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Editor
Mississippi College

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Editor's Notes and Acknowledgments

This was the year of the ice-storm the day of the conference, the ice storm that closed campuses at Mississippi Valley State University, Delta State University and Mississippi State University. The hardy souls who came anyway still produced strong papers; Louisiana Tech University, Jackson State University, and University of Central Arkansas certainly all made strong impressions; so, despite the weather, the conference was a success. The conference continues to draw good work and collegial friendships.

Our speaker, Professor Benjamin F. Fisher, reminded us elegantly why the conference is so appealing—because we all loved so many "specializations" in literature that we had to leave behind (and should not) to pursue our one, so that this conference has become a rare opportunity to specialize and to dabble in our other interests. After such an extraordinarily productive career as a scholar, which is by no means over, his graciousness in agreeing to address the conference is impressive. His address begins this volume.

The Department of English at Mississippi College allowed me to build a course around the process of editing a journal, and the students in that course assisted in editing the journal. Thanks are due to Susan Hall Vickery, Joseph Hemleben, Emily Kuh, and Luke Pitzrick for their contributions to the editing as well as for their efforts at setting up the '09 conference. Members of the English department were extremely helpful in keeping the conference running: Jim Everett, Lee Harding, Kerri Jordan, Susan Lassiter, Lu Ann Marrs, David Miller and Jonathan Randle contributed papers and/or other support; Vice President Ron Howard and Dean

Gary Mayfield also provided some underwriting for the conference. I am grateful to all of those people and to others unnamed.

This year, I considered how we might make the journal genuinely peer-reviewed and determined that, given the wide range of periods and genres, to do so would be beyond our resources; the conference as a whole may wish to reconsider that. On a related note, I decided that because styles vary within the field, I would try to embrace our diversity rather than homogenize the entire scope of our disciplines, so stylistic matters in the journal strive to create a balance between the variety and the straitjacket that journals sometimes create. I hope you enjoy your contributions as much as I did.

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Keynote Address
Benjamin F. Fisher
The University of Mississippi

Time's Passages : The Profession, The Mississippi Philological Association and Elsewhere

I commence with a quotation from a longtime favorite author. On 9 May 1933, A. E. Housman, delivering the annual Leslie Stephen Lecture at Cambridge University, began with these words: "It is my first duty to acknowledge the honor done me by those who have in their hands the appointment [of the speaker], and to thank them for this token of their good will. My second duty is to say that I condemn their judgment and deplore their choice." I have no pretenses to the stature of Housman, either as an academic or as a poet, but my sentiments about this presentation echo those I just quoted.*

Therefore know that profundity will not issue from me tonight. Since, however, on this occasion I may be present as the lone representative, or survivor, among founding MPA members, roughly a quarter century ago, and since this is my fiftieth year in higher education, I offer what may be some informed observations about comings and goings in our profession. Understand, mine have long been minority opinions, so if many in the audience feel their hackles rising because of this talk, know that said words and opinions were not formed with a principal intent to annoy or enrage.

First, at the risk of sounding self-centered, a meandering overview of certain academic experiences and the attitudes that have resulted from them. In high school, I pondered college possibilities, to prepare for what I thought would be a career as my Pennsylvania hometown high school History teacher or, alternatively, to train in Forestry. History won out. After all, I grew up in a household that included four generations, extending from 1862 to 1940, my Great-Grandfather Fisher

(the first Benjamin Franklin Fisher) was a founder of the United States Signal Corps, and the longest surviving successful escapee from Libby, Richmond, Virginia's infamous Civil War prison, and his children spent endless hours chatting about genealogy and other history. With such background I entered Ursinus College, an educational institution established in 1869, with the then express aim to train ministers to counter what were seen as increasingly high-church tendencies in the German Reformed Church. By my time at Ursinus, however, the religious focus no longer remained uppermost, though all students were required to attend chapel services. The Department of History maintained high standards, and Maurice W. Armstrong, the most demanding professor in that department, who had completed a Ph. D. in church history (concerning tent meetings in colonial Nova Scotia), a first-generation Scot-Canadian, taught me The History of Western Civilization, History of the World since 1870, British History, Renaissance and Reformation, and, even, Canadian History.

At that same College, as part of the general curriculum, sophomores were required to take, each semester, a one-credit-hour course in English Composition, plus a two-credit-hour survey course in British Literature or, alternatively, a three-credit-hour course in American Literature. Considering that the latter was the only American lit course offered, one may get glimmers of how times have changed in college-university departments of English across the U. S. A.. The professor who taught American Literature, by the way, was himself an alumnus of the College (as his siblings and their father had been), his undergraduate major was Classics, his Ph. D. dissertation treated poetry in *Cave's Gentleman's Magazine*, an eighteenth-century periodical, and well before my time in college he regularly taught courses in composition, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British prose, Romantic and Victorian Poetry, the American literature survey, and a seminar in Poetry (an analytical approach of the I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* variety). Another professor--who was Professor Emeritus of English and President Emeritus of the College, taught me Shakespeare,

Old English, History of the English Language, and Renaissance non-dramatic poetry--had instituted the course in American literature when he was a young assistant professor, emulating his mentor, at the Pennsylvania State University, Fred Lewis Pattee, who taught courses in Shakespeare and in American literature, and whose pioneering books on American literature remain worthwhile. A third professor taught Contemporary British Poetry, and although I benefited considerably from the content, who today would think of "contemporary" in a course that began with the poems of Henley, Hardy and Housman, Yeats, the decadents, along with the work of Ralph Hodgson, Ruth Pitter, Walter de la Mare, Norman Nicholson, Oliver St. John Gogarty, and in which the professor ultimately skipped to Dylan Thomas! You may well comprehend that my college education involved unusual turnings and diversities, several of which have stayed with me.

Our teachers at Ursinus determinedly ensured that students read, and read, and READ, no matter the subject. To return to the American literature course, I became so fascinated by the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne—and we read *The Scarlet Letter* plus fifteen stories of his (plus all of Norman Foerster's *American Poetry and Prose*, plus *The Sketch Book*, *Walden*, *Moby-Dick*, a Twain novel, a Henry James novel (I have never recovered from reading *The Ambassadors*): remember, this was a sophomore survey course—that I decided to shift majors from History to English. I have never regretted that change, though it has taken me far from becoming my hometown high school History teacher.

Subsequently I went to Duke University, earning M. A. and Ph. D. degrees there, with concentrations in American and Romantic and Victorian literature. Arlin Turner, a world renowned Hawthorne scholar and a specialist in Southern Literature, directed my M. A. thesis on Hawthorne's literary origins. Turner served as my dissertation director as well, but for that project my subject was Edgar Allan Poe. Thanks to Arlin's research leave, followed by a Fulbright to India plus another teaching abroad stint, at the University of Hull, Louis Budd became my dissertation director. Although Louis is a renowned Twain scholar, and

although I am sure that years ago he must have winced at some of my ventures, he has been a great mentor and friend.

Two other professors greatly influenced my American studies. First, Clarence Gohdes, whose courses in later nineteenth-early twentieth-century American literature gave scope to my growing interest in Local Color, or regional, writers such as Mary Wilkins Freeman and Mary N. Murfree. Professor Gohdes was a formidably learned man, who had originally majored in, then taught Classics, but who wished to pursue studies in American literature when that was only coming into being as a worthwhile area for serious research and teaching. His own scholarly work initially centered on American Transcendentalism, and he frequently offered graduate seminars in Emerson and in Whitman, though he shifted his focus into later nineteenth-century studies for much of his career (he also offered graduate seminars in American humor). Formidable in many other respects, Professor Gohdes brooked no nonsense in academic work, but he manifested a great kindliness as well, in and out of academe. His counsel assisted me in many situations, and he later contributed illuminating work to several edited publications that I captained.

Equally learned, and far less formidable, was Jay B. Hubbell, then retired but still very much a campus presence, and extremely pleasant and kind. Like Gohdes, Hubbell had early trained in Classics and taught Greek and Latin, but he went on to concentrate in American literature, particularly that created by Southern writers. Hubbell attracted great followings of students at Southern Methodist University, subsequently at Duke, where he founded the journal, *American Literature*, which first appeared in 1929, and how American literature studies have burgeoned since then. Professor Hubbell never forgot any person he met, and he was diligent in promoting the scholarship and careers of many of us who were fortunate enough to know this great pioneer in bolstering the causes of American literature as worthy of college-university classes.

Professor Gohdes was assiduous in making sure that graduate students in American literature were introduced to Professor Hubbell,

and many besides myself have been grateful for that cordial overture. Hubbell and Turner directed more M. A. and Ph. D. projects than any other members in the Duke Department of English during their years of fulltime teaching, and shortly before he retired, Turner was chairing more doctoral students than any other professor in the entire University. As tribute to *his* accomplishments, Professor Hubbell lived long enough to see the creation of the Jay B. Hubbell Center for American Literary Historiography, at Duke University, and to invite many persons to contribute factual accounts concerning their own contributions to American literary studies, and to prepare accounts of organizations devoted to American writers and to American literary studies. The Hubbell Center is a repository for much archival material related to American literature.

As a side note, which has been really no side note, my great interest in addition to American subjects is Victorian literature. My mentor at Ursinus, as I remarked earlier, was in inspiring teacher of Romantic and Victorian poetry, and I was fortunate to attend Duke University when several renowned professors of Victorian studies were riding that range, so to speak, although two of them had interests, and had gained acclaim, for more than achievements in just Victorian work. Paull F. Baum, who started his academic career as a specialist in Old an Middle English, publishing impressive studies of medieval legendry about Judas Iscariot, and who was a student of prosody, was drawn to Victorian poets because their verse appealed to that interest (and that at time when Victorian writers were not so highly esteemed in academe as they have become since). Although he was kindly, many students were cowed by Baum because of his great learning. He was a pioneer in Victorian literature, as Hubbell and Gohdes were in American literature so his views on the field were very much his own. Those present tonigh with interests in Victorian studies might wonder at a full year graduate survey that included Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Pater, Tennyson, William Morris, the Rossettis, George Meredith, Swinburne—and that was prett much the roster. Baum assigned novels by Thackeray and Dickens, but

he never discussed them in class. Browning's poetry he detested, and simply did not teach. Baum's books on D. G. Rossetti, one dating from the 1920s, continue to be regularly cited. Although his *Tennyson Sixty Years After* was hailed as a major book on that poet when it appeared (1948), Baum's assessments of Tennyson's poems inclined toward the stringent, so subsequent critiques have mitigated what seemed to many as an imperfect perception of Tennyson's intellect.

More latitudinarian toward Victorian writers was Lionel Stevenson, a Scot, who earned his first two degrees in Canadian institutions, then a Ph. D. at the University of California (when there was only one), Berkeley, with a book on Darwin's influence upon Victorian poets. A generation younger than Baum, Stevenson harbored none of the senior man's antipathies to Browning, and his courses in Victorian, and Romantic, literature were some of the most popular among undergraduate English majors and graduate students. Stevenson gave an impression that he might have come into the world with one hand holding a Victorian novel and the other with pen and paper writing brilliantly about it. He also published a valuable, informative history of Canadian literature. His biographies of Lady Morgan, Charles Lever, Thackeray and Meredith, his history of the English novel, and a book on the Pre-Raphaelites continue to be consulted by students of Victorian literature.

All these Professors of English were, for the most part, old line literary historians, but Stevenson spent much time giving us superb explications of texts. Moreover, although I had enjoyed George Meredith's poems when I was an undergraduate, Stevenson's inclusion of Meredith's novels in Victorian courses led me to another author who has remained a great favorite. Stevenson's courses also expanded my knowledge of writers like D. G. Rossetti and Swinburne, and led to permission from Rossetti's last surviving niece to publish his horror ballad, "William and Marie," which had long remained in manuscript. I likewise recall his moving one morning from Shelley's *The Cenci* to the best impromptu lecture on *Hamlet* that I ever heard. Earning a B. Litt.

from Oxford, Stevenson was a respected professor from an American institution who on occasion taught American literature in the UK, demonstrating a great command of that field. To understate, my inspiring teachers were in no way narrow specialists, but persons whose teaching and publications evinced far-ranging interests.

All of my professors in graduate school had also published important editorial and bibliographical work, in addition to their historical, biographical or theoretical works. So my "growing up" educationally never brought with it any disparagement of bibliographical projects, which certainly seems to have surfaced since. I have also repeatedly encouraged my students to engage bibliographical projects, sometimes with a specific intent toward publication of useful material, sometimes to ensure that students will have the experience of bibliographical work for other purposes. Ironically, when I set out to prepare what I expected to be biographical-critical studies of two writers, I quickly realized that, since practically nothing about them was available, I would for starters have to conduct bibliographical research.

I continue, after forty-plus years, to try to track information about Ella D'Arcy, an Anglo-Irish woman, whose short stories in *The Yellow Book*, in the mid-1890s, brought her great attention as a notoriously decadent writer, one who seemed intent on subverting the institution of marriage. Much that has been published about D'Arcy errs as to facts, but her stories continue to appear in anthologies of British women writers. My other quarry, Frederick Irving Anderson (1877-1947), has also remained elusive, like D'Arcy, because for both much documentation that would expand biographical and, no doubt, critical information about him, seems to be no longer extant. And this shadowiness in despite of Anderson's publishing crime fiction in the long popular *Saturday Evening Post*, publishing three volumes in hardcover from among his roughly seventy stories, and publishing works, back in the nineteen-teens, on what we today would designation environmentalism or preservationism, topics that he also incorporated into his fiction. From the exploits of his delightful rogue heroine, Sophi

Lang, Paramount produced three films during the 1930s. So this first-generation Swedish-American author continue to be just beyond reach, in despite of the many possibilities his writings should have in the canon shifts that keep altering the profile of American literature.

