Poe replaces her with the drastically different, fair-haired, blue-eyed, European Lady Rowena. Rowena, unable to love the narrator in the same fashion as Ligeia, causes the narrator to reminisce his first marriage, frequently referring to the horrifying beauty of Ligeia's person, which he devoted the former half of the tale to discussing at

length. However, illness soon befalls Rowena in much the same mysterious fashion as it befell Ligeia, and within the period of some months, Rowena falls into the arms of death as well. Rowena's death brings about a transcendent transformation only made possible by the supernatural. If Ligeia embodies the sublime and Rowena the stark opposite, the enlightenment, then this illustration overtly displays the inevitable triumph of the sublime to reign in the fascinations of mankind, overcoming the intoxicating temptation of empirical science. Poe urges readers to embrace the long, seemingly dead love of the horrifyingly beautiful in much the same way his narrator embraces the person of Ligeia. Embodying the era of romanticism in the Lady Ligeia and the world of empiricism in the Lady Rowena, Poe writes of an eventual death to mankind's fascination with the verifiable and defends the indestructible nature of the indemonstrable sublime in the minds of men.

Poe begins "Ligeia" by introducing the reader to the wisdom of Englishman Joseph Glanville, who, without a source and according only to Poe, said, "Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (Poe 97). Foreshadowing his intentions to defend the will of the sublime with this ominous epigraph and urging readers to remember that only the strongest and most able of wills can escape the haunting chains of death and destruction, Poe poetically introduces the person of Ligeia through his trademark nameless narrator. In stature, Poe says, "she was tall, somewhat slender, and in her latter days, even emaciated" (97); she "came and departed as a shadow" and hosted "features [that] were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship" (98). Paraphrasing the words of Francis Bacon in his *Essays, Civil and Moral*, the narrator says, "there is no exquisite beauty... without some strangeness in the proportion," and that Ligeia's loveliness "was indeed exquisite" with much "strangeness pervading it" (98). This strangeness,

the narrator confesses, is found mostly in her brilliant black orbs, which both “delighted and appalled [him],” drawing him to reach the verge of remembrance, but rendering him unable to, in the end, remember (100).

With morbid sensitivity to the person of Ligeia, the narrator embodies the foremost ideology of the romantic era, the sublime. As Gregory S. Jay writes in his article “Poe: Writing and the Unconscious,” found in Harold Bloom’s *New Critical Interpretations: The Tales of Poe*, Poe takes the “romantic reaction against empiricism” upon himself and draws a structural parallel between the Lady Ligeia and his own “subversive version” of the sublime (86). In particular, Poe strategically chooses language that correlates to Edmund Burke’s definition of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Sources of the sublime, Burke says, “excite the ideas of pain, and danger... operate in a manner analogous to terror... [and are] productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (39). Furthermore, the sublime causes the passion of astonishment, which Burke elaborates as the “state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” (57). In which case, Burke says, “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other,” and so the sublime in its highest degree produces the simultaneous inferior effects of “admiration, reverence, and respect” (Burke 57). The ever-placid Ligeia lives only long enough in the story’s narrative to highlight transcendentalism, her proficiency in classical tongues, and her affinity for metaphysical investigation, yet her impact on the narrator certainly meets the criteria of the Burkean sublime. The narrator writes of her “placid beauty,” “enthraling eloquence,” “emaciated body” (97), and eyes which simultaneously captivate and terrify him (100). Following the decay of the romantic era’s ideologies in the minds of men, Poe addresses Ligeia’s illness, which colors her fingertips the waxen hue of the grave and abruptly

and mysteriously takes her life. Her death results in the narrator's dive into opium and eventually another marriage, which seems symbolic of mankind's transition out of the romantic era to the Victorian Age, switching the intellectual focus from the horrifyingly beautiful and supernatural to an interest in natural, empirical science. According to R. Clinton Ohlers in *The End of Miracles: Scientific Naturalism in America, 1830—1934*, mysticism fell to the lure of scientific naturalism in the early 1830s, five to eight years before Poe published *Ligeia* (15). Certainly, the influence of reason shrouded the intellectually creative, shunning the romantic fascination with the mysterious and unknown. The narrator's remarriage in "*Ligeia*" embodies this new era.

Leigia's successor, blue-eyed, fair-haired Lady Rowena Trevanion, embodies this age of scientific naturalism that rose in the earlier portion of the Victorian era's movement, which ultimately stemmed from the earlier European enlightenment. Rowena suppresses the narrator's natural inclination to focus on the mysterious and seek metaphysical investigation for a short season, but she cannot cease his recollection of beautiful yet melancholy memories. Of Rowena's chambers, the narrator discusses the "madness" that comes from "the gorgeous and fantastic draperies" (103). The gothic, vaulted ceilings and uneasy animation of the ghastly forms in the tapestry allowed "hours of the first month of [their] marriage [to pass] them with but little disquietude" (104). Two months into their marriage, Rowena "was attacked with certain illness" from which she recovered slowly, but she eventually elapsed into "a second more violent disorder" (104). As her illness invades, her temperament increases in nervous irritation, and she becomes excited "by trivial causes of fear" (105). In her illness, she credits the movement of the tapestries to "inarticulate breathings" from "those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall" instead of the natural effects of the wind (105). The narrator offers the frantic Rowena a goblet of wine, which he then believes to have had "three or four large drops of a brilliant and

ruby colored fluid” fall into it (105). Within four nights Rowena takes a turn for the worst and eventually succumbs to death. As the narrator readies himself for rest, he hears a sound from the body and sees a color fill her once drained cheeks. Rowena resuscitates several times, wrecking the nerves of the haunted narrator, and falls into the hands of death time and time again. As she takes her final breath, the narrator relaxes, believing Rowena has finally died but, to his surprise, he sees the corpse stir, and before his eyes rise, with “feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream” an “enshrouded” body. The narrator questions the body as Rowena, whom he believes to have escaped the chains of death, but soon sees this body has grown taller and that hair “blacker than the raven wings of midnight” hangs from beneath the bandages (108). The fair-haired, blue-eyed Rowena does not stand before him! In horror and astonishment, the narrator shrieks, announcing the person of Ligeia before him, marveling at the full, dark, and wild eyes of his lost love.

The Lady Rowena, who initially stands in stark contrast to the person of Ligeia, represents the Victorian resuscitation of empirical science. However, as illness captivates her body, she becomes inclined to blame the supernatural for events that she would have once logically reasoned out, such as the motion in the tapestries. As her condition worsens, her mind offers supernatural credit to that which horrifies her. Her mind warps from deductive to horrified astonishment at the slight motion of her tapestries shrouding her window, which the narrator suggests to only be the mind and the result of unrelenting breath from the figures moving along the fabric. Treating her to wine, the narrator seeks to comfort her in her time of horror. Her body lives for four more days before it finally falls motionless, color draining from its surface. Upon her death, the narrator believes her suffering to have ended, but he learns that it instead transforms into the indestructible Lady Ligeia. Despite the lure of empiricism and natural science

in the Victorian era, the desire to marvel at the mysteries of the supernatural and unknown continue to reign in the consciousness of mankind. Astonishment, the progenitor to passion, causes individuals to marvel at the suspension of motion and fills the mind with admiration, reverence, and respect for the horrifyingly irresistible (Burke 57). Unable to turn away from Ligeia's revived, horrifying beauty, Poe suggests the eventual return of the sublime to capture the minds of men in the same fashion that it captures his nameless narrator.

If only the strongest and most able of wills can escape death and destruction, as Poe quotes in reference to Joseph Glanville, then Poe argues the indestructible nature of the sublime to be said strongest and most able of wills. He writes of its ability to not only stand beautifully powerful when on the brink of obliteration, but also of its alluring resuscitation and eventual consumption of mankind's fascination, despite its believed death. Transcendental and indestructible, the sublime survives through attempted annihilation; embodying its ideology in Lady Ligeia and the ideology of empiricism in Lady Rowena, Poe successfully demonstrates the inevitable conquest of the poetic sublime over the lure of experimental science in the minds of men.