Now, you might understandably be thinking, "How are these autobiographical ramblings relevant to the Mississippi Philological Association?" First, my own wide-ranging interests and teaching have without doubt found a kindred spirit in MPA. As one whose educational experiences have been inseparable from diversity, whether that diversity emanated from teachers whose equipment for effectiveness in their classrooms devolved from their varied educational and teaching experiences or whether it resided in my own impulses to cast a large net in my own learning and teaching, I find those same types of diversity in the MPA. In context I share a personal experience. In my Victorian studies I had come to know and respect the work of Clyde K. Hyder on Swinburne. When I ventured to publishing on Victorian writers he was the editorial board member for *Victorian Poetry* who gave my studies of D. G. Rossetti and of Swinburne considered evaluations. We then became personally acquainted, and I was amazed to learn that this man, who was such an important contributor to Swinburne studies had only once during his long academic career taught a course in Victorian literature. His mainstay was instead a course in Comparative Literature, although his duties as director, for many years, of the University of Kansas Press may have forestalled variety in his teaching.

As I commented, too, I was one of the persons asked to assist the causes when the Mississippi Philological Association was in embryonic stages. Those 1980s advocates for a Mississippi Philological Association, all from Jackson State University, apparently knew that I had actively participated in the philological associations of Arkansas and Tennessee. So I had, because my first M. A. student at the University of Mississippi had invited me to attend the Arkansas Philological Association, which invitation was strongly seconded by the then chairman of my department, as was my joining the Tennessee

Philological Association shortly thereafter. Later I went to the initial conferences of the Philological Association of Louisiana, which were also worthwhile events. All of those occasions were delightful to me, principally because I listened to many of my graduate and undergraduate students read topnotch papers and mingle well with those from other institutions.

Already a longtime member in the MLA, which has undergone some dramatic changes since the late 1960s, resulting in some cases to great overhauling in the nature of it annual convention programs, I found the philological associations' openness to any approach of literary study, welcoming and collegial. I have found a similar spirit pervading the Mississippi Philological Association, and although family necessities have curtailed my conference-going during recent years, I have nevertheless maintained my memberships in our own and in Arkansas' philological associations. Aware as I am of the good will that organizations such as these foster, I repeatedly urge colleagues and students to join and participate in the annual meetings. My activities in these associations have brought me many lasting friendships, and I doub that mine are unique circumstances.

More specifically, I have never gotten the remotest impression that those who take charge of the Mississippi Philological Association's annual meetings have been rigid about what are acceptable, what non-acceptable topics, and I trust that such latitudinarianism will continue. Just so, the receptiveness to graduate-students, which offers opportunities to gain seasoning in airing ideas about a chosen topic. The MLA, forty-six years ago, offered no ready forum for graduate student presentations. Nor were presentations by beginning assistant professors the order of the day in MLA at that time, the ideas of elder statespersons being definitely preferred. Over the years I have heard papers read on al sorts of topics, and using a spectrum of approaches. Although I myself have never feasted gluttonously on dishes assembled from ingredients o most kinds of critical theory, I have found much feminist theory enlightening—and often much easier to understand than some of the

translated versions of other varieties, which, interestingly, seem to slant the originals toward a much more political stance—perhaps that of their "translators?" Reading submissions for several professional journals, I have sometimes encountered a paper containing ideas set forth as if the writer were Eve or Adam in Eden, learning this or that for the first time, only to report that perhaps twenty, or forty, years earlier somebody else had published essentially the same critique. I say without hesitation that I have never listened to a paper in an MPA session that seemed a fumbling retread of someone's preceding work (though at other conferences I *have* listened to some extremely ill assembled and boringly delivered papers).

I am fully well aware that there are those in our profession who look upon philological associations as "mere," "regional," or even "chickenfeed" operations. Since members of ours, and other philological associations, often come from out-of-state or even from other countries, that charge collapses, as such small-mindedness should. The Arkansas and Mississippi Philological Associations have long published eminently respectable, and respected, journals (yeah, this is ego-tripping again; I once edited three volumes of *POMPA*), which are cited in annual MLA bibliographies and other information retrieval sources. Many of the articles published in POMPA have been requested for reprinting, wholly or in part, in reference works and as sections of books published by respected presses. Thus our publications serve as useful scholarship, the only worthwhile kind of academic publication. Our annual meetings bring to the fore presentations that are useful, and that could well take a place in organizations with apparently much greater scope, whether that appearance has credibility or not.

In my own academic pursuits and in the MPA, too, I have observed, overall, many changes. Many of those changes are for the better, or so I think, though increasing tendencies toward narrowing specialization is not one of those for-better changes. I have come during our meetings to learn more about authors who were ignored or certainly downplayed in my own student days. For example, Mary Elizabeth

Braddon and Wilkie Collins, among the Victorians, or, a transition figure, Rosamund Marriott Watson, who in the 1890s published poetry as "Graham R. Tomson." Another area of study that has also expanded, and within which quality and quantity of primary text reprints have been upgraded, is that of the Gothic novel, although literary Gothicism is in no way confined to the genre of the novel. Gothic novels were certainly on the periphery of academic literary studies fifty years ago, but they have since been awarded honorable place in our profession. Since 1991 the International Gothic Association has grown and flourished on both sides of the Atlantic. The status of Dickens is also no longer that of a writer whose fiction is categorized either as humor or sentimentality, with scant regard for characterization, symbolism, or anything else. Likewise, Edgar Allan Poe and his writings: gone, or pretty much gone, is the image of Poe, half-crazed by overindulgence in alcohol, drugs or sexual debauchery, who invented the horror tale. Every author seems to cycle through highs and lows, reputation-wise. Paull Baum's musical bu mindless Tennyson is no more, and those who once tended to dismiss Willa Cather as little more than a regionalist writer have lost credibility. Ironically, George Meredith, among Victorian novelists, seems out of fashion at the present, yet his themes and techniques bear far closer kinship to one or another of those in the works of, say, Joyce, Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, than they do to Dickens, Trollope or Wilkie Collins. Faulkner, for that matter, has far surpassed the position of one who wrote, less than kindly, mainly about persons he knew and the area of Oxford and Lafayette County, Mississippi. Instead he is regarded as a writer who comprehended character with amazing divination. Moving to another change, today we find far more political takes and more frank treatment of sexuality in literature than there was half-century ago, and this is putting it mildly. Moreover, all those years ago, who would have envisioned the romance novel popularity in evidence today? Interestingly, romance novels often demonstrate many of the same features as works touted as more mainstream. Such linkages were evident, of course, in that Ur-romance novel, *Peyton Place* (1956), in

which, also, Grace Metalious' knowledge of small-town America and abilities in fine storytelling are only too evident.

At times we academics seem to forget that storytelling may be as important as, or more important than, a critic's perspective on the work in question. Two other areas that we in the MPA do not neglect, however, are pedagogy and creative writing, for which sessions keep reappearing on our programs, amen. I went into college teaching because from First Grade to Ph. D. my role models were teachers who enjoyed their work. Consistent with my aim to offer effective teaching I have tried to provide useful scholarship in my presentations and publications. I know that many conference-goers return to their classrooms with expanded thinking about their subjects. MPA also often sponsors sessions on issues in languages other than English, and in composition and rhetoric. In sum, the MPA keeps current in the profession by featuring diversity of the most dynamic varieties. Such heterogeneity makes for genuine education. "Rich labor is the struggle to be wise," wrote George Meredith, and although one may not immediately light on struggles a component in its sessions our MPA certainly offers the fruits of rich labor to its members.

In the same spirit as that with which I began, I now close. Concluding *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, A. E. Housman stated, "Farewell for ever. I will not say with Coleridge that I recentre my immortal mind in the deep sabbath of meek self-content; but I shall go back with relief and thankfulness to my proper job."

**If my drawing upon Housman appears to recall his frequently acerbic manner, I dedicate, with gratitude and cordiality, these remarks to the memories of my former teachers and to the honor of those who are still living, as well as to my many students whose accomplishments and great personal kindnesses have made worthwhile and pleasant my career as a teacher. To Professor J. B. Potts I am grateful for this forum—and hope that my lucubrations do not dishonor the living or the dead. [Editors*

note: By no means. At least, I have not heard the dead object, and the living were delighted. JBP]

POETRY

C. Leigh McInnis
Jackson State University

Mississippi Like…

from ***Searchin' for Psychedelica*** © 1999, 2007

What is it to be Mississippi?
Where Capitol Streets cross cotton fields
and Margaret's *Jubilee* jams with Eudora's Festival
even when there are college cuts, controversy, and the Klan,
with plenty of revolution, religion, red, ripe tomatoes, and
rebel's ruby racist rag; this is all my Mississippi.
It's little boys puttin' dirt in abandoned tires
then rolling the tires by little girls in their Sunday dresses.
It's hangin' out at Big Sam's Juke Joint on Saturday night
and jukin' to "Sign Me Up" on Sunday Morning.
It's pickin' wild berries and stealin' plumbs.
It's mowin' everybody's yard 'cause yo' mama said so.
It's where time out means…
mama takin' a break from whippin' yo' leathery hide,
and the thought of a swarming strap still causes you
to wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat.
It's Ross Barnett damming the doorway of education
and James Meredith bulldozing over his ideology.
It's the Sovereignty Commission playing
hide-n-go-seek with the lives of invisible citizens
while Ebony voices declare "We Shall not Be Moved"
under the salacious sites of riffles and German Shepherds.
What is it to be Mississippi?
It's no matter how high brow we get
we still have hot sauce on the table when we eat.

It's having a special jaw bone from being double-voiced,
being bi-legally lingual enough to talk with two tongues:
a democrat on tv and a dixiecrat under the hill—
wearing black suits in the day
and white sheets during the night.

It's cinnamon and coffee leaves hangin' from faded olive trees,
a warm Thanksgiving and a cool Christmas,
where rain takes the place of snow,
and a brief frost can close school
like the notion of the ending of segregation,
as Southern Apartheid is kept alive every Sunday morning.
We still don't pray together even though our children
can go to Ole Miss and play together.
What is it to be Mississippi?
It's the peanut butter and jelly sandwich
of Archie Manning and Walter Payton
where some like peanut better more than jelly.
It's the quiet confusion that becomes
too cantankerous to ignore—like when the doctor says
today is the day to stop eating pork.
Or, when the pork politics of "good ole boy" kick backs
become too fattening to nurture democracy.
What is it to be Mississippi?
It's having one street with two names so that
the white folks can live on Hanging Moss
and the Black folks can live on West Street
until the Black folks march up the street
'causin' the Confederates to retreat to Rankin County.

What is it to be Mississippi?
It's being the mirror of the world with a
Chrysler chrome reflection too bright to face.

When you say yes ma'am and no ma'am because
manners are the concrete foundation of civilization,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you open the door for a woman,
not as a prelude to a rendezvous,
but because women are the fertile soil of our futures,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When a family reunion is a Sunday dinner,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
Or, when you send a plate over to Ms. Mary's house 'cause
all of her children took the exodus train North,
and she can't navigate the stairs like she used to,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you go to school, because education is the sledge hammer
to knock holes in the walls of injustice and oppression,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you vote, even though there are two flap-jack politicians
on both sides of the ballot, and the concept of Statesman
is nothing more than a mascot for Delta State,
yet you pull the lever anyway because Medgar's blood
is the only registration card you need,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When being baptized in the blood refers to the plasma of Jesus
and the crimson of the Civil Rights Movement,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you speak to people whom you don't know
as you pass them on the streets,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
And then after speakin' you ask them,
"Who yo' folks baby?"
That's the Mississippi in ya'.
Or, when you see a stranger with a familiar face and ask him

if he's Ms. Ruthie Mae Johnson's boy,
who lives over the tracks, under the hill,
that had that daughter who married that Williams boy
whose family owns the stow next to the Saw Mill Inn,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
Or, when you got a whole lot of cousins,
but yo' mamma and daddy ain't got no brothers or sisters,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you stand 'cause a woman approaches yo' table,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you refuse to call a woman
after ten p.m. or anything but her name,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When lovin' your fellow man as you love yo'self
is your political platform,
and feedin' little Leroy is your social welfare program,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
When you pay your bills despite them vampire interest rates,
not because you scared of colorless collectors,
but because yo' granddaddy's word was as solid as the Earth,
and yo' daddy's word is as true as the seasons, and
you don't want to drive down the value of your family's name
by being as unreliable as a politician's promise the day after election,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.
And when you do unto others as you would have them do unto you
because it pleases God and yo' grandmamma,
that's the Mississippi in ya'.

ESSAY
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Spatial Relationship in Marie de France's *Eliduc*:
The Arthurian Love-Triangle Revisited

[. . . *Dame Marie*] *compensa les vers de lais,*
Ke ne sunt pas de tut verais;
[. . .]
E si en aiment mult l'escrit
E lire le funt, si unt delit,
E si les funt sovent retreire.
Les lais solent as dames pleire,
De joie les oient e de gré,
Qu'il sunt sulun lur volenté.
-- Denis Piramus (ca. 1190)[1]

Lady Marie composed the verses of *lais*,
Which are not at all true;
[. . .]
And they [i.e., the nobility] love the writings a great deal
And cause them to be read out loud, and thus they have delight,
And they often have them recited.
The *lais* are pleasing to the ladies,
Who listen to them with joy and satisfaction,
Since they are according to their wishes.

Introduction

When, in the late 12th century, Denis Piramus took stock of his literary contemporaries, the Englishman could hardly have known that his comments about "Dame Marie" would be the first in a long list of critical statements, analyses, and suppositions about France's first named (and yet still largely anonymous) poetess. His assessment of Marie's popularity, as evidenced in the epigraph above, might sound to our ear like medieval quill envy, or at the very least, a well-developed sour-grapes complex. On the contrary, these statements create a crucial foundation

for our understanding of Marie's *lais*. In the first instance, Piramus provides a contemporary evaluation of Marie's texts: he rejects them because they do not tell the truth (incidentally, telling us much about what would become a dominant 13th-century technique of moralization and didacticism).[2] And, in the second, they give an indication of Marie's place in society: her audience was noble, courtly, and (especially) feminine. The *lais* are so extraordinarily popular among the ladies of elite French society, Piramus maintains, because they are "according to their wishes." About these two claims there is a great deal to be said.