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# “It’s Typical South”: Parallels between Maycomb in *Go Set a Watchman* and Yoknapatawpha in *Requiem for a Nun*

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*By Phillip Gordon*

Without doubt, Harper Lee’s novel *Go Set a Watchman* has caused a stir in literary circles, with readers and critics claiming it is a fraud or criticizing how it slays their beloved hero, Atticus Finch, by making him an overt racist, among other complaints. The state of Alabama even opened an inquiry into whether or not Lee was coerced, possibly through physical violence, to publish her novel, which, if it is authentic, has merited condemnation for being so poorly written and problematic that maybe we can ignore it after all and pretend it is an aberration. Though she was alive at the time of its publication, Lee’s mental state and possible dementia have served as means to distance her from her text and distance her characters from any semblance of consistency in the novels. We can ignore *Watchman*, an industry of scholarly inquiry assures us. We can read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in isolation. Our idols need not be undermined by the idiosyncratic realities of history and context. The purpose of this paper, however, is to argue that *Watchman*, on its own merits and by comparison, does in fact stand as an important literary work. Though incomplete and unpolished as a final draft relative to our usual expectations from the hyper-edited world of publishing, the novel nonetheless speaks to the cogent and thoughtful brilliance with which Lee surveyed the landscape of her native Alabama nearly sixty years ago. In light of Lee’s death in the Spring of 2016, we can now survey her life and, I hope, take stock of her full



brilliance, even if her second novel was not what we expected it would be. I will also address this brilliance by comparing Lee's novel to a novel by a more recognized literary "genius," William Faulkner, and his 1950 *Requiem for a Nun*. Even as an incomplete text, *Watchman* offers a critique of *Requiem* by manipulating Faulknerian tropes into a mildly satirical but still perspicuous history of race and identity in the rural South. Lee's use of these tropes highlights the extent to which her long-unpublished novel partakes in Southern literary traditions and deserves consideration as an object of study both for its insights into its time and, possibly, our own. First, though, I should establish the contemporary context for the writing of this paper.

On my drive home after the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Philological Association, at which I delivered a shorter version of this paper, news broke of the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Certainly a controversial jurist, Scalia quickly became the subject of a number of differing obituaries, from people praising his thirty years of service and keen legal mind to others arguing "In Defense of Grave Dancing" or questioning if his views on LGBT rights and affirmative action merit such polite praise. Regardless of his longer legacy, as is tradition, the Supreme Court honored Scalia in the week following his death by draping black mourning cloth over his seat on the bench and by laying his body in state for mourners to pay respects to him. Such is how we treat the death of a jurist. Such, perhaps, is how we might need to treat the revelations about Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman*, which many readers considered a death blow to their idol of racial progress in a time when white Alabamans were bombing buses near Anniston, black Alabamans were being dispersed from public assembly by police dogs and fire hoses, and all Alabamans (and all Americans) were coming to terms with images of a military-style police

assault on a peaceful march across the Edmund Pettis Bridge and the percussions of bombs in Birmingham churches. If the turmoil specifically in Alabama in the early 1960s led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, then Scalia's joining the majority opinion in *Shelby County V. Holder*, the case from Alabama that gutted that law on the basis that the South had overcome its discriminatory voting practices, marks a kind of book end to a momentous history that should rightly include Harper Lee's addition of a fictional account of racial strife in Alabama, her 1960 *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lee's death, however, less than a week after Scalia's, may represent a more appropriate moment for pause and reflection in the grand scheme of Alabaman (and American) civil rights history.

If we overlay Lee's literary output onto a larger history of civil rights, her life and writings seem even more significant. Scholars traditionally mark the beginning of the civil rights era as the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama (*Brown V. Board of Education* and the murder of Emmitt Till also contend for title of "originary" moment, though the bus boycott seems to represent the start of organized resistance by black Americans as opposed to necessary reactions to the egregious criminal acts perpetuated against them). The bus boycott began in 1955. Lee wrote her first novel sometime after or during the boycott and submitted it to the J. Lippincott Company in 1957. Her second novel appeared in 1960 and was made into a popular movie shortly thereafter. The bus bombing near Anniston occurred in 1961, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was bombed in 1963, the march to Montgomery took place in 1965, and, seemingly in response to that march, Lyndon Johnson pushed the Voting Rights Act through Congress. Racial strife did not end as a result of the passage of any law, however lofty its aims, but major legislation gave way to the Vietnam War and a series of assassinations, the rise of less peaceful activism in the form

of the Black Panthers, and, eventually, the “end” of the civil rights era and, arguably, the beginning of a proverbial cold war of racial re-segregation and sporadic attempts at disfranchisement still fought piecemeal to this day in voter ID laws and other insidious impediments against voting in all corners of the United States. Then in 2013 the Supreme Court overturned a major portion of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*. In 2015 Harper Lee finally released that long-lost first novel, to much clamor and surprise and not the slightest indignation. Certainly, the novel speaks in a racial rhetoric that seems stuck in its original moment in the late 1950s, but the appearance of the novel in 2015 does more than just spook the ghosts of racial history. As the *Shelby County* ruling, police shootings and counter protests such as #BlackLivesMatter, and a number of other daily reminders of the deep institutional racism pervading the American landscape prove, *Watchman* may not be a voice entirely from the grave but a voice quite alive and speaking in our contemporary tongue.

Of course, in early 2016, Harper Lee died. Perhaps had she died prior to the late publication of *Go Set a Watchman*, readers would have found her novel less difficult to integrate into our sense of these characters whom so many have come to love. We were all shocked to find that Jem had died, that Scout was all grown up and had fled to the North, only returning South for a two week annual visit, and that Atticus, the supposed pillar of racial redemption, was a racist who questioned if blacks were truly ready to vote or receive other rights of citizenship because of his perception of their infancy as a civilized people. We are, oddly, less mortified by the obvious incompleteness of *The Canterbury Tales*; in fact, from George Lyman Kittredge to Don Howard and beyond, scholars have long argued for the “completeness” of the text in its current unfinished state. Some scholars query if

Shakespeare wrote every word of all of his plays or if his fellow players who printed the *First Folio* might have added portions or edited portions or simply misremembered portions of his eloquent language. Scholars rightly devote themselves to teasing out even minute examples of questionable wording, but readers (and critics) also confidently read plays such as *Hamlet* as whole, complete, and vital texts of the human experience and of Renaissance ideas. In a more contemporary setting, James Meriweather and Noel Polk devoted themselves to discovering and preserving the “authentic” or “original” version of Faulkner’s novels, all of which were edited by publishers who struggled with Faulkner’s unique style. Meriweather restored the full text of *Flags in the Dust*, which Faulkner’s publisher, with the aid of Ben Wasson, originally released as *Sartoris*. The longer version gives us more insight into Faulkner’s universe, but Faulkner was alive to approve the cuts to the original. He died before Meriweather’s revision, yet we rarely question the authenticity of Meriweather’s version of the text. Similarly, Polk edited nearly all of Faulkner’s novels before his death, including another revision of Meriweather’s *Flags* and a controversial revision of *Absalom, Absalom!* that “fixed” incongruent dates in the novel and the attached chronology and genealogy. Faulkner’s novels may not have been published the precise way in which Faulkner first envisioned them, but he approved the versions that made it to print in his life. All of Meriweather’s and Polk’s work—currently accepted as the standard editions of Faulkner’s novels—represent editorial decisions after his death. On the other hand, Lee was alive when her lawyer found and pushed for the publication of *Watchman*. Perhaps we suffer from such difficulties of “authenticity” in regards to her novel because we struggle to account for the agency of aging members of our society; at least after death, we do not have to blame them for someone else’s decisions, for better or for worse. Perhaps such questions

of authenticity serve as cover, though, for a more difficult realization. We would rather doubt the authenticity of a narrative that sheds negative light on our idols than face the possibility that we have actually misread the actions of those idols all along.