First, although Marie herself might have blushed at the oblique compliment concerning her popularity, she takes great pains to establish the veracity or authority of the tales she writes. In nine of the twelve *lais* occurring in the Harley manuscript (our most complete collection of the corpus),[3] there is some attempt by Marie to verify the truth of what she tells – either a direct claim of truth (as in, for instance, the conclusion to *Bisclavret*), or an expression of unwillingness to fabricate material either to enhance or extend the tale (for which see the conclusions to *Lanval* or *Chaitivel*).[4] And if we admit Marie's comments about veracity in her Prologue to the *Lais*, we have even further indication of her own evaluation of the truth of her tales. The comments in question, occurring at the beginning of her collection, include two statements which seem to indicate that, for Marie at least, truth was a necessary prerequisite for her perpetuating the story.[5] Even if we allow that this kind of truth-claim is a mere authorial convention, we would do well to heed a further passage of Marie's Prologue, in which she maintains that it is the resulting benefit of a text, rather than its source in a perceived truth, which leads to popularity and reputation.[6] Marie thus creates an alternative reading to that of Piramus. Rather than her *lais* being popular *in spite of their falsity*, as Piramus suggests, Marie supposes that her tales might become popular *on account of the benefit* her audience reaps, neatly side-stepping the issue of truth.

Thus far the critique of falsehood. The second implicit criticism of Piramus that Marie has composed her *lais* according to feminine desires, deserves more lengthy treatment. That Marie's *lais* are predicated on feminine desires, of course, depends entirely on what we (or on what Piramus) considered those desires to be. This is problematic for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that, in terms of narrative content, we cannot identify a single unifying theme or trend in Marie's narratives as far as the treatment of females is concerned. In some texts, such as *Guigemar* and *Yonec*, the heroine is released (or frees herself) from the oppression of a jealous husband and finds solace happily united with her true (though adulterous) lover.[7] In other *lais*, however, this reversal of "captivity" is

itself reversed, such as *Equitan* or the aforementioned *Bisclavret*, where the women appear as threats to the heroes of the tale – the unfaithful wife in *Equitan* ends up in literal hot water, dying in the scalding bath prepared for her husband by her adulterous lover and herself; the unfaithful wife in *Bisclavret* has her nose ripped off by her husband-turned-werewolf, she is tortured and exiled, and is responsible for generations of noseless children. In response to such multiple treatments of the themes of love, marriage, and adultery, it has been suggested by both Burgess and Mickel, for example, that rather than promulgating some sort of moral absolute, Marie tends to condone or condemn adultery in the *lais* relative to the quality of love that is being demonstrated in the text – whether adulterous or marital.[8] Thus, if the woman is married (as in *Equitan*) to a just, honorable husband, her selfish desire for the adulterous lover is both a testimony to her lack of faith, and damnable. If, however, the husband is jealous and possessive, the *inclusa* – the innocent, imprisoned, noble, prudent and beautiful woman – tends to be justified in seeking whatever consolation she can find, which more often than not in Marie leads to a faithful, passionate, true, and strong love.

But surely it is too reductionistic of us (or of Piramus) simply to identify this kind of conditional, relationship-based reversal of oppression and ultimate upholding of "true love," as "feminine desire." After all, such a simplistic reading forces us to conclude that it is a woman's deep and honest desire to be unequally yoked to a man; in other words, the happiness of Marie's feminine protagonists necessitates their love with (and, in the best of all possible scenarios, marriage to) a man. Simply put, Marie has no chaste heroines. And, further, what are we to make of Marie's female characters who, presumably seeking their own desire, leave a husband for an adulterous lover, yet are still condemned? This seems a disapprobation of feminine desire, rather than use of such desire as a mode of composition. And even more to the point, what are we to make of *Eliduc*, the *lai* of the "man with two wives" motif? Surely this tale does not represent feminine desire, but rather masculine fantasy. In short, by what means can *Eliduc* be said to contribute to an understanding of Marie's thematic intent in the collection? It is precisely this question that I hope to answer, by examining the ways in which the love-triangle present in *Eliduc* demonstrates a principle inherent in all the *lais* by Marie.

Background to *Eliduc*

As the last, and longest, text in the collection of Marie's *lais* found in British Library MS Harley 978, it would stand to reason that *Eliduc* would present a more

developed, and perhaps definitive, exploration of the themes of love and suffering which seem to permeate Marie's collection. And, largely, this is what we do indeed get. The story of a good, honorable, brave, courtly noble, trapped between duty and love; a man torn between the love he holds for his wise and noble wife, and his newfound passion for a beautiful princess – all this would have delighted Marie's audiences, particularly because of the courtly catch-22 found in the irresolvable dilemma of Eliduc (whom should he choose? the wife or the lover? the lady or the tiger?). As cliché, contrived, and unrealistic as the plot may sound to us, we must remember that Marie's audience would have been struck by the paradoxical novelty of this situation. True, they were familiar with love triangles – the remainder of Marie's *lais* afford ample evidence of this, and the popularity of the Arthurian love triangle adds further corroborative testimony (a point to which we shall return); and, true, the *Aeneid* – a text with no small circulation in medieval Europe – presented its hero with a similar conflict between love and duty, or passion and *pietas* (indeed, the leave-taking of Eliduc from Guilliadun has some striking similarities with the mid-twelfth-century *Roman d'Eneas*).[9] But it took the medieval obsession with *fin'amor* to transform the love triangle from rivalry (offensive and bellicose) to charity (reconciliatory), and to transform the "duty" side of Aeneas' predicament from "destiny" (founding an empire – an extremely masculine sphere of activity) to "marriage" (a more androgynous sphere).

If *Eliduc* would have occasioned response and comment among Marie's contemporaries (such as Piramus), it is equally responsible for a great deal of modern analysis. The text has been used to provide commentary on everything from "the man with two wives" motif to allegorical representations of man's fall and redemption; from studies concerned with the medicinal knowledge of weasels to examinations of the use of chess as a metaphor for love (both of which are attested elsewhere in medieval texts, but neither of which seems a strikingly central image in Marie's text).[10] Perhaps the two most well-worn critical pathways involve socio-gender analyses (in which the text demonstrates Marie's perspective on masculine and feminine roles, mores, and expectations), and structural studies (in which an attempt is made to unify the collection of 12 *lais* through the suggestion of an overarching structural theme or trope). In the latter camp, Donald Maddox, in a perceptive essay on Marie's *lais* from about 20 years ago,[11] suggested that a triadic structure pervaded the texts in which each *lai* obtains what Maddox terms "narrative movement" by presenting two subjects in a relationship which excludes a third subject. The distribution of this "exclusion principle" to different pairs of subjects in a text thus "moves" the storyline through a process of attraction and repulsion. By way of simplistic example, Marie's aforementioned

lai, *Bisclavret*, tells of a worthy noble who has the embarrassing secret of, three days out of the week, becoming a wolf and roaming the forest. His conniving wife wheedles the secret out of him, and then convinces her adulterous lover to steal the noble's clothes – his only means of shape-shifting back into a man. This accomplished, the wolf is left to fend for himself. He comes under the protection of the king, and eventually is restored to manhood, and the wicked wife exiled. Thus Maddox's hypothesis would see the husband and wife as a pair, with the adulterous lover excluded. The narrative movement then occurs when the wife shares the secret of her husband's lycanthropy with her lover, excluding the husband from the marital union and, eventually, from human society. And so on.[12]

This way of seeing the *lais* is particularly useful, since so many of them involve love relationships that face some sort of challenge – a jealous husband, a protective father, an unfaithful wife. The loving pair, then, by contrivance of the plot, exists in a self-enclosed world, excluding those forces that would compete against or destroy them. And, at first glance, it would seem that Maddox would offer a particularly beneficial way of looking at *Eliduc*, which itself sees a triadic relationship among Eliduc, Guilduluec, his wife, and Guilliadun, his new love. Yet this principle of exclusion and concomitant narrative progression breaks down in *Eliduc*, where the triad of characters is effectively inclusive, rather than exclusive, with all three members forming a society of sorts by the end of the tale.

Rather than seeing exclusion as an operative principle in *Eliduc*, as Maddox has done, I would propose that we shift the terms of his analysis. A helpful suggestion here has been made by Sandra Pierson Prior, who sees in the *lai* a steady motif of displacement. Thus, in *Eliduc*, the centrality of character is steadily displaced by the centrality of plot – or, in Prior's words, there is a "switch in syntactical subject from chivalric hero to *l'aventure* (or 'adventure')."[13] If the text is more focused on plot than on character, we should perhaps not begin our analysis with triadic character groupings which cause the plot to move forward, as Maddox would suggest; rather, we might begin by examining the spaces in which the plot occurs, and how narrative space affects the characters.[14] In so doing, we shall find that in *Eliduc* Marie has offered us her definitive statement about the potentially redemptive aspects of love – particularly of *parfit'amur*, or perfect love. Simultaneously, I hope to suggest that Marie is self-consciously rewriting the great love-triangle of the 12th century, from the Arthurian cycles.

The Centrality of the Oath

First, however, Marie's use of space in *Eliduc* – particularly public and private space, or freedom (open space) and enclosure (bound space) – needs to be established. The easiest means to achieving this end is to focus on the idea of oath-making that seems to pervade *Eliduc* – much more so than any other of Marie's *lais*, as an analysis of the diction of the collection can demonstrate.

One of the most striking characteristics of the *lais* as a collection – and this is a feature noted frequently by commentators, given the brevity of the *lai* genre – is the heightened economy of style that Marie employs.[15] The octosyllabic couplet in which all the *lais* are written, yields ample opportunity for Marie to form terse, pithy constructions to communicate her narrative. Given this economy of style, it is reasonable to assume that when a given word occurs frequently (in a statistically meaningful sense), it matters. In other words, if one is limited by the constraints of poetic composition, one is not going to bother including words gratuitously. Quite simply, words matter in poetry, and particularly so in Marie's poetry.

When, for instance, we turn to examining the diction of *Eliduc*, we discover any variety of words for "love" or "lover": this is to be expected, of course, and this tendency differs in no way from the use of such words elsewhere in Marie – after all, as Mickel reminds us, "love is the unifying theme of the collection" (99). It differs in no way, that is, unless you compare the proportionate use of such words in the other *lais*. For instance, the word *amur* is used in *Eliduc* 15 times.[16] Likewise, the word *amie* occurs 13 times in the *lai*[17]. Bearing in mind, however, that *Eliduc* is Marie's longest *lai* in the collection, what we discover is that there is no substantial difference in distribution of these terms between *Eliduc* (which, at 1184 lines and a total of 28 attestations, yields a distribution of 2.36%, or once every 42 lines) and shorter *lais*, such as *Lanval* (646 lines, almost half that of *Eliduc*; 23 attestations[18] = distribution of 3.56%, or once every 28 lines) and *Guigemar* (886 lines; 25 attestations[19] = distribution of 2.82%, or once every 35 lines). In fact, proportionately, *Eliduc* has fewer references to love than either of the other two shorter texts.

On the other hand, if we consider words such as *fei* ("faith"), *fiance(s)* ("promise"), *leialment* ("loyally, faithfully"), or the verbs *plevir* and its cognates ("pledge") – all words which connote faithfulness or adherence to an oath – we find that *Eliduc* has a higher proportion of such terms than do any of the other *lais*. In fact, in several cases, there are more attestations of such words in *Eliduc* than in all eleven remaining *lais*, taken together (see Appendix).

It seems, then, that *Eliduc* is first and foremost concerned with the idea of oath, of faith, of one's loyalty; and, comparatively at least, far more concerned with this particular aspect of love than it is with love in general. It is as if Marie

as focused in on the concept of trust and fidelity, which is implicit in any love lationship, to the exclusion of passion.[20] This is, in one sense, necessarily so, nce Marie seems to overlay the romantic *aventure* of Eliduc on top of his feudal bligations of fealty and loyalty. Eliduc's experience as a knight and his xperience as a lover are thus parallel, to some degree. His entire narrative begins, ter all, with a breach of faith between himself and the king of Brittany; and he ust take pains to establish his reliability and faithfulness in Exeter. Yet this cessity does not therefore diminish the significance of the concept of oath in the *i* – one might just as well fault *Lanval* because the fairy lover is more beautiful an Guinevere. The whole concept of "fairy" is necessary in *Lanval*, and yet it is multaneously significant, representing an idealization and "otherworldliness" of e love experience. So, too, with the other *lais*: there appear to be significant, screte topics or concepts dealing with love in the texts, on which Marie focuses ir attention.

In focusing our attention on oath-making (and oath-keeping) as we read *liduc*, then, Marie coincidentally introduces the concept of "space" into her rrative. An oath, of course, and particularly in the Middle Ages, has meaning ly insofar as it is a public declaration. It is this communal, civic aspect which ntributes to the "binding" nature of the oath in medieval culture.[21] In the case of edieval formal declarations – particularly of service to a king – what we have is a iastic relationship, schematically depicted as follows:

	Ceremonial Oaths	Personal Oaths
pace" of Oath ublic or Private)	OPEN (public ceremony)	ENCLOSED (private and verbal)
lature" of Oath inding or Porous)	ENCLOSED (publicly binding)	OPEN (little or no public consequence)

r instance, insofar as Eliduc would have sworn an oath of fealty to the king of ittany, he has engaged in a formal, public, and open affair – it would have taken ace before witnesses who would testify to its appropriateness. Paradoxically, ch an open, public ceremony results in a constrictive, binding, and "enclosing" lationship – Eliduc is beholden to the King of Brittany; he can seek service and eference from none other. And, if we take this model and invert it, what we find that private oaths – those that are delivered in informal, enclosed spaces (the wer or bedroom, between individuals, with no witnesses present) – are at least

theoretically "open"; one could contravene the oath with little or no public consequence.

Eliduc's Oaths

With this model as a kind of guiding principle, then, we come to examine the spatial relationships in *Eliduc*, represented by the oaths – both public and private – that are made in the text. And what we find is that the knight from Brittany is hopelessly backward in his concept of fidelity. The formal, public, "binding" oaths, he is quick to contravene; the informal, private and "open" oaths are the ones that he apparently cannot escape, even if he wanted to.

Once again, in order to demonstrate this tendency in *Eliduc*, the metaphor of "space" works well, for the *lai* divides nicely into a triad (following Maddox) of spaces or movements. The first movement, taking us up to line 270 and focusing on Eliduc's career and prowess as a knight, can be termed "Chivalric Space"; the next movement, dealing with the love dialectic which Eliduc experiences between his wife and his lover, and ending at line 750, is "Erotic Space"; and the final movement, from Eliduc's flight by night with Guilliadun until the end of the text (lines 751-1184), is "Mythic Space."

1. Chivalric Space

The oaths in the first portion of the text, the Chivalric Space of *Eliduc*, are all public affairs. To the kings of both Brittany and Exeter, Eliduc has made formal, public declarations of fealty and service. The Brittany oath is appealed to by the king of Brittany at the conclusion of the second "movement" of the text, when he requests aid from his knight "in the name of the alliance that bound them / when the king received homage from Eliduc" (567-8).[22] The Exeter oath, however, is in the narrative present, shown to us at the conclusion of this first section of the text:

> *Un an entier l'ad retenu*
> *E ceus ki sunt od lui venu,*
> *La fiance de lui en prist;*
> *De sa tere gardein en fist.* (267-70)
>
> He [the king of Exeter] kept him [Eliduc] a whole year –
> and those who had come with him –

and accepted his oath of loyalty;
he made him protector of his land.

Both of these oaths – public and binding – are discarded or contravened by Eliduc in the process of the text. Admittedly, his oath to the king of Brittany is dissolved by the king, but in response Eliduc himself chooses to go to Logres – volitionally (thus precipitating the entire plot of conflicts in love and fealty). There is no indication of necessity in Marie's text; she simply states that Eliduc "doesn't want to remain" in Brittany (*Ne volt al païs arrester*, line 67), and that he will "go to the kingdom of Logres / where he will enjoy himself for a while" (*Al rëaume de Loengre ira, / Una piece se deduira*, lines 69-70). Likewise, the formal, public oath which Eliduc has made with the king of Exeter is betrayed when he later comes by night and abducts (an albeit willing) Guilliadun (lines 759-814). What is compelling in terms of a spatial analysis of these two episodes is that both public oaths are broken through the agency of a private, furtive, secret action. The slanderers who malign Eliduc in Brittany seem to do so in a private space;[23] Eliduc's abduction of the Exeter princess is equally clandestine.

A third oath occurs in this section of the text, and although it centers around the concept of "love" rather than "chivalry," it also is public and therefore ephemeral for Eliduc. In his assurance to Guilduluec that he will remain faithful, Eliduc participates in a further "binding" oath in a public space:

Dis chevalers od sei mena,
E sa femme le cunvea;
Forment demeine grant dolur
Al departir [de] sun seignur;
Mes il l'aseürat de sei
Qu'il li porterat bone fei. (79-84)

Eliduc took ten knights along,
his wife escorted him,
revealing enormous sorrow
at her husband's departure.
But he assured Guildeluec
that he would be faithful to her.

Although theoretically a private promise of fidelity between the two individuals, Marie tells us that ten of Eliduc's knights went along with him – the married

couple is, in fact, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. In the case of such a public oath, though, we ought now to be prepared for Eliduc's reneging. And, true to form, Eliduc holds rather loosely to even the most generous definition of marital fidelity, as we discover in the next "movement" of the *lai*.

2. Erotic Space

If Eliduc's oaths in the chivalric space are all contravened, then his oaths in the erotic space of the *lai* are held consistently throughout the text, until the conclusion. In this space, firstly, there is the private pledge he and Guilliadun make to each other in line 537: "They made their pledges to each other" (*Bien s'esteent aseüre*, construed by Ewert as "they pledged each other their troth"[24]). The two lovers have drawn away from the king and his entourage, and are seated "far from the others" (501). This private oath has been preceded by Guilliadun's bestowal of two tokens which figuratively indicate the binding nature of her love – namely, a ring and a belt (403-10). Eliduc has accepted these, and later, when he must return home to Brittany to help his former king, he reiterates his loyalty to her ("I swear and pledge loyally to you," 690) and the two exchange gold rings as mutual indications of their faithfulness (700-2). Moreover, despite the private (and therefore chiastically "open") nature of this pledge, Eliduc is rigidly true to Guilliadun, showing up at the prescribed time, faithfully fulfilling all that he has vowed to her.

The idea of privacy or enclosure, represented by the ring and belt which Guilliadun bestows on her lover, is furthermore figuratively represented in the earlier, initial meeting of the princess and Eliduc. This furtive meeting takes place in Guilliadun's chamber: she seizes Eliduc by the hand when he enters, and subjects him to what some have called a reversal of the stereotypical masculine gaze:[25]

> *Cele l'aveit par la mein pris,*
> *Desur un lit erent asis;*
> *De plusurs choses unt parlé*
> *Icele l'ad mut esgardé*
> *Sun vis, sun cors e sun semblant;*
> *Dit en lui n'at mesavenant,*
> *Forment le prise en sun curage.* (297-303)

She took him by the hand
and they sat on a bed,
they spoke of many things.
She looked at him intently,
at his face, his body, his appearance;
she said to herself there was nothing unpleasant about him.
She greatly admired him in her heart.

Here, in something close to an envelope pattern,[26] we see that Guilliadun "seized" (*pris*, 297) Eliduc by the hand, and that she "admired" (*prise*, 303) him greatly, with the added implication of "enclosure" in both instances. In this case, then, and considering the emblems of the ring and belt as well as the "private" and "secluded" nature of the conversations between Eliduc and Guilliadun, we are prepared for viewing Eliduc's oaths to Guilliadun as "personal" ones, and therefore violable without impunity.

As Calabrese notes, however, "specifically enclosed spaces often provide secrecy and security" in the *lais* (83), which fact further suggests a sense of fixity, of resistance to change, and of strict adherence to one's shared secret.[27] And Eliduc's rigidity in adhering to the oaths in this "erotic space" is, as has already been noted, consistent and fixed – a fact which is further indicated, upon his return to Brittany, by his constant thought of his beloved, implicit in his downcast state which is noticed even by his wife (705-20). The same frame of mind is in Eliduc upon his second, tragic return to Brittany, after Guilliadun's "pseudo-death," when he is effectively no longer bound by his oath of faithfulness to her – he asserts to (what he thinks is) her corpse that he will weep every day on her grave: *Sur vostre tumbe chescun jur / Ferai refreindre ma dolur*. ("each day on your tomb / I shall make my grief resound", 949-50). Such private and "open" oaths Eliduc treats as law, adhering to them inflexibly in a manner which highlights the effervescence of his public oaths, in the previous movement, to the kings and to his wife.

3. Mythic Space

The mythic space in *Eliduc*, or final movement of the spatial triad, is broadly characterized by the two "fantastic" events of the *lai*, represented by the motifs of resurrection of the dead (Guilliadun's miraculous resuscitation) and the Jonah motif of throwing the guilty party from the boat in order to calm the storm. The important oaths that are made here are the heavenly transactions which all three characters make, abandoning their secular lives and possessions, and taking "great

pains / to love God in good faith" (1177-8).[28] These consummating and concluding oaths, implying righteousness, peace, and holiness, stand in stark contrast to the nadir which Eliduc reaches in this final movement of the text. At the point of his second return to Brittany, he has violated almost every conceivable oath that he can – to Guilduluec, to the king of Exeter, and to Guilliadun. Indeed, if we take into consideration Eliduc's clandestine departure to Exeter which occurs at the beginning of this section of the text, we might say that he compromises his oath to the king of Brittany as well – thus effectively contravening all the oaths hitherto mentioned in the text.

Nevertheless, in terms of oath-making, Marie in this section intends for us to focus on the respective ends of her three protagonists, rather than their journeys to those ends. And such ecclesiastical destinations would necessarily have involved public declarations of one sort or another. In fact, the public and contractual nature of entering into the contemplative life is well-attested in medieval ecclesiastical documents; it was proscribed practice for at least one type of religious ascetic – the anchoress – to undergo a public "enclosure ceremony," which included the administration of Extreme Unction and a Requiem Mass, both symbols of the anchoress' formal "death to the world."[29] So it is reasonable here to interpret the lines which refer to the protagonists' conversions to the religious life as involving public, binding oaths.[30]

Yet such oaths are equally private matters between one's soul and God; hence the interior struggles to discern, for instance, monastic vocation.[31] This ambivalence is suggestive, as it effectively deconstructs the chiastic structures which we have seen to this point: the oaths are both private and public; they are both enclosed and open. One would be safe in assuming, perhaps, that these oaths would be the ones that would be the most successfully upheld in terms of the spatial relationships among characters. To this end, Marie herself communicates the unyielding nature of the oaths which all three characters have made; her concluding statement about Guilliadun, Guilduluec and Eliduc is that

Mut se pena chescun pur sei
De Deu amer par bone fei
E mut [par] firent bele fin,
La merci Deu, le veir devin. (1177-80)

Each one took great pains

to love God in good faith,
and they made a very good end,
thanks to God, the divine truth.

Thus the oaths made in this final movement of the narrative are perhaps the only ones that are (1) made in good faith (*par bone fei*, 1178); (2) free from dissolution or contravention; and (3) free from despair on the part of any of the parties.

The Arthurian connection

While such an analysis may be interesting merely in terms of nomenclature, or perhaps because it clarifies issues of character development for Marie's male protagonist, it gains even more significance if one considers the popularity of the Arthurian cycle in twelfth-century Norman England – and Marie's almost certain familiarity with such material.[32] Particularly of interest, given the narrative content of *Eliduc*, is the notion of an adulterous or illicit love which seems to pervade the twelfth-century Arthurian corpus. For instance, roughly contemporaneous with Marie, Chretien de Troyes' interpolation of Lancelot into the Arthurian narrative, as a noble, worthy love interest for Arthur's queen, represents a variation on the theme of adultery which Geoffrey of Monmouth had first presented some half-century before, and which Robert Wace reproduced in his *Brut* (c. 1155).[33]

In Geoffrey and Wace, however, it is Mordred – Arthur's nephew, not (as Malory has it) his incestuous son – who is responsible for the downfall of Arthur's reign.[34] But where later writers, such as Malory, would bifurcate the themes of "adultery" and "decline" (the immediate cause of the downfall in such texts is the fatal battle with Mordred, a function of the incest motif; it has less to do with Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery), Geoffrey has Mordred (the singular and immediate traitor) entering into an illicit union with his aunt during Arthur's continental campaign – and Guinevere is, at first, a willing accomplice. Geoffrey, then, (and Wace, who follows Geoffrey) conflates the two themes of decline and adultery. Or, to put it the right way around, later writers separate the two themes that Geoffrey had introduced into the Arthurian canon as a unit.

In many ways, Marie's text is a subtle inverting of the Arthurian triangle that she would have known through Wace, and potentially through Geoffrey. Instead of Guinevere torn between two male rivals, she has Eliduc torn between two women. Both texts would see the male hero voyaging between southwest England and the continent – Arthur embarks on a continental campaign against the Roman emperor in Wace and Geoffrey – but in opposite directions (Arthur begins in

England, goes to the continent, and returns to England; the pattern is reversed – and multiplied – in *Eliduc*). And in both texts the wife-figure enters a convent – but in Wace, Guinevere's flight to a convent is out of despair, whereas it is a kind of apotheosis in Marie.[35]

In fact, we can see in Marie's conclusion a rather startling departure from Geoffrey's moralistic conclusion to this adulterous chapter in the saga of his hero. First of all, the final episode in the lives of all three characters in Marie has a kind of incarnational flavor to it. In order to see this, we must return briefly to Marie's collection as a whole. Marie's first *lai*, *Guigemar*, shows her hero in an adulterous relationship with an imprisoned wife of an unjust lord. The two exchange love tokens – much as Eliduc and Guilliadun – but it is the nature of these tokens that is significant. Guigemar gives his love a chastity belt of sorts, which no-one but a true lover would be able to loose; she likewise ties a knot in his shirttail, which no-one but she is able to undo (*Guigemar* 556-76). This symbolic "Gordian knot" of love is one of the defining emblems of Marie's first *lai*. And yet Marie takes the "emblem" of the lovers' knot from Guigemar, her first *lai* in the collection, and "incarnates" it in the Gordian knot of Eliduc, Guilliadun, and Guilduluec.[36] This incarnational aspect of her *lais*, when a word or image is presented in narrative flesh-and-blood terms, is meaningful in examining the system of oaths and oath-keeping that pervades the *lai*. For we find this rule at work in *Eliduc*: verbal and ceremonial oaths are malleable, transient, and fleeting. Material oaths – those that are sealed, one might say sacramentally, with incarnated images – are the ones that stick (one remembers the exchange of rings with Guilliadun). Even at the conclusion of the *lai*, then, when Guilduluec would seem to be making a verbal, non-material oath to God, there is still an economic incarnation of exchange – the land and wealth which Eliduc provides to endow the two churches.[37]

Moreover, and it is here that Marie demonstrates her true departure from Geoffrey, love in *Eliduc* becomes a means of attaining spiritual purity. In line 1150, Marie says that Eliduc and Guilliadun, having married, experienced *parfit'amur*, or "perfect love" – and it is this that enables them, Marie implies, to turn to God. The word *parfit* has been used in reference to a person only once elsewhere, in the entire corpus of Marie's *lais*. That single instance of "perfect" occurs in *Eliduc*, in reference to the hermit, whose chapel forms Guilliadun's pseudo-sarcophagus:

> *Oit jurs esteit devant finiz*
> *Li seinz hermits, li parfiz;* (917-8)

Eight days before, the perfect,
the holy, hermit had died.

Marie, in the middle of the twelfth century, here seems to be suggesting a theme that Dante would elaborate on, much more comprehensively, a century and a half later. Namely, that human erotic love is not so much a path or ladder to the love of God, as it is a form of the love of God, enabling and ennobling humans to participate, as Marie concludes her *lai*, in *le veir devin*, the divine truth.