A closer inspection of *Mockingbird*, and a counter-intuitive one given the praise heaped on the novel and subsequent movie, easily reveals some problems that fans of the narrative seem to overlook. In her obituary for Lee, Hayley Miller describes how the novel “found immediate critical success.” Miller even points out that the *New Yorker* went so far as “touting it as ‘totally ingenious’” as a work of fiction. The movie, Miller also notes, has “earned a spot in the American Film Institute’s list of the greatest movies of all time.” Still, as so many other critics and commentators, Miller fails to mention in her overview of the book that the trial at its heart—wherein Atticus defends Tom Robinson against accusations of raping a white woman—is predicated on Tom’s handicap. As a black male in an era that rarely saw black men as anything other than cheap labor and libidinous monsters, Tom’s handicap neuters him. He could not rape a white woman; therefore, he did not rape a white woman. Atticus is spared having to argue for the innocence of a black man who could rape a white woman; his client is inept. In the racial stereotyping of the day, Tom’s handicap spares a more difficult confrontation with the perception of the black beast rapist that haunted white American identity. The handicap also puts Tom in need of Atticus’ help, though the real “handicap” he faces is his blackness, not his crippled arm. Tom cannot defend himself in court because he is black. He must have a white man, the iconic father figure, to defend him. Atticus steps in to avoid a lynching, an extra-legal practice that even the Atticus in *Watchman* finds appalling. The Atticus in *Watchman* joins the KKK to temper

down their violence, much the way he defends Tom in *Mockingbird* at least to keep him alive.

Thus, Atticus enables a process that will see Tom become part of the re-constituted plantation system masquerading as a prison where he will be shot while trying to escape. Atticus, the white man, nonetheless gets the credit for trying to help the black man. Readers get to feel just awful that the system is so broken. Tom still dies, but Atticus' white children do not. At the conclusion of *Mockingbird*, Atticus neither affirms the right of blacks to the franchise nor excoriates the penal system that deprives black men of the rights supposedly guaranteed to all Americans by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which does contain an exception for those who are tried through the due process of law. All citizens have a right to due process, but if one is incarcerated through due process, one becomes less than a citizen in the eyes of the state. In all the praise the novel receives and all the praise heaped on Atticus as an exemplar of racial justice, few scholars note that if he spares Tom the rope, he does not save Tom from prison. As Douglas A. Blackmon has explored at length in his study *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Southern states—in particular Alabama—needed few pretenses to skirt the promises of due process in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment; Tom could have as easily been loitering in the wrong place at the wrong time as caught in an illicit affair with a white woman and faced the same fate. Atticus does not solve or even address these “legal” realities; he just forestalls the illegal one. Still, when the “colored” balcony rises to honor Atticus' passing after the trial, the emphasis is on his valiant defense, not Tom's fate. In short, we honor Atticus' paternalism. Set before the events of *Watchman*, *Mockingbird* was written later. It is either the more progressive or the more reactionary of the two, depending on the perspective of the reader. From either

perspective, Atticus embodies paternalism. Scout, as child narrator, simply fails to see it. We, as readers, should not.

Writing for *Salon.com* in early February 2016, Scott Timberg published the results of a British survey, conducted after the release of *Watchman*, which found that Atticus Finch remains the most beloved of literary characters, beating out no less than Katniss Everdeen and Frodo Baggins, at least among a British popular readership. Timberg uses the survey to explore how our first impression is often our fallback impression, even when new information comes to light that may cast aspersions on our childhood heroes. In an earlier interview from summer 2015 with Angela Shaw-Thornburg, a professor at South Carolina State University, Timberg asked her about her thoughts on the novel after she published a review of *Watchman* contextualizing it against the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina statehouse after the mass murder of nine black men and women in a Charleston church. Shaw-Thornburg's interview comments stand out for their honesty and thoughtfulness in light of the revelations about Atticus' character. Whereas most readers were appalled to discover that dear Atticus harbored racist attitudes, Shaw-Thornburg takes a longer view. She points out that, "when most people read *To Kill a Mockingbird* [. . .] they're looking for some kind of racial redemption [. . .] It's supposed to be a novel about race, about civil rights, but it's a conversation between white people." Indeed, in context, it is hard not to see the "racial redemption" promised by *Mockingbird* as "paternalism" by another name. The happy narrative of race relations is predicated on a sympathetic reading in favor of the caring white person with money and social rank stooping to help the helpless black person who otherwise could never be imagined as pulling himself up by his own bootstraps or navigating access to legal rights or higher education without a benevolent,

charitable white hand. The perception of “racial redemption” in *Mockingbird* certainly clouds a reader’s vision about the stakes of the racial politics in the story. Pulling back the veil, as readers experience in the older, wiser Scout’s return home in *Watchman*, makes for an abrupt confrontation with the harsh sunlight of racism stalking in the shadows all along. This confrontation is a good thing for the context of the original writing of the novel in the 1950s and for the context of its publication in the 2015. For both moments, despite the gap of nearly sixty years, *Watchman* reminds readers of the simple reality extolled in Scout’s conversations with her native townspeople: we cannot remain colorblind.

Not only is *Watchman* an important link in a longer history that reminds us, as so much Southern literature is wont to do, that “the past is not dead, it’s not even past,” but it also represents an important literary coming-of-age for the young writer who penned it in the long shadow of her literary forefathers. That young Harper Lee, though, seems utterly unintimidated by the giants who surrounded her; close inspection of the novel shows a playful, and certainly not intimidated, send up of one of the best of them. Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding *Go Set a Watchman* has obscured the deep interconnectedness it shares with other serious works of Southern literature. On one level, *Watchman* mirrors and subverts latter-19th century reconciliation romances: Scout comes back South to be educated in Southern ways by a man who would be her suitor, were he of high-enough class. On another level, the novel borrows from and subverts one of William Faulkner’s most paternalist (and misogynist) novels, *Requiem for a Nun*. The parallels between Faulkner’s and Lee’s novels reveal quite a bit of thoughtful literary interplay in Lee’s much-maligned lost text. Lee deserves credit for the ingenuity of that interplay; to prefer the belief that Lee did not write portions of *Watchman* is to deny her agency over her own artistic



vision for its brilliance as well as for its perceived deficiencies. In 2015, Lee may have lost the keen sight that animates her two novels; hidden behind the mask of her seeming senility, we chose to see a lost old woman robbed of the dignity of a quiet death. The evidence in *Watchman* suggests, however, that in 1957 Lee's vision was much clearer and more intentional, as her troping of Faulkner's novel bears out.

Few scholars rank *Requiem for a Nun* as one of Faulkner's greater works; Philip Weinstein even goes so far as to make it his prime example of what he calls "Faulknerese," a term he applies to Faulkner's later fiction when his famous verbose style went from tightly structured and suggestive brilliance to logorrheic ramblings with no clear, central purpose. The "Faulknerese," in this case, is the three long narrative sections that introduce the three Acts of the play. The play itself suffers from its own rhetorical problems: primarily, the dialogue is stilted towards the homoglossic and didactic. Indeed, each character is a voicebox for Faulkner's larger moral purpose. Read as a play, *Requiem* approximates a Romantic-era closet drama, best read quietly and alone. The technical brilliance of the novel resides in neither the prose nor play parts of *Requiem* singularly; rather, their interplay pulls both into a higher discursive plane. Together, they trace the discourse of systematic racism and gender inequality disguised as a tall tale wrapped up in a Perry Mason-style courtroom drama.