APPENDIX

Attestations of "oath-words" in *Eliduc*, compared to the remainder of the collection

Oath-words in *lais*, by line number, exclusive of *Eliduc*

word choice	Guig	Eq	Fres	Bis	Lanv	Deus	Yon	Lai	Mil	Chait	Chev	TOTAL ATTESTATIONS
fei	344, 860	77	430	42, 48	274, 446, 613		247		472, 497	229	90	14
fiance		186		118								2
ëaument	238	166				72	308		108		22	6
plevir					402							1

Oath-words in *Eliduc*, by line number

word choice	*El*	TOTAL ATTESTATIONS
fei	84, 173, 186, 192, 325, 337, 433, 475, 538, 688, 739, 838, 1025, 1178	14
fiance	269, 525, 567, 674, 905	5
ëaument	12, 32, 73, 195, 326, 452, 690, 945	8
plevir	186, 690, 730, 757	4

Comparative attestations of oath-words

	in lais exclusive of *Eliduc*	in *Eliduc*
fei	14	14
fiance	2	5
ëaument	6	8

plevir	1	4

Length of lais (with abbreviations)
Guigemar (*Guig*) = 886 lines
Equitan (*Eq*) = 314
Le Fresne (*Fres*) = 518
Bisclavret (*Bis*) = 318
Lanval (*Lanv*) = 646
Les Deus Amanz (*Deus*) = 244
Yonec (*Yon*) = 554
Laüstic (*Laü*) =160
Milun (*Mil*) = 536
Chaitivel (*Chait*) = 240
Chevrefoil (*Chev*) = 118
Eliduc (*El*) = 1184

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[1]The lines here quoted are 37-8 and 43-8. The translation of the epigraph is my own; all subsequent textual citations are from the Ewert edition of Marie's *lais*, and translations (unless otherwise indicated) are from Hanning and Ferrante.

[2] For the differences in style between the literature of the twelfth century and the more "didactic" texts of the thirteenth, one need only compare Marie's *lais* with, for instance, the anonymous thirteenth-century *Quest del Saint Graal*, in which allegory, moralization, and a "Cistercian" focus seem to overshadow the plot. Yet here it must also be acknowledged, as Mickel states, that there is a sense in which Marie's *lais* show "the subject of love treated . . . within a didactic framework," and that modern distinctions between (especially) "allegory" and "realistic" literature are largely "artificial in a twelfth-century context" (*Marie de France*, 33 and note).

[3] London, British Library Harley 978, 118r-160r. This manuscript contains all twelve of the extant *lais* that have been ascribed to Marie. For a complete listing of additional manuscript attestations (none of which is as complete as the Harley text), see Burgess, Introduction, xxxv. See, further, Burgess' discussion of the chronology of composition for the twelve Harley *lais*, in Chapter 1 of his *Text and Context* ("The Problem of Internal Chronology").

[4] The relevant passages are as follows. First, the conclusion to *Bisclavret*, in which Marie makes a direct truth-claim about the content of the tale she has told:

> *L'aventure ke avez oïe*
> *Veraie fu, n'en dutez mie.*
> *De Bisclavret fu fet li lais*
> *Pur remembrance a tutdis mais*. (315-8)
>
> [The adventure that you have heard
> really happened, no doubt about it.
> The lai of Bisclavret was made
> so it would be remembered forever.]

In the conclusion to *Chaitivel*, Marie adopts a typical rhetorical claim that she has told "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth":

Ici finist, [il] n'I ad plus;
Plus n'en oï, ne plus n'en sai,
Ne plus ne vus en cunterai. (238-40)

[Here it ends, there is no more;
I've heard no more and I know no more about it;
I shall tell you no more of it.]

This type of conclusion is also found, though in far more abrupt form, in *Lanval*: *Nul hum n'en oï plus parler, / Ne jeo n'en sai avant cunter* (645-6). [No man heard of him again, / and I have no more to tell.]

[5] Two statements in the Prologue of the *lais* suggest that Marie sees her role as that of "truth-perpetuator." In lines 1-4, Marie suggests that the tales she is about to offer are a result of her receipt of *escïence* ("knowledge") and *eloquence* from God:

Ke Deus ad duné escïence
E de parler bon' eloquence
Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,
Ainz se deit volunters mustrer.

[Whoever has received knowledge
and eloquence in speech from God
should not be silent or secretive
but demonstrate it willingly.]

Likewise, Marie claims credibility for her sources several lines later:

Des lais pensai k'oï aveie;
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
Ke pur remambrance les firent
Des aventures k'il oïrent
Cil ki primes les comencierent
E ki avant les enveierent. (33-8)

This passage is rendered by Hanning and Ferrante, with emendation, as follows:

"Then I thought of the lais I'd heard.
I did not doubt, indeed I knew well,
that those who first began them
and sent them forth
composed them in order to preserve
adventures they had heard."

although it is equally plausible to accept Burgess and Busby's translation: "So I thought of lays which I had heard and did not doubt, for I knew it full well, that they were composed, by those who first began them and put them into circulation, to perpetuate the memory of adventures they had heard" (41). The issue here, of course, is whether Marie "did not doubt" the *lais* themselves (Burgess and Busby), or whether she "did not doubt" that they were composed in response to oral transmission (Hanning and Ferrante). I prefer the Burgess/Busby reading, especially in light of a passage from Marie's "second prologue" in the opening of *Guigemar*:

Les contes ke jo sai verrais,
Dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
Vos conterai assez briefment. (19-21)

[The tales – and I know they're true –
from which the Bretons made their lais
I'll now recount for you briefly;]

For further discussion of the "double prologue" controversy, see Brightenback, "Remarks"; see further, Mickel, "Unity," and Spitzer, "Prologue."

[6] *Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz,*
Dunc a primes est il fluriz,
E quant loëz est de plusurs,
Dunc ad espandues ses flurs. (5-8)

[When a great good is widely heard of,
then, and only then, does it bloom,
and when that good is praised by many,
it has spread its blossoms.]

[7] For a discussion of this, the *mal mariée* motif, in Marie, see Bloch, *Anonymous*, 57-67.

[8] See, for instance, Mickel's discussion of "Marie's Concept of Love" (*Marie de France*, 99-121 esp. 99-103). Mickel claims that "the central issue" in the *lais* is "the nature of love itself" irrespective of "its coincidence with marriage or with the social situation" (101). Burgess, *Text and Context*, suggests that although "there is a good deal of variety in the love relationships in the *Lais*" (126), yet "when combined with loyalty, perseverance and good fortune [does] an adulterous relationship lead to happiness" (128). See Burgess' complete discussion of the nature of love in Marie's *lais*, in his Chapter 6 of *Text and Context*, "Women in Love"

[9] See Mickel, *Marie de France*, for his discussion of the potential sources which Marie seems to have known, among which is numbered the *Roman d'Eneas* (22-3); Mickel takes a guarded approach to the question of textual influence on Marie, suggesting that such influence is notoriously difficult to trace in thirteenth-century literature: "One simply cannot ascertain the exact relationship of these texts" (147, n. 10). See also Hoepffner, *Les Lais*, 95-108; see especially Hoepffner's comparison between Eliduc's leavetaking of Guilliadun and Aeneas' of Dido in the medieval *roman*: "Elle avait lu la grande scène pathétique des adieux d'Enée et l'idé lui était venue de la reprendre pour son compte" (101). Hoepffner further compares Eliduc's arrival in Exeter and Aeneas' arrival in Carthage: "Le modèle dont Marie s'est inspirée n'est donc pas celui des amours de Lavine, mais c'est l'épisode analogue de l'amour de Didon." (98).

[10] The *locus classicus* for an analysis of the "husband with two wives" motif is found in Matzke's study, which despite its antiquity is still the most comprehensive analysis of the subject; but see further Trindade, "Man with Two Wives." For a more allegorical reading, base on Marie's comments about the relationship between literal and doctrinal significance in her Prologue, see Nelson, "Eliduc's Salvation." A comprehensive examination of "weasel episodes in medieval literature, originating from a study of *Eliduc*, is found in Bambeck, "Wieselepisode for a study of the significance of the chess reference in *Eliduc*, see Whittaker.

[11] See Maddox, "Triadic Structure," *passim*. See further Maddox's revision of this essay in the first chapter of his monograph, *Fictions of Identity* (24-82).

[12] See page 217 in Maddox, *Fictions*, for a schematic representation of such a triadic structure in *Bisclavret*.

[13] Prior, "Displacing," 124. Prior elaborates: "Beginning with the most literal displacement – a spatial and physical one – that takes her chivalric hero away from his home and following with a gradual displacement in language – from the discourse of warfare and chivalry to that of desire, Marie then completes the displacement of chivalric values with some unusual plot motifs: the shipboard incident and the weasel episode. The *lai* concludes in the mode and world of Christian monastic service – a radical shift from the chivalric world of war and love service" (124).

[14] Such an approach is successfully employed by Calabrese with reference to six of Marie's *lais* (*Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Yonec*, *Milun*, *Laüstic*, and *Eliduc*). However, as we shall see, Calabrese's suggestion that "specifically enclosed spaces often provide secrecy and security" (83) is not particularly applicable to Eliduc; on the contrary, the spaces in *Eliduc* tend to be the exceptions that might prove the rule for Calabrese. Moreover, Calabrese sees in the *lai* "a festival of mock-comic secrecy and lies" (83), a suggestion which I think cheapens Marie's vision of divinely consummated *caritas* at the conclusion of the text.

[15] Burgess and Busby make the point that Marie's "narrative art is essentially one of economy" (31). While this observation focuses attention on the brevity of the narrative structure of the *lais* – their concentrated focus on *aventure* and plot rather than character – the same observation can be made about Marie's diction. See, for instance, Hanning and Ferrante: "The combination of variety, virtuosity, and economy of means that characterizes the twelve short stories of fulfilled or frustrated passion . . . gives ample and constant evidence of Marie's mastery of plot, characterization, and diction . . ." (1). Further, Mickel, *Marie de France*, describes the content of each *lai* as "a narrative which is both carefully and economically developed" (131), later adding that "*abréviation* is the rhetorical figure which dominates her style" (133). Gertz claims that Marie's intertextual relationship with Ovid, evident from her Prologue, allows her to "profile literary concerns economically" (103); while Cargo attributes the "artistry" of Marie to her "remarkable evocative power and a great economy of means in sketching the aristocratic milieu" (166). Indeed, from such a cursory glance, it appears that "economic" is one of the most frequent epithets applied to the *Lais*.

[16] Lines 66, 343, 349, 361, 398, 473, 502, 513, 520, 580, 684, 697, 712, 1027, and 1150.

[17] Lines 541, 601, 669, 716, 768, 812, 845, 908, 923, 941, 1023, 1113, and 1145.

[18] *Amur* occurs in *Lanval* at lines 24, 133, 265, 273, 377, 410, 441, and 520. *Amie* occurs at lines 158, 165, 181, 187, 217, 255, 320, 335, 339, 368, 452, 463, 482, 523, and 597.

[19] *Amur*, in *Guigemar*, is found at lines 58, 66, 115, 131, 234, 237, 240, 250, 455, 459, 469, 529, 551, 648, 711, and 834; while *amie* occurs at 418, 441, 458, 627, 773, 816, 839, 856, and 881.

[20] Marie uses this same focus, although ironically, in *Equitan*:

> *Cil ki de amur sunt nov[e]lier*
> *E ki se aturnent de trichier,*
> *Il sunt gabé e deceü;* (163-5)
>
> [Whoever is inconstant in love
> and gives himself up to treachery
> is mocked and deceived in the end;]

The irony here is that the speaker, the king of "Nauns" (12), is encouraging the wife of Equitan to be treacherous and disloyal. See Burgess' discussion of this passage and its larger context (*Text and Context* 138-143).

[21] One sees this practically in the connotation of the phrase "to swear an oath": publically, it means to make a binding pledge, as in the inaugural "oath of office"; while privately it might refer to uttering a string of expletives or a violation of the third commandment.

[22] Although it appears in the second portion of the text, my so-called "Erotic Space" section, it is clear that the oath to which the King of Brittany here refers is the prior "lord – retainer" relationship which existed between Eliduc and himself at the start of the text, suggested by lines 29-30: *Elidus aveit un seignur, / reis de Brutaine la meinur* ("Eliduc had a lord, / a king of Brittany").

[23] Although there is no clear indication in the text of the manner in which Eliduc's accusers malign him before the king of Brittany, the private nature of this action is suggested both by line 45-6 (*que de la curt le cungea / sanz ceo qu'il ne l'areisuna*; "until the lord sent him away from his court / without a formal accusation") and by the use of the noun *cunseil* ("counsel, advice") a line 559.

[24] See Ewert's glossary entry for *asseürer* (191).

[25] See, for example, Kinoshita: "When the princess sends for Eliduc and scrutinizes him with a attention usually reserved for the male gaze, the distinction between feudal and contractual service is neutralized in the gender inversion that transforms the king's lieutenant into the object of female desire" (43); see further Kinoshita's note 27 (page 54).

[25] The rhetorical figure of the "envelope pattern" is itself related to the chiasmus, and is particularly evident in this passage in the repetition of *pris/prise* and the aural and orthographic similarity between *Desur un lit* (298) and *Dit en lui* (302). See (for instance) Mayoral, "Chiasmus."

[26] Of particular interest in the case of *Eliduc*, Calabrese further states that "Marie's lovers, good and bad, young and old, sympathetic or scurrilous, seek safety . . . . Success in love depends on the deft use of secrets and secret places, a control and manipulation of the physical world, the artificial landscape of love. Those who use it well will thrive and find security . . ." (82). Moreover, Calabrese's own observation that "the drama [of *Eliduc*] revolves around secrets concealed and revealed, and such imagery and vocabulary saturates the text" (98), is both instrumental in his own analysis of Marie's *lais*, and indicative of Marie's focus on the importance (and potential inviolability) of such "secret" oaths in this particular *lai*.

[27] Additional oaths do occur in this section: the aforementioned promise which Eliduc makes to the corpse-like body of Guilliadun (938-50); Eliduc's solicitation of an oath of secrecy from his nephew, chamberlain, and squires upon his reentry to Exeter (751-8); and a similar oath of secrecy which Eliduc demands of his company when they have returned to Brittany (905-6). However, as the first oath has already been associated with the "erotic space" of the *lai*, and as the second and third instances both have to do with Eliduc's retainers' faith rather than his own they are extraneous to the present discussion.

[28] Documentation of such ceremonies is widely attested from medieval sources; see, for instanc Elkins 63-71 and Warren 94-96. Clay includes a translation of the Latin *Servitium Includendorum*, the "Office for the Enclosing of Anchorites," from the York Manual, according to the Use of Sarum; see her Appendix A, 193-8.

[29] The lines in question occur in two separate passages. The first, dealing with Guilduluec's conversion, occurs at 1131-44, the significant lines of which are

Quant tut ad fet bien aturner,
La dame i fet sun chief veler,
Trente nuneins ensemble od li;
Sa vie e s'ordrë establi. (1141-4)

[When everything was well prepared,
the lady took the veil
and thirty nuns with her;
she established a rule of life for herself and her order.]

Within ten lines of this reference, Eliduc and Guillidun are married, and they live happily for "many days" (1149). After a pious life of almsgiving, they each "[turn] to God" (1152): Eliduc founds a monastery and populates it with his own men and others (1153-60). At this point, Marie states,

Quant tut aveit appareillé,
Nen ad puis gueres [a]targé:
Ensemble ode us se dune e rent
Pur server Deu omnipotent.
Ensemble od sa femme premere
Mist sa femme que tan tot chere. (1161-6)

[When he had prepared everything,
he delayed no longer;
with the others he gave and rendered himself up
to serve almighty God.
With his first wife
he placed the wife whom he so cherished.]

[1] For instance, in terms of the anchoress example above (n. 29), each candidate for the anchoritic life underwent a rigorous process of confirmation from a number of sources, including bishops, noblemen, and members of her community or (in the case of lay converts) neighbors and family members (Clay 90-2); such a process only makes sense if the goal is to corroborate one's internal vocation to the religious life. On ecclesiastical vocation, see Vermeersch.

[2] That Marie was familiar with Robert Wace's *Roman de Brut*, is now taken almost for granted. See, for instance, Burgess, *Text and Context*, 4-7. In the present context, it is worth acknowledging that Totnes, the port mentioned in *Eliduc*, "is mentioned frequently in the *Brut* of Wace" (Burgess, *Text and Context*, 198 n. 75). See also Mickel, who concludes that "Hoepffner demonstrated effectively that much of the geography in the *lais* is drawn from Wace's *Brut*" (*Marie de France* 18).

[3] Though most critics are now agreed that Chrétien and Marie are contemporaries, the literary relationship between the two is disputed, as is the exact chronology of their periods of activity. See, for instance, Mickel: ". . . one cannot establish with certainty Marie's temporal relationship to Chrétien . . ." (*Marie de France* 18). For an opposing viewpoint, which postulates a significant influence upon Marie by Chrétien, see Jackson, "Arthuricity." Jackson asserts, about another of Marie's *lais*, that "*Lanval* has no point at all unless those who heard it knew of the

petulant, weak Arthur, the Guenevere who betrayed him with Lancelot, the Gawain who was courteous above other knights, and the obsession of the court with leisure pursuits" (200).

[34] The treachery of Mordred and Guinevere occurs in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* x.13: "Arthur spent the following winter in this same locality and found time to subdue the cities of the Allobroges. When summer came, he made ready to set out for Rome, and was already beginning to make his way through the mountains when the news was brought to him that his nephew Mordred, in whose care he had left Britain, had placed the crown upon his own head. What is more, this treacherous tyrant was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage" (257). Wace, similarly, states that Arthur "was hindered in his hope by Mordred, . . . the king's kin, his sister's very son . . . . Arthur had given the whole realm to his care, and committed all to his keeping. Mordred did whatever was good in his own eyes, and would have seized the land to his use. . . . Not content with this great sin he wrought yet fouler villainy. Against the Christian law he took to himself the wife of the king. His uncle's queen, the dame of his lord, he took as wife, and made of her his spouse" (109).

[35] Wace's final statement about Guinevere is as follows: "That queen, who was Arthur's wife, knew and heard tell of the war that was waged by Mordred in England. She learned also that Mordred had fled from before the king, because he might not endure against him, and durst not abide him in the field. The queen was lodged at York, in doubt and sadness. She called to mind her sin, and remembered that for Mordred her name was a hissing. Her lord she had shamed, and set her love on her husband's sister's son. Moreover, she had wedded Mordred in defiance of right, since she was wife already, and so must suffer reproach in earth and hell. Better were the dead than those who lived, in the eyes of Arthur's queen. Passing heavy was the lady in her thought. The queen fled to Caerleon. There she entered in a convent of nuns, and took the veil. All her life's days were hidden in this abbey. Never again was the fair lady heard or seen; never again was she found or known of men. This she did by reason of her exceeding sorrow for her trespass, and for the sin that she had wrought" (112-3).

[36] The relationship between the narratives of *Guigemar* and *Eliduc*, Marie's intial and final *lais* in the Harley collection, is established, for instance, by Jackson: ". . . only in *Guigemer* [sic] and, to some degree, in *Eliduc* does the adulterous love result in lasting happiness" (198). Additional emblematic or "incarnational" imagery pervades the *lais*, such as the nightingale in *Laüstic*, the swan in *Milun*, and the hazel wood in *Chevrefoil*.

[37] See lines 1125-6 and 1135-40 for the foundation of Guilduluec's convent; a similar "sacramental" foundation, of Eliduc's monastic house, occurs at lines 1153-60.

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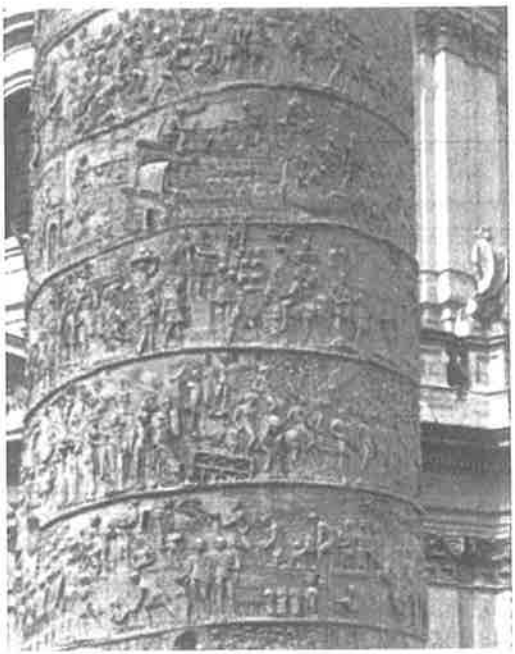

POETRY

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Dream Catcher
Confessions: Brainstormin' from Midnight 'til Dawn © 1998, 2007

"Poems are like rainbows. They appear suddenly and leave us quickly"
Langston Hughes

Sometimes, they come down on me;
[i]'m in a field of butterflies with no net.
Like a flash rain on a shifting spring day,
they appear and vanish like God's etch-a-sketch,
leaving moist shadows of themselves.
[i] gather the drops in my little pots and buckets,
trying to catch enough to garner a cup of coherency.
The poet has a photographic memory;
the poet is a speed reader, soaking up and collecting,
squeezing out onto the grass of humanity.
But an imperfect vessel, my jaded eyes
disallow perfect replication or Xeroxing.
That's why the poet never wants those dream drops
to ever hit the ground. But, they do.
And the poet scoops dreams now soiled by earth's experience,
running over the combined, cupped hands, trickling down the arm,
gathering pieces of dirt and perception along the way.
The poet scoops gallons and only drinks droplets,
the rest falling from the hands before the mouth sucks them in.
And sometimes the poet snatches the dreams
from the viscera of the sky, handling and managing clouds.
Performing C-section, the poet rips and shakes
the waters from the cloud's womb.
He is a bumbling god...who wakes and edits.
And sometimes dreams are regurgitated upon the poet
from the bowels of life.
The art is soaked within the smell of man's annals of Time.

The poet is a mirror of the soiled wetness and dried stench.
Yet, no matter the method, the poet primarily catches.
That's what he does. All that he can do
is wash, mold, and varnish his vessel.

ESSAY

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Noble Villains and Counterfeit Rogues: Aphra Behn's *The Widow Ranter*

From the moment Europeans learned of the New World land mass, English writers began discussing ways to exploit it. For example, John Smith wrote about the English endeavor at Jamestown, Virginia, its successes, failures, and interactions with the natives of this new land. Aphra Behn, often referred to as the first professional female writer, tackled the "colonial experiment" in her play *The Widow Ranter; or, The History of Bacon in Virginia*. Probably written in 1688, the play was posthumously performed in 1689 and published the following year. Behn sets the play during Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion against Jamestown and interweaves two parallel plots: the tragic plot of Bacon's love for an Indian queen and the comic plot of the widow Ranter's maneuverings to woo a soldier. In many respects, the play follows the traditions of Restoration tragicomedy. Yet Behn is also remarking on the inherent dangers of the colonial enterprise. Virginia is a place where the individual can fashion a new identity, and the colony itself – through interaction with the natives – can grow into something other than English. The play calls for the need for a strong, traditional, aristocratic hand to guide the colonies so that rogues aspiring to power would not rule the entire colony and so that miscegenation would not metamorphose Virginia into something other than English.

First, it might be fruitful to first mention both the political context in which Behn is working and her own political leanings. Those that are familiar with her novella *Oroonoko* know than Behn harbored a social consciousness changed by the capitalist overtones of the colonial enterprise (she once witnessed a slave and native uprising in Suriname). Yet overtly Behn was a Tory, almost fanatically loyal to Charles II. In fact, the court appointed her as a spy, a role she may have played when she visited Virginia with her father. Her faith in the throne might have wavered some during the Exclusion Crisis and after Charles' death, resulting in her re-imagining of the Bacon Rebellion.

Also, like some of the characters in *The Widow Ranter*, the historical Nathaniel Bacon traveled to Virginia because of family financial troubles. Originally from a good family, Bacon rebelled against Tory Governor William Berkeley two years after the former's arrival in the colony. Bacon believed that Berkeley was being too soft with the Indians; the Indians never should have been

sold guns and should have been met with force. After his petition to the governo for permission to attack the Indians was denied, Bacon took matters into his own hands. With fiery Puritan rhetoric he assembled an army of rabble to attack the Indians. Berkeley rightly feared that Bacon's army would not be easily disbanded and Bacon eventually turned his attention to the aristocrats of the colony. Bacon leveled a charge of corruption against the aristocrats of the colony and eventually captured Jamestown. Berkeley only regained control after Bacon died suddenly o natural causes.

Bacon's Rebellion may have led Behn to make changes in her play, t balance the potential for new identity against the risks. As critics such as Heid Hutner and Margaret Ferguson have commented both on the importance of the historical context of Bacon's Rebellion and the alterations Behn made in the play Changes aside, the brief biographical sketch provided retains one important facto about Virginia that Behn was keen to include in the play: Virginia is a place where one can refashion a new identity. The historical Bacon was not a royalist and hi fortunes were exhausted during the Restoration. Without explicitly stating thei political allegiance, nearly every character introduces themselves with the story that their family lost their fortunes in the Civil War or the following chaos. Hazard admits, "Ill company, and that common vice of the town, gaming" was responsibl for his family's loss of fortune (I.i). Timorous says of Dunce, "they say he was farrier in England, but breaking turned life-guard man" and eventually Dunce ended up in Virginia with the help of some counterfeit papers (I.i). Dunce late challenges this claim (much to the audience's amusement) because Dunce want his "new history" to stand up to scrutiny. More than becoming a doctor i Jamestown (counterfeit papers or not), he wants to erase his history as a farrier i order to move up. The council members do this handily. Dullman tells Friendly "Why sir, we were somebody in England" to which Friendly dryly replies, "So heard, Major" (II.ii). Friendly's insinuation is that the Virginians make up thei personal histories ("we were somebody") which allow them to attain class status i the colony previously unavailable to them.

Steadily, the characters in the comic plot refer to taking advantage of gainin social status (the usual word is "venture"). As Friendly tells his friend, one "ma pick out a pretty livelihood here," as if Jamestown were a supermarket and ric new lives were for sale (I.i). Or perhaps rich women would be on the shelves, a well, for Ranter admits, "We rich widows are the best commodity this countr affords" (I.iii). Part of the comic plot concerns Hazard passing himself off a someone he is not in order to win the heart of a rich soon-to-be widow. Th difference between Hazard/Friendly and Timorous/Council is that members of th

latter group believe their own hype. The play warns that while a Virginian may fashion papers for a new job, it does not give one access to the good breeding of the English aristocracy.

In reality, characters often note that many people come to Virginia as criminals. Friendly suggests that the council are "perhaps transported criminals" (I.i). Ranter asks a boy if he came from Bridewell, a kind of juvenile hall for thieves. When the boy feigns a misunderstanding, Ranter responds, "You rogue, 'tis what we transport from England first," meaning criminals (I.iii). Ranter should know about leaving one's class behind; she arrived in Virginia as an indentured servant. She only rose to her current rank because her master married her before dying. However, Ranter does not deny her original station, which is why she flourishes over the course of the play. Instead, those characters that think counterfeit papers change their criminal natures, like Timorous, are mocked.

Timorous often refers to "my rank and quality" as if his new station in life actually elevates his cowardly nature (III.i). He announces "Virginia breeding," as if it is superior to English breeding (I.i). Critic Peter Herman reads these moments as Timorous establishing Virginia as a separate political entity, as if acknowledging that the Virginians somehow are superior. But Herman forgets that Timorous is constantly ridiculed for his belief that he can change his essential nature. In one particularly hilarious scene, Timorous and company appear 'ready for battle' dressed "in buff, scarf, and feather" as if a fancy uniform would actually make them superior soldiers (III.ii). When asked about why they would even want commissions to fight, Whimsey remarks, "to be called Captain…to show, to cock, and to look big and bluff" (III.ii). Having the papers that say they are captains does not erase their essential nature of cowards. In fact, during the actual battle, Timorous pretends to be dead to avoid any fighting. As a result, his pockets are picked by Ranter, a character who does not deny her essential nature. Behn argues that pretenders to class and status do not deserve the financial benefits that come with the new identities.