In "The Courthouse" section of *Requiem*, Faulkner describes the founding of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County through a story both hilarious and chilling. A man owned a giant lock. The lock was useless, but the outpost that would become Jefferson locked up their small post office holdings with it anyway, because for the people living there "the old lock was not even a symbol of security; it was a gesture of salutation, of free men to

free men, of civilization to civilization” that bound a small, unnamed crossroads in the Mississippi wilderness to Nashville, from where it received its mail (11). This otherwise unnecessary symbol takes on greater significance when members of the community confiscate it to lock up some purported outlaws in an ersatz jail. The outlaws escape; they take the lock with them. In an effort to avoid paying for the lock, the Ratcliffes and Compsons and other members of the settlement incorporate as a town--named after the postal carrier who happens to be named after Thomas Jefferson--and write off the lock in their ledger of IOUs. Interestingly, in a twist that would make Nietzsche proud, the “debt” of the lock that is never paid for becomes the “guilt” of the town as it builds and rebuilds its courthouse and then a real jail, all as the greater price of their foolish decision to charge the lock against the future promise of an ideal, a “town,” in an otherwise formless backwoods.

In the larger scheme of this history, the town’s guilt stems from the unpaid acquisition of land and wealth, hallmarks of civilization, at the cost of Indian removal and racial slavery. The lock comes to represent precisely these twin sins and the debt this society refuses to pay for them. Indeed, as an afterthought, as they finish their first courthouse to make the idea of the town real, these suddenly legal lawless men pause in their labor because “so little remained now that the two slaves could finish it” (29). The detailing of the first courthouse is done by the slaves already in the community. One might be tempted to recall that the devil is in the details, as the old saying goes, but such a saying misses the mark in this case. History is in the details, even when a society tries to convince itself otherwise. From this courthouse other buildings would grow, the town spidering out in neatly laid streets of ordered real estate from “the center, the focus, the hub” of that courthouse, which the town, no matter its future, “will never be able to get away from” (35,

34). Even postbellum, the descendants of the slaves who finished that courthouse will “[pass] in beneath its balconies and into the chancery clerk’s office to cast ballots” (41). Herein the fear at the heart of the novel leaks into the open: published in 1950, Faulkner is forecasting a surge in black voters and quaking at the possible effects such a surge might have on the continuation of the South and its ways. In the apocryphal society in Faulkner’s novel, black people do not belong in the chancery clerk’s office. They belong in jail cells, where Nancy Mannigoe will so willingly go (and eventually to the scaffold, a metaphoric lynching with all the pretense of law).

In grand Faulknerian style, Faulkner changes course in his narrative rather than confront this fear of social progress head on. His narrative takes a turn, and instead he interjects a different kind of fable to express his anxieties about black citizenship through the story of a mammy who kills the white child to save the white woman and preserve the white family. Just as slaves detailed the first courthouse into completion, Nancy will dutifully play her role as caretaker of whiteness as well. We are “locked” into this repetition, Faulkner might say. The founding of the town in debt over that old lock has cast its long shadow over all the future of that town, centered as it is around a courthouse and legal system that deprives black people of the franchise, of citizenship, and even of basic humanity. In the world of the novel, Nancy is a plot device, not a person. The story is about a white woman; Nancy is just her maid. She is also the natural endpoint for the progression of history started with that lock and the debt the (white) town fathers incurred from it. Thus, *Requiem* becomes the vehicle for Faulkner’s most complete history of his mythic town.

Faulkner gave his readers this particular history of Jefferson late in his career; Harper Lee began her career with a similar history, though readers would not know about it until

many years later. In the opening pages of *Watchman*, Scout returns South for her annual trip home. Home is Maycomb County, county seat Maycomb, named after Colonel Mason Maycomb, whose humorous ramblings occupy an interlude six pages into the novel. Colonel Maycomb was fighting in the Creek Indian Wars in a stretch of country “vaguely hilly in the north and flat in the south” (8). The same “vague” geography, laid east to west, more or less sums up Yoknapatawpha, with its hill country ethos near Frenchman’s Bend and its iconic Delta imagery fleeing off into the west where men go to hunt fabled bears. Colonel Maycomb was out of position, of course, and despite a reprimand from his superior officer to “*Move south, damn you,*” pursued his meanderings until he “became hopelessly lost in the forest primeval” (8), where his troops spent the remainder of the war far from any actual fighting. Interestingly, the humor of the story belies its deeper use for a society built on land stolen from Indians; Colonel Maycomb did not really do any fighting, so, at least mythically, the land named after him may not have been anyone else’s home prior to his arrival. Elsewhere, other land was won from native populations; Maycomb County could conceivably be immune to that history, at least by way of the tall tale. To the day of Scout’s return, Maycomb remains a backwoods. It is an out of the way place where only its current “natives” live in isolation, or return to when they move away. It does not even have its own train stop. Scout returns there as if leaving any real map and entering a lost part of history, a county more myth than reality, detached from history and maybe even a little out of position itself. Of course, what she finds there is a population as invested in current affairs as anyone in the New York City she left for this short vacation. On the tip of every tongue is the latest Supreme Court decision; tomorrow might be the day the NAACP comes walking into town.

Later, we are again treated to snippets of history, this time concerning the location of the county seat itself, which “owed its location to the presence of mind of one Sinkfield, who in the early dawnings of the county operated an inn where two pig trails met, the only tavern in the territory” (43). When the governor sent a survey team to find the geographic center of “Maycomb” county, Sinkfield distracted them to his crossroads tavern while they were traveling to their actual destination “in the middle of Winston Swamp, a place totally devoid of interest” (43). Thus, by clever machinations, “Maycomb grew and sprawled out from its hub, Sinkfield’s Tavern, because Sinkfield made the surveyors drunk one evening, induced them to bring forth their maps and charts, lop off a little here, add a bit there, and adjust the center of the county to meet his requirements” (43). If the climax of *Requiem* takes place in the halls of the legal system—courthouse, to governor’s mansion, to town jail—Scout conveniently has her Faulknerian moment of lived historical identity at a soda fountain, where, as she faces the realities of her father’s prejudices, she understands that “[i]t was not because this was where your life began. It was because this was where people were born and born and born until finally the result was you, drinking a Coke in the Jitney Jungle” (154). The town of Maycomb was founded, metaphorically speaking, on a drunken night in a tavern; Scout comes to see her place in the history of the town drinking a soda at a counter in the new version of a tavern (where one imagines black citizens are not invited to sit). Post-prohibition, the change from tavern to soda fountain marks transition but not progress.

Though less detailed a history than in *Requiem*, the tall tale history of Maycomb County in *Watchman* does seem to play more of a role in the plot than as just humorous interludes. It establishes, however farcically, the history to which Scout is heir. It also

contains the traces of a deeper, less humorous history. Colonel Maycomb was out of position and saw no real fighting, but the land itself has a longer history of violent usurpation and conquest. Drunken surveyors seem harmless, but the machinations of the tavern owner register as decidedly more intentional than the bumbling accident of town fathers trying to avoid paying for a lock. Sinkfield's actions represent the motives of a man who wants to be fixed in the eyes of the government for profit, but until Atticus comes along in a subsequent generation, there is no courthouse in sight. Most significantly, this history subverts the high tragedy at which Faulkner aims in his earlier novel. Faulkner's history buttresses the actual drama he envisioned for the plot of his novel. Nancy's and Temple's histories as fallen women intersect and cause the death of a child to restore the order almost usurped by Temple's nearly giving in to temptation again. *Requiem* aims at *The Oresteia*, but probably falls short. *Watchman* takes a different tact; it aims at old southwest humor and raises it to level of *Bildungsroman* with Scout as scion of a mythic history as that history unravels into the harsh realities of white supremacy along the trajectory of her final step towards full adulthood.

Ideally, Lee could have further developed her mythic history of her apocryphal Southern town had *Watchman* been accepted for publication. Or maybe her brief nods to a sense of Faulknerian origins function best for their subtlety and lack of overwritten zeal. We, however, have become too caught up in textual authenticity and the toppling of heroes to pay heed to the implications of Lee's reworking of mythic histories. As readers, we also seem unwilling to view too closely the harsh realities behind those histories as those realities slowly expose themselves in Lee's first novel, which takes direct aim at its current moment and the politics of race in a way that a children's story cannot capture except through

heightened, and thus obscuring, innocence. But Lee saw something else in Faulkner's novel beyond just the racial implications of the history that girds its dramatic scenes. She also saw the misogyny of it, and she took aim at that misogyny in a telling scene borrowed and modified from Faulkner's original.

Early in *Requiem*, as he concludes "The Courthouse" section, Faulkner explains that this mythic space was fated, because of that lock, to forever be "a white man's land." Faulkner's history focuses on the "white" part of this claim. His novel, however, explores that claim through a woman. Temple "Drake" must confess her sins first to Gavin Stevens, a lawyer, then to the governor, and finally, her husband, who has taken his seat in the governor's chair during her confession in Act II, a symbolic substitution meant to imply that the legal system, as an extension of the law of the father/husband, reigns supreme. Temple and Nancy are fallen women, both culpable in the eyes of the law, one fated to the gallows, the other to the eternal contrition of domesticity. Lee depicts a similar scene in *Watchman*. After her uncle tries to explain to her the wisdom of Southern white (male) order as more virtuous than Supreme Court rulings to advance the colored race, Scout confronts Henry, her suitor, who also tries to explain to her the same wisdom and why her father may have surprised her but she should honor his judgment about these challenging race questions anyway. As she grows increasingly exacerbated and speaks out against her father, Atticus appears behind her, overhears her, and interrupts her, a gesture symbolic of his status as eternal father hovering at the edge of her consciousness. She must face him directly as Temple had, finally, to face her husband. Lee does not reach this final confession through a trick of stage lighting, though. Scout simply "turned around and stared at her father. His hat was pushed back on his head; his eyebrows were raised; he was smiling at her" (235).

“Paternalism,” we might recall, is not simply a racial attitude. Translated from Latin, it also implicates something far more familial.

The paternalism that marks Atticus’ treatment of Tom in *Mockingbird* is symmetrical to the paternalism that marks Atticus’ treatment of Scout in *Watchman*. Atticus’ attitude of benign control and wisdom extends to both novels and proves remarkably consistent, only in *Watchman* we can easily see how problematic it is whereas in *Mockingbird* we can overlook it because our eyes are so focused on “racial redemption” that we blind ourselves to paternalism and call it benevolence or generosity or patience instead. If we link this one critical scene in *Watchman* to its antecedent in *Requiem*, Atticus’ less-than-noble status comes more sharply into focus. Once we can see Atticus more clearly, his actions in *Mockingbird* register as less wholesome, for lack of a better word. Of course, as readers, for every time we have returned to our beloved book, we have spent more than half a century with images of stoic Gregory Peck calmly lecturing Mary Badham on a front porch on what looks to be a warm evening in a small town in Alabama. Returning to those scenes all these years later requires a different perspective gained from the loss of innocence that only sees a good father, a legal system, and poor white racists overrunning the town. Now we see the real father, the fully broken system, and racists who could be all of us if we take for granted the status quo and ellipses of history, if we accept the myths of our foundations rather than interrogate the realities still buttressing the systems in which we still live.

If anything should make us angry about *Go Set a Watchman*, it should be that the novel is not irrelevant to our contemporary moment. It should be that almost sixty years transpired and we still cling to *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the answer to some enigmatic racial question to the point of willfully disregarding any perceived threat to its status as Great



American Literature. Of course, it is a great novel and an important one, but that greatness has always been a mark of its complexity and challenge, not its capacity to make us feel good about ourselves. We ought to praise Harper Lee for the genius so clearly apparent in her finest and most well-known novel. On the occasion of her death, may we all turn down that glass in her honor. Then, let us also work to understand her other novel. It may not be the novel we wanted, but now it is the only other novel she gave us. Now, for the ages, for us, and for the better, this is the Harper Lee we will always have.

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# Excessive Religiosity in African American Prose: *Black Boy*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Bailey's Café*

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*By John J. Han*

## **Introduction**

Since the days of slavery, Christianity—especially Protestant Christianity—has been an important part of African American culture. In antebellum America, some masters regarded slaves as brutes who did not have souls and thus would not comprehend the gospel (Galli). Other masters were reluctant to share the gospel with their slaves for fear that the Bible contains too many passages about personal freedom. Eventually, white missionaries persuaded slave owners that Christian faith could lead slaves to docility and obedience. As one slave owner stated, “The deeper the piety of the black slave, the more valuable he is in every respect.” As a result, an increasing number of slaves embraced Christianity until it became the dominant religion for African Americans. However, before the proliferation of the Methodist and Baptist churches in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, black Americans remained outside the belief systems of Christianity (Garrett). After the end of the American Civil War, African Americans began to worship in a formal setting, and distinctly black church communities emerged to serve as a foundation for black cultural identity and political culture (Trumpy 263).

Currently, African Americans constitute the most religious ethnic and racial group in their church attendance and in their belief in God and the power of prayer (Vu). The U.S.

Religious Landscape Survey—conducted in 2014 by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life—revealed that black Americans are more religiously oriented than any other racial or ethnic groups in the United States. According to the demographic profiles of religious groups, black American adults surpassed the counterparts of all the other groups in most areas—in their absolute belief in God (83%), the importance of religion in one’s life (75%), weekly attendance at religious services (47%), daily prayer (73%), the frequency of participation in prayer, scripture study, or religious education groups (39%), weekly meditation (52%), the frequency of feeling spiritual peace and well-being (69%), pursuit of religious guidance on right and wrong (43%), the frequency of reading scripture (54%), the literal interpretation of the Bible (51%), belief in heaven (86%), and belief in hell (73%). Black Americans trailed other groups only in the frequency of feeling wonder about the universe (45% vs. 52% of the others/mixed persons and 51% of Latinos) and belief in absolute standards for right and wrong (28% vs. 36% of whites) (“Racial”).

Not surprisingly, African American prose includes many characters marked by religiosity and spirituality. An intriguing aspect of African American prose lies in its predominantly negative portrayal of the characters’ excessive religiosity. Admittedly, hyper religiosity is a frequent target of authorial criticism in American texts in general.

Sociologically, excessive preoccupation with religion may not necessarily signal mental illness but can be explained in terms of religious utilitarianism. In his book *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (1961), the sociologist Peter L. Berger notes the psychological uses of religion as follows:

[...] Religion is highly beneficial, perhaps even essential, to the psychological integration of the individual. Religion provides meaning and purpose in life.

It gives inner strength to cope with both minor and major crises. It alleviates anxiety and makes for a mature approach to one's problems. It helps the individual to relate to others, in the family and beyond. In general, religion is conducive to mental health. (90)

In other words, religious faith provides believers with meaning and purpose and helps them deal with their frustrations and anxieties. The uniqueness of African American prose lies in the preponderance of hopelessness, despair, and self-contempt behind religiosity.

This essay discusses the generally negative portrayal of hyper religiosity in three twentieth-century African American texts—one autobiography and two novels—in their sociological and psychological context. Although some black theologians, such as James H. Cone, maintain that black Christianity is not entirely otherworldly, it is also true that excessive religiosity sometimes derives from a resigned sense that retribution can be found only in the afterlife. Whereas texts before the Civil Rights Movement tend to represent religiosity in terms of the black race's powerlessness and despair, texts since the 1960s focus more on the psychological aspect of faith applicable across racial and ethnic lines in the United States. For this discussion, we will examine three specific African American texts: Richard Wright's memoir *Black Boy* (1945), Toni Morrison's short novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and Gloria Naylor's novel *Bailey's Café* (1992).

### ***Black Boy: Despair-Turned-Religiosity***

Excessive religiosity is a prominent theme in *Black Boy*, Richard Wright's wrenching memoirs of his childhood and adolescence. Born on Rucker's Plantation near Roxie, Mississippi, Wright grew up under Grandmother Wilson's care. A white-looking black

woman, his grandmother was a devout Seventh-day Adventist who forced her religion on him. She taught him about the eternal punishment of sinners in a literal lake of fire, the whole moon turning red, and other miracles from the Bible. He was “compelled to make a pretense of worshipping her God, which was her exaction for [his] keep” (Wright 113). Her religious beliefs stood in line with the teachings of her church, yet Wright explains that, psychologically, their excessive religiosity derived from hopelessness and despair.