Timorous is drawn much more as a buffoon than as a villain. He serves his purpose in both the comic and tragic plots, illustrating what happens when a scoundrel begins to believe his own hype, buying into the idea that Virginia is a place where one "learns manners" (I.i). But there is a danger to having such buffoons gain any real measure of political power. Dullman argues that for the politicians in England, "their business is usury, extortion, and undermining young heirs" (II.ii). Still, the council in Jamestown seems no better. In the aftermath of the hilarious courtroom scene, Hazard asks, "Is this the best Court of Judicature your country affords?" to which Friendly responds, "To give it its due, it is not"

(III.i). Arguably, the reason the court has degenerated into a mockery is due to the absence of the governor (either Berkeley or Lord Culpepper). The play hints that neither the antics of Timorous nor Bacon's rebellion would have been possible with the strong hand of an aristocratic governor (and *his* good breeding) present. Hazard quips that Bacon is "serving his country without authority," (I:i); meanwhile, the council members are serving themselves at the expense of the country without any moral authority.

Speaking of the rebellion itself, critics have enumerated the ways Behn alters history to suit her purpose. For example, the historical Bacon was known for his savagery, using women as shields as he marched on Jamestown. For a Tory like Behn, Berkeley would have been the hero of the saga while Bacon was seen as an anti-Stuart rebel. Critics, like Heidi Hutner in her chapter on the play, read this alteration of history a symptom of Behn's ambivalence towards James II and disappointment in England's imperialistic agenda. Margo Hendricks argues that Berkeley is absent from the play in order to underscore his importance; the action of the play can only occur in the absence of a strong aristocratic leader. Hendricks also tackles the tragic plot, discussing the necessity of Semernia's demise. For our purposes it is important to take Hendricks's argument into account. While the play ridicules Timorous and the council for deluding themselves into thinking that Virginia's atmosphere of new identities actually changes their nature, Bacon and the Indian monarchs are punished even more severely for attempting to change the very nature of the colony. Peter Herman suggests that Behn is writing about Virginia as a separate political entity from England; I argue that Behn is condemning that idea by killing the characters that are purposefully trying to turn that idea into a reality.

Hendricks argues that in the play (or in the new world in general) the more the English bring their 'good breeding' to the Indians, the less like Indians the natives become. As a result, the differences between the English and the Other are further highlighted. For Behn, there is a double danger: if the Indian becomes too English or an Englishman becomes too Indian, the possibility exists that Virginia would become to Indian (or American). For a devout loyalist like Behn, Virginia must remain firmly part of England.

King Cavarnio represents the Indian that is becoming too English. When the audience first meets the Indian monarchs, Cavarnio laments to Bacon, "You've been so noble, that I repent the fatal difference that makes us meet in arms" (II.i). The difference between the two only becomes 'fatal' now that Cavarnio is gaining a measure of English civility, to use Hendricks's term. In the final confrontation between the two men, Cavarnio says to Bacon, "You, sir, first taught me to use a

sword" (IV.ii). Bacon is directly responsible for the Indians' use of weapons; remember, this was the historical Bacon's grudge against Berkeley. In addition to Cavarnio's knowledge of English swordplay, his speech (along with Semernia's) is distinctly cultured. Margaret Ferguson notices that the original text was slightly butchered, but it seems that the Indian leaders and Bacon spoke in blank verse, as opposed to the council members. Hendricks argues that Cavarnio is the typical "English warrior prince," and the only indication readers of the text have that the Indians are Other is the ceremony at the beginning of Act IV (233). His speech, his actions, and his knowledge equate Cavarnio with Englishness. Yet he is distinctly Other, with his strange dress and religion. The portrayal of the king as somewhere between English and Indian is what eventually dooms him. As he dies, Cavarnio describes his state as "hovering between heaven and earth" (Iv.ii). In life, he hovered between English and Indian, civility and barbarism, and as a result must be killed in order to keep Virginia cleanly English.

Queen Semernia exists in the same liminal space as Cavarnio. She has the same elevated speech patterns, and as Hendricks notes, strangely raceless until Act IV. Semernia is further complicated by her love for Bacon. When she manages to be alone with him, she pleads, "Our words exchange our souls...Take all our kingdoms – make our people slaves, and let me fall beneath your conquering sword" (II.i). She is offering their kingdom (in a political way) as opposed to their kingdoms merging through miscegenation. However, she does want to fall beneath his sword, indicating that the desire for each other could result in the mixing of English and Indian bloodlines. She is 'saved' from having to consummate her love when Bacon mistakenly kills her. Semernia understands that she needs to die; she says after being stabbed, "The noblest office of a gallant friend, thou'st saved my honour and has given me death" (V.iii). Her death is a blessing. Otherwise, the possibility would have remained to merge Virginia with the Indian kingdom, creating a new political entity separate from England.

So Bacon is slated to die from the very beginning. Ferguson notes that Bacon is linked with historical names like Hannibal, Caesar, and Alexander, naming Bacon both conqueror and fated to die. Her reasoning is that Behn provides this connection to allow the audience to be titillated enough with the forbidden romance, but ultimately realize that Bacon's destiny is to die. Ferguson does not stress something that I think is important, which is many of the names Bacon is connected with – Hector and Romulus, especially – refer to founders. Romulus founded Rome in one myth, and the Trojans (of which Hector was their most cherished warrior) founded Rome in another. Bacon is a founder of a new country, and that would be frightening to a loyalist like Behn. Bacon is even linked

with Dido, as he expresses desire to self-immolate. Coupled with the danger of a miscegenatial relationship with Semernia, Bacon is a threat to Virginia as a completely English colony. For that reason, Behn dooms him.

Many critics admit their frustration with *The Widow Ranter*. For example, Hutner admits the "impossibility of finding fixed meaning in the play" (92). The play's internal paradoxes make it difficult to arrive at a unified message. Historical context seems to exacerbate the problem. Yet I think it is clear that while the Virginia is portrayed as a place where one can reinvent oneself, it is dangerous to believe that your nature is changed by that reinvention. Furthermore Behn is using the play to argue that for Virginia to succeed as a colonial enterprise, a strong aristocratic presence is needed to keep rogue natures in check and to prevent the colony from growing into a separate political entity.

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Poetry

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Seven Life Sentences

I

The young oak bent by vines looks like an old woman wrapped in shawls
with a crooked spine.

II

In the turn lane, three feathers stick out like arrows from a vulture's crumpled body.

III

So many grains of rice go forkful after forkful into the gut that is never full.

IV

The gnat hardly tickles my throat as it passes into the universe of my stomach.

V

At the gas pump, a lunar moth sludged with pink milkshake twitches its wings, a tongue that cannot fly from the oil stained concrete.

VI

The earthworms lay smashed and numerous on the sidewalk today, refugees driven out by the imperial rain.

VII

How soon the furrow the telephone truck dug in the wet grass appears
as though some fool tried to plow the earth and quit after one crooked pass

If Laura is the main character, then her plot does not resolve. There is no climax to Laura's plot, unless one counts the anticlimactic escape of Jim from the Wingfield's troupe of characters desperate for escape themselves and pinning their hopes on him. In scene seven, the audience feels Laura and Jim coming together. Laura's shyness fades as she warms up to Jim enough to draw him in closer to her.

Previously we've seen Laura react strongly when her glass menagerie is threatened. We know it symbolizes her, her delicacy, and her hopes and dreams. When Tom's coat accidentally hits the menagerie at the end of scene three, the stage directions tell us, "Laura cries out as if wounded" (24). When the unicorn that symbolizes Laura—she is different but special—has its horn broken by Laura and Jim's dancing, Laura says, "Now it is just like all the other horses" (86). Laura seems to be pulling away from her fantasy world to live in reality, and Jim seems to reciprocate her feelings of warmth. For a moment it seems this plot will rush toward the desired resolution: Jim will see Laura loves him, and he will return her feelings. Tom can escape, and Amanda will be provided for. The heterosexual narrative will climax and resolve.

After Jim kisses Laura, all the pieces of the play seem to fall into place. Laura's long awaited dream has come true, and now the couple seem to be rushing toward the logical, heterosexual conclusion. Then Jim says he won't come back and won't call. "I've—got strings on me" he explains, and before he makes a quick getaway, Laura gives him the broken unicorn—the audience's hope that she was shedding her hermitlike ways. There is a lack of completion to this narrative. All the pieces that were set up to fall into place—the plot elements leading to the expected resolution—clatter to the floor with a tinkling of glass. No substitute resolution falls into place—Amanda hints at the outcome with her song, "Lemonade, lemonade/Made in the shade and stirred with a spade--/Good enough for any old maid!" (91). Laura and Amanda will be left alone to fend for themselves.

It is important to note that a heterosexual narrative is not the same as a heterosexual sex act or a representation of such in a wedding. While the resolution of Laura's plot would have ended in a wedding, and one supposes, a heterosexual sex act, that is not the necessary outcome of a plot for it to be described as a heterosexual narrative. For Tom's plot does resolve—he leaves. We see the escape building, and then it happens to our satisfaction. We bask in audience afterglow and smoke our narrative cigarette at the heterosexual climax and resolution of this plot.

It's also interesting to note that Laura's label as crippled is more of a hint by the author than a real manifestation of disability. As George Crandell points out,

Laura, like Blanche Du Bois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Alma Winemiller in *Summer and Smoke* "suffer[s] the pains of isolation, alienated from family and friends who perceive [her] as different, as deviating from the social or moral norm," (13). As Crandell points out,

In Williams's early plays, illness is most often a sign of social or moral disfunction, its cause mysterious or unknown, its cure dependent upon the patient's resolve to conform to society's rigid standards of behavior. Williams's women characters, for example, are expected to conform to the social norm that women marry, both to provide for their economic security, and to avoid, presumably, lifelong dependence upon their relatives or 'upon the kindness of strangers.' . . . . Williams employs illness as a metaphor, suggesting an analogous relationship between the individual and society such that, generally, the healthy individual is the one who accepts and practices what society prescribes as socially acceptable behavior. The unhealthy person, on the other hand, is the one who refuses to conform, who willingly violates rules of social or moral conduct. According to the logic of Williams's analogy, illness is a sign that points to a history of unconventional or sinful behavior; and conversely, anti-social or immoral behavior is a sign or symptom of illness. The sign, representing or standing in the place of what it is not, functions both to reveal and conceal its referent, making visible what otherwise cannot be seen. (13-14).

Crandell is correct that Laura's personality quirks represent homosexuality. While in the 1940s there was no way to get homosexuality past the censors, and certainly no way to make a general audience sympathetic toward a homosexual character, Laura's unable-to-put-a-finger-on-it "difference," and her inability to conform, share similarities with what Williams must have at various times felt as he realized that his homosexuality made him different and made his life difficult, and yet he could not "snap out of it" just as Laura could not change her personality.

But the vague illnesses that Williams saddles his characters with are not the only way that he is eluding the censors and introducing referents to sexuality into his plays. Laura's narrative stalls at Jim's revelation and exit. Unable to go backward after the unicorn has been altered by Jim, and unable to move forward because of her illness, Laura is frozen in the moment Tom leaves. However, the plot rushes around her and pushes Tom off the fire escape, effecting the heterosexual resolution of his plot, and erasing the troublesome halt of Laura's plot from the audience's memory. We are reminded of her stalling in the last line of the play, but in this context, her plot is presented in relation to Tom's resolution. Though Tom has traveled for quite some time—he says in scene seven, "time is the longest distance between two places," he still sees Laura blowing the candles out

that night—the candles made necessary by Tom's failure to pay the electric bill.

Like sex without a penis, lesbian narrative seems to many to be purposeless. After all, what is the point of pointing out that Laura did not get her man? It is not so much the fact that Jim was not the savior of the play—certainly if he had been, perhaps the play would suffer as trite and predictable—but rather the fact that the narrative line with Jim does not result in any resolution at all. Jim leaves, and Amanda is angry, so Tom's plot line is impacted. However, Laura's character goes nowhere. Amanda's closing movements indicate that she tries to comfort Laura and that she sees the connections among her husband, Tom, and even Jim. All the men have left Laura and Amanda to fend for themselves, and Amanda steels herself for the challenge. But Laura goes nowhere. She does not grow, she does not learn, she is not strengthened by the "operation" on the unicorn, she simply halts. Unless one counts her memory haunting Tom, there is no resolution to her plot line. The lesbian narrative pause haunts Tom forever, like an albatross.

So what's the purpose of finding the lesbian narrative at all in *The Glass Menagerie*? Does it prove Williams was a lesbian? Hardly. Does it make him more gay than we already know he is? Perhaps. Is an instance of lesbian narrative structure sufficient to proclaim a lesbian found? I don't think anyone is arguing that Laura is actually a lesbian, so much as a representation of homosexuality on the stage, and probably more a representation of male homosexuality as Williams experienced it rather than lesbianism. I believe we are to see Jim as a love interest Laura sincerely desires, and Williams through Laura.

Annamarie Jagose has noticed that "the diagnostic recognition of lesbian invisibility" is many times "critically countered by attempts to negotiate for lesbianism a more straightforward relation to the cultural rubrics of legibility, as if the problems of lesbian invisibility might be shortcircuited by the reversal of that paradigm" (2). If Jagose is correct, then finding lesbians in narrative structure rather than in character representation might be one of the few legitimate ways to declare victory in the search for homosexual elements in Williams.

The search for lesbian narrative instead of homosexual content might be a new technique for responding to critics who, since the 1990s have complained that "Tennessee Williams isn't gay *enough*; that he was incapable of producing a 'positive image' of a gay person" (Paller 2). Perhaps, as Williams' later plays indicate, he was crafting more than a good or bad gay character. His use of narrative leads us in directions his characters cannot, something Michael Paller sensed when he noted that "When emotions such as those Williams felt while writing *The Glass Menagerie* must be expressed subtextually, they are often rendered all the stronger; when boundaries are established against expression,

expression must find another way to break through" (47). I predict a thorough examination of Williams' later plays will find increasing use of lesbian narrative to express Williams' complicated time, place, and desires.