Admitting that he was attracted to “an emotional belief” his grandmother’s religious instructions embodied, he found it meaningless on the streets, where he faced the cold hard facts of life for blacks in his time: “Once again I knew hunger, biting hunger, hunger that made my body aimlessly restless, hunger that kept me on edge, that made my temper flare, hunger that made hate leap out of my heart like the dart of a serpent’s tongue, hunger that created in me odd cravings” (Wright 113-14). Grandmother Wilson’s teachings were well-intentioned, but they seemed disconnected from the real world.

Within the house, Grandmother Wilson was allied by Aunt Addie, who ran a religious school the young boy had no choice but to attend. Calling the school of twelve students “God’s holy ground” (Wright 116), Aunt Addie whipped young Richard for arguing with her in class, although he had done nothing wrong. He also found his fellow students lacking real-world knowledge he—a street-toughened boy—had already acquired:

The pupils were a docile lot, lacking in that keen sense of rivalry which made the boys and girls who went to public school a crowd—in which a boy was tested and weighed, in which he caught a glimpse of what the world was. These boys and girls were will-less, their speech flat, their gestures vague, their personalities devoid of anger, hope, laughter, enthusiasm, passion, or

despair. I was able to see them with an objectivity that was inconceivable to them. They were claimed wholly by their environment and could imagine no other [...]. (Wright 115-16)

As a bright young boy who had firsthand knowledge of the society he was living in, he found the religious school not giving the practical answers he was seeking. For him, religious belief and ritual were little more than a defense mechanism for avoiding real-life issues. During a conversation with a deeply religious neighborhood boy, he expounds his understanding of God based on “[his] knowledge of life as [he] had lived, seen, felt, and suffered it in terms of dread, fear, hunger, terror, and loneliness” (Wright 127). He cannot avoid feeling sad for his grandmother whose excessive religiosity hides her weariness of life. After a church revival fails to convert Richard to Christian faith, Grandmother Wilson and Richard walk home together. The author describes the scene as follows:

On our way home she would not utter a single word. I walked anxiously beside her, looking at her tired old white face, the wrinkles that lined her neck, the deep, waiting black eyes, and the frail body, and I knew more than she thought I knew about the meaning of religion, the hunger of the human heart for that which is not and can never be, the thirst of the human spirit to conquer and transcend the implacable limitations of human life. (Wright 131-32)

Thus, Wright’s anger turns into a compassion for a colored woman who tries to find meaning and purpose through religion.

### ***The Bluest Eye: Religion for the Self-Styled Martyr***

Despite their spiritual abuse of young Richard, Grandmother Wilson and Aunt Addie in *Black Boy* are at least sincere in their faith. The critical problem for Richard Wright is that their faith lacks the ability to solve real-life issues. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Mrs. Breedlove, Pecola's mother, turns to religion out of her desire to escape failures in life: her once tender relationship with Cholly has turned sour, she feels lonely, her children do not give her happiness, and Cholly is an alcoholic who fails to provide for the family. Religion offers her consolation. Her belief is intense and is marked by a martyr complex, as evidenced by the narrator's comment below:

She [...] returned to church [...]. She came into her own with the women who had despised her, by being more moral than they; she avenged herself on Cholly by forcing him to indulge in the weaknesses she despised. She joined a church where shouting was frowned upon, served on Stewardess Board No. 3, and became a member of Ladies Circle No. 1. At prayer meetings she moaned and sighed over Cholly's ways, and hoped God would help her keep the children from the sins of the father. She stopped saying "chil'ren" and said "childring" instead. She let another tooth fall, and was outraged by painted ladies who thought only of clothes and men. Holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross. (Morrison 100)

This passage implies that Mrs. Breedlove's hyper religiosity was triggered by her unfortunate circumstance, not by her genuine spiritual desire. Religion happens to meet her



psychological needs, and she turns herself into a righteous victim. In other words, she suffers from a martyr complex, a concept explained below:

[A]cting out the role of innocent victim as a form of attack is the very essence of martyrdom as a character flaw.... [It] causes people to unconsciously attract and exaggerate situations in which they are apparently victimised, mistreated and persecuted. The martyr emphasises, exaggerates and even creates his own suffering and oppression on a grand scale in an attempt to make someone else feel guilty and take the blame. ("Martyrdom")

Loneliness, a sense of insecurity, low self-esteem, and negative memories from the past all contribute to Mrs. Breedlove's martyr syndrome. As an omniscient narrator, Morris implies that Mrs. Breedlove's intense religious experience was caused by her troublesome life, not by an emotionally healthy spirituality. One wonders whether Mrs. Breedlove would have turned to church if her life were as fulfilling and secure as her white masters' were.

Morrison also criticizes excessive religiosity through the episode of Aunt Jimmy's death. A devout Christian, Aunt Jimmy refuses to take medical advice from her friends. Instead, she listens to Miss Alice as she reads the Bible to her: "She nodded in a drowsy appreciation as the words from First Corinthians droned over her. Sweet amens fell from her lips as she was chastised for all her sins. But her body would not respond" (Morris 108). Her conditions grow worse until she dies alone. For the funeral, the ladies clothe her with a white wedding dress so that she can meet Jesus, her bridegroom.

Black women like Aunt Jimmy suffered throughout their lives at home and in the fields: "Then they were old. Their bodies boned, their odor sour [...]. They were old enough to be irritable when and where they chose, tired enough to look forward to death,

disinterested enough to accept the idea of pain while ignoring the presence of pain” (Morris 110). The bereaved encounter the loss with a deep religiosity:

[...] The deceased was the tragic hero, the survivors the innocent victims; there was the omnipresence of the deity, strophe and antistrophe of the chorus of mourners led by the preacher. There was grief over the waste of life, the stunned wonder at the ways of God, and the restoration of order in nature at the graveyard. Thus the [funeral] banquet was the exultation, the harmony, the acceptance of physical frailty, joy in the termination of misery. Laughter, relief, a steep hunger for food. (Morris 113)

Thus, religion gives the blacks in Morris’s short novel a system of symbols that allow them to make sense of the injustice they live under.

### ***Bailey’s Café: Hyper Religiosity Masking Emotional Insecurity***

Religiosity in *Black Boy* and *The Bluest Eye* is mostly a result of racial inequality and oppression. *Bailey’s Café*, set in 1948 and published in the last decade of the twentieth century, showcases a different type of religiosity, the kind evident in mainstream American literature: excessive religiosity that hides psychological insecurity. Naylor uses the Café as a setting for a panoramic view of African Americans who grapple with a number of existential issues. In addition to African American themes such as racial discrimination, the novel addresses social issues applicable across racial and ethnic groups, including sex addiction, drug abuse, domestic violence, and prostitution. One of the characters, Sister Carrie, is a Bible-thumping triumphalist who considers herself a messenger from a wrathful God. Nicknamed the “Cornerstone of the Temple of Perpetual Redemption,” she prays that her

daughter not be tainted by the sins of the people she sees at the café. One of her prayers reads, “Lord Jesus, it don’t make a bit of sense, all this riffraff and scum in here. I can barely swallow my food looking at the likes of them. Lord Jesus, please, protect my Angel from the filth and abomination taking over this place” (Naylor 32).

Bailey, the narrator, explains that what his customers say in the café should be taken with a grain of salt: “[N]obody comes in here with a simple story” (Naylor 34). Sister Carrie’s attitude may be “flat and predictable” (33-34), yet below the surface of her words lies an inner struggle. When she prays for her wayward daughter, Angel, her unuttered plea is this:

You gotta help me, Lord Jesus. Remove this burning from me. Remove these evil thoughts. Wipe out Satan. Wipe him out. I ache and touch, Lord Jesus. I ache and squeeze. I ache and dig into the heat. I bring up my fingers, wet, and give glory to Your name. (Naylor 34)

Sister Carrie’s constant condemnation of sexual sin ironically reveals her struggle with the sin itself. She also knows that her self-righteous prayer for Angel is powerless. She knows that Angel is reaching puberty which comes with sexual awakening:

[H]er Angel, Lord Jesus, [...] can’t be trusted. All of the care given the child, all of the teaching, and the betrayal is still coming. The girl wants to sin. She can see it in the breasts that keep pushing up over her brassieres. She buys them tighter and tighter, but the flesh keeps spilling out in defiance. The nipples so large and hard, they show through her dress. Inviting trouble. Wanting trouble. Cover yourself. People are staring. Wash yourself down

there. Again. Again. She can't let her smell like a bitch in heat. Like the bitch she wants to be. (Naylor 34)

Indeed, the narrator equates Sister Carrie with Sugar Man, an “[a]ll-around hustler and pimp” (33). The two characters “aren’t as far apart as they sound” (33).

Sister Carrie is symptomatic of psychological projection, a concept initiated by Sigmund Freud and further developed by Karl Abraham and Anna Freud. Projection is a defense mechanism in which a person attributes negative thoughts, desires, or impulses—the ones his or her superego rejects as objectionable—to another person. The most commonly projected guilt is related to aggressive and sexual fantasies or thoughts (McLeod). In *Bailey's Caf *, Sister Carrie projects her own sense of sense of sin and guilt to her teenage daughter who is undergoing puberty. As a hyper-religious Christian woman, she wants to maintain her good name and thus tries hard to suppress her intensely sexual desires. Those desires are projected onto her promiscuous daughter in whom she sees her own lustful self. Knowing that she is a failure in her pursuit of purity, Sister Carrie is afraid that, similar to her, Angel will grow up polluted with sin. Sister Carrie hopes that her daughter will live a pure life, but, based on her own life, she also knows that it is a lost hope.

## **Conclusion**

The three novels discussed above are overwhelmingly negative toward excessive religiosity among some African Americans. *Black Boy* and *The Bluest Eye* characterize it as an unhealthy phenomenon founded on powerlessness and despair, not on the basis of a genuine spiritual search. As a legacy of slavery, hyper religiosity reflects the suffering in this world. All slaves had was heaven, hence the emphasis on God’s eventual retribution. The

system of racial subjugation sometimes bred despair, which in turn bred excessive religiosity. The two novels suggest that understanding a text involves more than a study of plot, characterization, and symbolism; it involves an analysis of the text as “the product of a particular history” (Eagleton 527).

*Bailey’s Café* reflects changing racial dynamics in contemporary American society: Excessive religiosity in this novel has less to do with socio-political oppression and more to do with an individual’s psychological needs. In her judgmental tone, Sister Carrie sounds more like Mrs. Sandry, a religious fanatic in John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, than Grandmother Wilson, Aunt Addie, and Mrs. Breedlove.

Grandmother Wilson, Aunt Addie, Mrs. Breedlove, and Sister Carrie find safety and comfort only in religion; they cannot function well outside its boundaries. Unfortunately, life is complex, and religion provides them with only a momentary emotional release. As Milton Horne and Wesley Eades note, religion can be confusing and destructive for those who use it as a crutch: “[R]eal spiritual transformation occurs when people move from expecting God to take care of them, to realizing that peace is possible regardless of circumstances.... [P]eople often use religion to try to control the uncontrollable, which, in turn, magnifies suffering” (ix). The African American characters discussed above also display what Bernard Spilka, Ralph W. Hood, Jr., and Richard L. Gorsuch call a “pattern of religion-abnormality relationships,” in which religion and mental or psychological disturbance are interrelated (291).

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# Pulp Fiction and the Rhetoric of Charity

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*By Andrew Nelson*

Scholarly and critical reception to Quentin Tarantino's 1994 film *Pulp Fiction* varies in tone, orientation, and focus. Writing for the LA Times, [Kenneth Turin complained in a contemporary review](#) "... this is a noticeably uneven film, both too inward-looking and self-centered in its concerns" (Turin). Equally frustrated by the film's lack of substance, James Wood railed against the film's significance in a contemporary review published by *The Guardian*: "Tarantino represents the final triumph of postmodernism, which is to empty the artwork of all content, thus avoiding its capacity to do anything except helplessly represent our agonies.... Only in this age could a writer as talented as Tarantino produce artworks so vacuous, so entirely stripped of any politics, metaphysics, or moral interest" (Wood). Reviews of this kind may have been visceral reactions to scenes such as Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman) accidentally overdosing on Vincent Vega's (John Travolta) heroin stash, Mia's husband Marcellus (Ving Rhames) being raped by a rent-a-cop, and Butch (Bruce Willis) narrowly escaping a fixed boxing match only to leap into a waiting cab in which Esmerelda VillaLobos (Angela Jones) breaks the news to Butch that he just killed his opponent in the squared circle. Challenging the film's detractors, Peter Bradshaw in the *The Guardian* celebrates the film's re-release: "Twenty years on, Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* has been rereleased in cinemas, and it looks as mesmerizing and mad as ever: callous, insolent, breathtaking" (Bradshaw). The film was nominated for seven Oscars; Tarantino and his writing partner Roger Avary won the Academy Award for Best Screenplay. As of this writing, the film grossed over 100 million dollars (Imdb). With countless one-liners,



memorable scenes of overdoses, robberies, shootings, and the soundtrack which peaked at 21 on Billboard's 200, there can be no doubt: the film has etched a deep groove into the pop-culture consciousness of the Western World.

In addition to the varied critical reaction in the movie press and the film's tremendous success both in and out of the film industry, discussion of the picture in the academy involves: genre studies, postmodernism, race, language; and, even philosophical ethics. From a rhetorical perspective, scholarship notes Tarantino's placement of marginalized characters within familiar settings—primarily using language—to establish community between the film's imaginative universe and real audiences (Davis and Womack 60-66). As with any film, rhetorical criticism helps establish meaning; thus, this paper will attempt to build on existing scholarship by discussing the film rhetorically; yet, will also embrace religious studies and anthropology. Through an exploration of key meanings within these three fields, a powerful message exists that scholarship surrounding the film has failed to point out and reviewers have neglected to mention. Beneath the shock-driven, sheer entertainment of Tarantino's direction, the real challenge to audiences involves understanding the film's highly persuasive message witnessed in the critical closing scene. The journey to personal salvation and spiritual attainment begins with service and charity toward others. After establishing these ethical principals through a detailed examination of the film's intense final diner scene, a larger discussion of the rhetoric of charity becomes possible.

The film ends as it begins: in the iconic [Hawthorne Grill](#) now demolished in favor of an Auto Zone. Two Bonnie and Clyde (Tim Roth and Amanda Plummer) figures plan to rob the diner at the film's outset, and the plot returns full circle at the film's conclusion as

audiences witness the two going berserk terrorizing patrons. As Pumpkin (Roth)—or Ringo from Jules Winfield’s (Samuel L. Jackson) perspective—approaches Jules demanding his wallet, the dialog revealing Jules’ transformation begins. Ringo attempts to rob Jules, Jules snatches the gun away from Ringo, and now Jules enjoys the upper hand. Absurdly comical irony frames the entire [dialectic between Jules and Ringo](#): Jules discusses his present state of mind, spirit, and his future fate with Ringo in a completely normal, conversational, almost comforting tone while pointing a 9mm pistol straight at Ringo’s face. Jules has been a gangster his entire life. He carries out hits at the behest of his crime boss Marcellus Wallace. Jules only knows violence. This is his history. This is his narrative. His narrative was significantly disrupted, however, by an incident which occurred previous to the diner scene. Jules and his partner Vincent were sent by Marcellus to kill an associate who attempted to beat Marcellus in a drug deal. Jules follows through with the hit; thus, carrying out the orders given to him by Marcellus. Seconds after exacting revenge on Marcellus’ behalf, Jules and Vincent are fired upon by an individual bursting from a back room. Six or seven shots all missed. Jules and Vincent are spared. Jules feels the presence of the divine. In his own words, “God got involved.” Jules felt the touch of God. That is a life-changing experience for Jules. Even more important is what Jules chooses to do with this experience. How is Jules going to live his life from this point forward? How is he going to follow up on this divine experience? To point out that he experiences the touch of God, and that this experience was life changing, is only a small part of Jules’ narrative. The way he lives his life from this point forward bares the most significance. Audiences are able to get a glimpse of how Jules is going to conduct himself through the discussion he has with Ringo.

Jules' first act of charity—service to his fellow man—involves a monetary gift. A deeper look at this first act of service, however, reveals something much more than a mere charitable donation. First, why did Jules give *Ringo* all the money in his wallet? Once Jules got the upper hand on Ringo, why didn't he take all the wallets from the garbage bag and return them to the restaurant's patrons who were just robbed by Ringo? After all, that would be a true act of charity, wouldn't it? Jules realizes the other patrons are not the ones who are truly in need. They are not the ones hurting. Ringo hurts. Ringo needs to be saved. Ringo is the weak. Jules knows this. Jules understands this because he has lived the exact same life as Ringo. The killing, the robbing, the lying: Jules has experienced the same life as Ringo. Jules knows how to get Ringo's attention, because in a sense, he is Ringo. Gangsters like Jules and Ringo have one loyalty: money. That is how Jules gets Ringo's attention. Even if this monetary gift from Jules to Ringo never changes Ringo's fate, at least in Jules' eyes, a seed has been planted. Jules knows the best way to get that seed planted and germinating within Ringo is to use money. The money becomes not just literal currency, but spiritual currency. Jules explains, "I ain't givin' it to him, Vincent, I'm buying something for my money. Wanna know what I'm buying with it Ringo? Your life. I'm giving you that money so I don't have to kill yo' ass" (Tarantino). The gift from Jules to Ringo is much deeper than just monetary. Jules gives Ringo life, instead of death. This is Jules' first spiritual decision. He could either kill Ringo or give him life. Jules chooses to give Ringo life, and uses money as spiritual currency because that is all Ringo understands. Jules communicates his commitment to charity and service to Ringo in the most appropriate way possible. From a rhetorical standpoint, it is a *kairotic* moment for Jules. It is the right

setting, he has a receptive audience, he uses the appropriate language, and Jules' action is guided by high ethics.

Jules ends his discussion with Ringo as the film concludes. This is not coincidental: ending the film in this manner emphasizes the importance of the exchange between the two and supports meanings explored in this paper which have been missed in much scholarship surrounding the film. Jules revisits and reinterprets the Bible verse he delivered time and time again to hit victims. This was his trademark: he would recite the verse to a victim just before he would whack them. The verse from Ezekiel is rewritten by Tarantino:

The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides  
by the inequities of the selfish, and the tyranny  
of evil men. Blessed is he who in the name of charity and good will shepherds  
the weak through the valley of darkness for he is truly his  
brother's keeper and the finder of lost children.

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And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger  
those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers  
and you will know I am the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you.

Jules considers three ways of (re)interpreting the verse: 1) Jules is the righteous man; 2) The world is evil and selfish; or, 3) Ringo is weak and Jules is the tyranny of evil men. He decides on the third interpretation. His honest appraisal of his current place in the world, and more specifically this particular situation, indicates he has a strong desire to transform

his life. He ends the conversation with Ringo by giving the audience a glimpse of the new Jules: “I’m trying...I’m trying real hard to be the shepherd. Now go” (Tarantino/Avary). Remember, the shepherd’s quest is informed by goodwill and charity. Jules’ life thereafter will be an attempt to appropriate this shepherd figure. He understands the way—maybe the only way—to redemption is through a life of charity and selflessness. This is the exact inverse of the selfish pursuit of wealth and greed he’s known previously. His reinterpretation of the verse supports his mercy and charity toward Ringo and anticipates his future life as a shepherd.

This glimpse into the beginning of Jules’ transformation—with a commitment to charitable deeds at its core—opens up a discussion of the rich history of charity. In a sense Jules’ transformation carries on a tradition of charitable works which has existed for thousands of years. The ancient Hindu Vedic texts detail the value of charity from a spiritual and philosophical point of view (Osborn). Charity is positioned as one of the three principal virtues in a Vedic text called the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a key Hindu text believed to have been written around 700 BCE, although Romila Thapar contends “The nature of the literary data is significant to the historical reconstruction of this period. It is virtually impossible to date the Vedic texts with precision since they are essentially ritual texts and in some passages are clearly anachronistic” (11). The general scholarship surrounding the Vedas, their origins, authors and dates includes significant differences and controversy.

Chapter 5 of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad explores the Three Principal Virtues—self restraint, charity and mercy—as strategies for sublimation against the Three Great Evils: desire, anger and greed. Keeping Jules’ struggle in mind, the discussion of the three

Principal Virtues as a spiritual alternative for the gangster's life of vice contextualizes his struggle nicely. As far as the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is concerned, one's actions are just part of charity. An internal empathy characterizes the charitable person. It seems this Upanishad suggests charity needs to be in one's nature.

St. Thomas Aquinas commented extensively on charity in his 4,000 plus page *Summa Theologica*. His discussion of the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) contains an expansion of the nature of charity; he invests around 100 pages in this discussion. The complex treatment involves the Divine and its presence within the individual:

The Divine Essence Itself is charity, even as It is wisdom and goodness. Wherefore just as we are said to be good with the goodness which is God, and wise with the wisdom which is God (since the goodness whereby we are formally good is a participation of Divine goodness, and the wisdom whereby we are formally wise, is a share of Divine wisdom), so too, the charity whereby formally we love our neighbor is a participation of Divine charity (Aquinas).

Aquinas seems to argue charity is not a choice an individual makes, or even represents some sort of relationship with a greater being; rather, charity very simply is the essence of God. Charitable acts are the outward manifestation of God within. Ironically, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and the *Summa Theologica*, two texts from very different spiritual traditions produced at significantly different times in history have very similar ideas on charity: charity originates from within and is evidence of divine spirituality.

In stark contrast to the divine nature of charity discussed in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, the French Anthropologist Marcel Mauss'

research on gift-giving among traditional societies needs to be mentioned. Mauss and his group studied traditional cultures in Polynesia, Melanesia, and North West America. Gift-giving among specific groups in these geographical areas had decidedly different functions than an expression of God's love seen in the previously mentioned Christian and Hindu models. In Mauss' *THE GIFT: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, giving has a very important cultural function. Gifts serve as "... prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour (sic) is formal pretence (sic) and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest" (Mauss). From the perspective of an individual in these traditional cultures, if a gift is received, that "generosity" needs to be repaid. Mauss argues gift giving in these traditional cultures is no more than a division of labor. One party's gift to another party helps split up work. There is a very important moral obligation on behalf of someone who receives a gift to return the favor. Therefore, gift giving is essential glue which holds these cultures together.

Whether charity is divinely inspired an act of free-will, an essential cultural institution, or a way to personal salvation, it retains a powerful place in the human experience. An article in the May 16, 2015 edition of the St. Louis Post Dispatch can attest to the healing power of doing good works in one's community in the name of charity. Mike Pereira is a 2015 graduate of Washington University of St. Louis. He is also a combat veteran who served two tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. He, like many other combat veterans, suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He found a way to cope with his PTSD "What I found was that service, doing something for others, helping the people who

need help, was the most beneficial route for me,' Pereira said. 'I went to Wash U because I wanted to learn how to articulate that.'" Pereira's narrative, Jules' transformation in *Pulp Fiction*, and the history of charity in religious and anthropological texts all indicate giving to others can have a powerful effect on an individual. Charity can very simply save lives. The world needs more of that.



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