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Fiction
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Hardwoods

I sympathize with hardwoods. From my window I can see three. They were golden a few months ago; hung with rubies and diamonds like Solomon's wrists. Now they look naked and weak in the fading daylight with nothing to protect their spindly limbs from the frost and the chill and the howling winds of winter. They try again every spring as if they didn't know it was coming. This is the time of the evening when I close the blinds and condense my environment to the soft yellow lights and worn brown cloth of my apartment. It's Tuesday. Maybe Amy will drop by and we will regress into the same conversation—argument more or less—that we have begun and exhausted many Tuesday evenings since we met, so many years ago.

The first time I saw Amy was in a contemporary art class we took together at the university just across the street here. She was already sitting in her desk in the front corner of the room fidgeting with her notepad, narrowing her eyes and making thoughtful gestures with her jaw while the rest of the students were still entering. Her features matched her business suit—sharp, dark, and expensive. She was a beautiful girl. I left a desk or two between us before I sat down, just to be safe. Nobody filled them.

We hit it off on the wrong foot. Been on it ever since to tell the truth. Five minutes into the class discussion she began polluting the room with her opinions in a nasal timbre and a condescending tone. I'm not too good at remembering conversations verbatim—it's my opinion that most things never happened exactly the way you hear them anyway—but I believe the professor posed some sort of fruitless conversation topic on the nature of postmodernism. I'm not sure if he even meant for it to be answered; probably not but she answered it.

"Postmodernism is freedom," she said. Up to this point I had just been staring at her throughout the period like I would stare at a vehicle in front of me with its turn signal on miles after completing its turn; slightly annoyed, but not necessarily bothered enough to react. At this point however, I could no longer conceal my aggravation.

"By freedom you mean… anarchy?" That was our first argument. The first of many. She started following me back to my apartment after class and staying until she was sure she'd had the last word. She usually did unless they were "get out," spoken by me of course which she took as a victory anyway, or unless I fell asleep during one of her lengthy spiels. In such cases she would finish in writing and end with a vulgar and insulting salutation concerning her opinion of my worthlessness as a human being and the stagnant state of my mind. At one point I had a notable little collection of such bitter entries on my refrigerator; mostly yellow notebook paper scratched with angry black or red pen marks. A few particularly insulting notes—my favorite of which was scribbled on the back of a church bulletin—received the monumental honor of being tacked on the wall in the living room.

We argued about most anything you can have an opinion about—music, politics, poetry, religion, religion, religion, love, real estate, food, truth, the nature of the abstract, the functions of various perspective subcultures, and of course postmodernism. Given the rare case that one or both of us had not yet formed an opinion over an issue at hand, we could fall comfortably into opposing views with complete confidence that it was part of the very fabric of our belief structure.

We usually sat in the front room on opposite ends of my couch. Sometimes another student or two would get stuck in the argument and I would go to the kitchen to put on a pot of coffee while Amy recruited our guests. Usually it was just some guy waiting for me to leave the room and for Amy to shut up long enough for him to ask for her phone number. This never happened of course, and when Amy finally got up and left—which she always did abruptly and without any apparent reason or even a lull in conversation—he would sit there in my easy

chair and look at the black TV screen for a minute or so. Then when he thought of something cordial to say on his way out, he would say it, groan like an old man as he stood to his feet, and leave.

One evening, when it was just the two of us—Amy and I that is—I got up to get us some coffee, hoping to buy my nerves a few minutes peace but she just followed me into the kitchen and never missed a beat.

"How can an Enlightenment Guru like yourself," (a title which, to my knowledge I have never done anything to deserve save to oppose the validity of a few postmodern claims) "be opposed to systematic and theoretical creation of art?" We were engaged in my least favorite discussion: the subjectivity of art. Her position and beginning argument was that good art is relative; nothing is concrete.

So, I asked her if she'd ever listened to any John Cage pieces. She paused for a second, squinting at me, and rocking to and fro on her heels. I thought I saw something penetrate—a thought; something fabricating in her brain; an opinion that she didn't read—then it faded. She must have remembered something from a high school music appreciation class, or a random quote from the stacks in the university library. Her face lit up and all aspirations towards original thought went dark.

"I'm familiar with the work of John Cage." She spoke as though it fit perfectly into her theory.

"Good then, it's settled," I said. "If you *have* heard his music, I don't need to continue my argument because the only people in the world who have anything good to say about John Cage write textbooks for a living."

"He was both innovative and imaginative." Repulsive.

"Quote the textbooks. So, that's just art like anything else? I mean you don't feel the need to distinguish between that and say, Steely Dan?"

"Nope, it's all art. It's all music." The thrill of victory was beginning to illuminate in her cheeks.

"Fine, you win. It's art. It's all art. Good art is relative." I waited until her radiation was complete. "But bad art is concrete." She left then. She told me I was the poster child for arrested mental development and she left.

The next year I graduated and to Amy's "well expected disappointment," decided not to pursue any post graduate educational endeavors. I was still living in the same apartment; playing at bars nights and working as a knife salesman during the day. I worked on a referral system. Basically, I could take off whenever I wanted. Now and then I would go to Texas to see some friends. One of them introduced me to his sister-in-law and after a few visits I began thinking of her in that comfortable, predictable manner so boring and so easily confused with love. I was making enough to get by, and for a time there wasn't much that I wanted that I didn't have. It's not that I had much. I just didn't want much. So, I started putting some money aside. I and other men my age and social status were putting money aside.

Amy remained in school—dark, sharp, and expensive. On random Tuesdays and Thursdays she would bless me with her presence. Sometimes she would come and watch me play. Other times she brought a bottle of port to my apartment and we would argue. She never passed up an opportunity to remind me of my insignificant role in the progress of the human race, and my failure to better myself as a member thereof. Sometimes she would bring whatever tool she was dating at the time, and I would stare at him and wonder if he was playing "a significant role in the progress of the human race." One time when the conversation was dwindling, I even vocalized my complexity.

"So, what makes you think this here what's-his-name is worth anything to humanity?" I made a hand motion in Jake's direction. I knew his name was Jake. That wasn't the point. A few minutes later they left. The next Tuesday Amy came back alone and we ran out of things to talk about. She spent the night on the couch. I told her she could stay in the extra bedroom, but she didn't answer and she stayed on the couch.

In 1987, I married Darla. Darla was the sister-in-law. She was beautiful like Amy, but not so sharp. Darla was sweet. She even had dirty blonde hair, how could it have gone wrong? Back then Darla seemed to permeate a translucent haze of love and purity. Promise and security and big brown eyes. Her parents gave us an old ranch they had been trying to sell. Darla taught math at a Junior College in Tom Ball, and I spent most of my time aimlessly working with cows and fences and whatever else needed doing on the Ranch. It was a life that I loved and knew nothing about. We had one son and we named him Wyatt. I always wanted to be a real cowboy; figured with a name like Wyatt, and me giving him enough training and attention, at least my son could be. Once he got old enough though, his friends started calling him Will. He's a good one though. Wouldn't matter what you called him.

Any rate, Darla had acquired a few dot com domain names, whatever they are, and when the internet took off she sold them for preposterous amounts of money and we became financially, one of the luckiest undeserving families in the U.S. I'm not sure who tipped her off on all that. I'd be willing to bet old Gordon just bought them for her and never told me about it. That's her dad's name—Gordon. It always bothered her that I called him Gordon. Said I wasn't taking him seriously. I couldn't really refute her. Thing was, Gordon *made* himself a little difficult to take seriously.

See, Darla had this thing with clowns. Gordon had been buying her clowns since she was a little girl because when she was three years old some clown made her laugh at a circus or something. That's weird I know, but it never really came up until we were engaged and I'd met the parents and everything and you don't go around calling off weddings because of a stupid clown fetish. I didn't like it though. He took it too far. For a little house-warming gift, Gordon bought us this horrific looking Bozo on a unicycle. What do you do with something like that? It was the size of a lawn gnome. When he gave it to us I thought it was a joke—like any sensible man would—so I laughed and went on for a little while about how ridiculous it was. Of course it wasn't a joke and

'm standing there blushing with the whole Texas born and raised family hocked immobile and staring at me like some sad runt-degenerate. Gordon muttered, "No use alive nor less dead to nobody" if I remember orrectly. He must have taken it personal too because he never had nuch to do with me after that. They ought to thank me. He would have one on buying her clowns instead of insanely profitable investment pportunities.

Meanwhile, I was still playing around with cows and fences and actors. To be honest though, I only used the tractor once or twice and was just a little backhoe. I never could get the hang of it and I ouldn't let Gordon show me—I told him I already knew how. Anyway, never liked the feel of a tractor. I'd rather feel a tool in my hand and ork with the land than rape it with a big rusty piece of machinery. I go or that whole western cowboy hero myth. Heroes don't use tractors. Ieroes use horses and the occasional truck. Satan uses tractors to turn atural sanctuaries into tourist traps.

I felt useless then, as if I was playing the role of a character that ad been completely cut out of the script. My redemption was that I ame home tired and woke up sore and for years that was just enough to ase my mind. Then I learned something. They've got two species of corpions in Texas. One of them is an almost transparent brownish londe color, and they don't get much bigger than a half dollar. The ther is big and black and looks like sin. Turns out, if you get stung by a lack one, it's no worse than a wasp sting, but I've seen grown men cry ut in pain when those little brown ones get a hold of 'em. Evil things. hey hide where you want to feel safe, like boots and sleeping bags. It's ke they want you to understand that there's nothing in this life you now just by looking at it.

So anyway, I read somewhere that eighty-five percent of married emale entrepreneurs leave their husbands before the age of fifty-seven. Vell, I never considered Darla to be much of an entrepreneur, but she eat 'em to it. We'd been married about nineteen years when she nformed me that God had told her to ditch me, sell the ranch, sell the

cattle, and sell the home, so she could move to Dallas and have a better hold on her financial to-do's. Texas women will talk like that about God without blinking an eye. I'd like to think she didn't really believe that. Maybe there was a man in Dallas. Maybe she was just looking for a way out. I'd hate to think I was married to a crazy woman. Probably would have meant I drove her there. But whatever the case, she sold the home, the cattle, and the land that I had labored on for almost twenty years, and moved to Dallas. Luckily Wyatt was in college and making his own decisions or she would have sold him too, pious 'n greedy heifer.

I wasn't sure where to go then. I moved back to Mississippi and leased an apartment not far from my old college abode and started playing the blues again wherever they'd pay me to. I had enough money from the divorce for a house, but it didn't feel right. Without Darla, I'd rather not have things that remind me of her.

I wondered when I would run into Amy again. I knew she would be in town. It's always those who talk so fondly about getting out, and going someplace far away that end up right where they started. Sure enough, a year or so later, I saw her in a grocery store—like that Dan Folgelberg song—and for the first time, I was glad to see her. She was divorced too, but for much longer than I had been. She had married an architect shortly after I married Darla, and stayed with him for about five years, at which point she decided to "take the money and run," as she put it. No kids. So, now she was well off and lonely in the dying metropolis of Jackson, Mississippi writing controversial editorials for all the surrounding newspapers. She was well traveled, having spent at least a year in all of her favorite European cities, and raising her nose in a very European manner at opportunities to travel to non-European cities. I gathered all of this from a few minutes of conversation in the produce aisle and then we exchanged addresses and phone numbers and intentions we didn't mean to keep and said so long. She even said she would stop by my place on Tuesday night.

It would have been an ideal chance encounter if that had been the extent of it. The problem is, there seems to be no such luck in any domestic shopping center. Paths that cross will cross again for which there is no appropriate greeting or salutation in the English language and there is nothing you can do about it. Every few minutes I would walk by an aisle and there was Amy, looking at spaghetti sauce, or opening a carton of brown eggs to make sure none were cracked.

Something was different about Amy that night. I don't mean how people just change with time either. It seemed to scare her every time she saw me. She was still sharp, but she had to try harder, like it was something she was remembering. She was still dark and still expensive, but fragile too. Maybe I had changed. I had never really studied her before. I had always seen her rigid posture but never the soft, wary lines of her neck. I had seen how cold her eyes were and how green, but they were nervous too. I stopped and watched her for a while when she didn't know I could see her. She was staring at a wall of soup cans but I don't think she was looking at any of them. Her face was flushed. The fingertips of one hand were resting on her lips and I thought they must have been burning. With her other hand, she cleared her bangs from her face and rested them behind her ear. It was that motion that betrayed me to her. She twitched like a sparrow, and her head was facing me. She looked so troubled I thought she would cry. I was too far away to speak. I took a swallow of nothing and walked past the aisle. I didn't finish my list. I hurried through the check-out line careful not to look behind me, and I left. Driving home, I could not shake that picture of Amy—so vulnerable. I felt like I was in the wrong somehow.

The rest of the week I spent imprisoned by walls of ideas that I hadn't considered in years. Bars of my philosophy were bending and petrifying; melting and freezing again into my reality. I stood in the frozen rain between two old oaks that I had shared the campus with so many years ago. We stood, the three of us—weak, spindly, cold. Two clouds of gray twigs, and a gray haired man who thought he was twenty-two. For a moment, I had never gone to Texas. I had never had a wife

or a son. I had never been deceived and stung by a blonde scorpion the size of my thumbnail and there was no reason for the great lump in my throat. Then I looked at an old brick building and saw the worn concrete steps down which Amy would walk to meet me after class and it all came pouring back. The lump melted in my throat. It reached the brim of my eyes and came seeping out; mixing with the rain and sleet on my face and no one walking by could have told the difference. A faint whimper from my chest was drowned obsolete by a great howling from overhead and like the swell of a tide in our anguish and our shame I began to believe that it was not the gales of winter heard howling through the limbs above, but the defeated souls of the hardwoods themselves crying out for release from their annual regret and moaning at each moment's reminder of the bitter and shivering consequence at hand. The relation of all things like the horror of a dream come true settled into my life not as a belief but as the very marrow of my bones so that as I walked home it was this reality that held me up, this that made me strong, this that made me hurt.

You can be young whenever you want to, but you can never be young again. Amy didn't come by that Tuesday; or the next. Tuesday itself remains faithful. The world turning leaves it no choice. It was faithful last week and it is tonight and I with similar options sit philosophizing about the trees across the street and waiting on Amy. Things could have gone different but they did not. People like me have to believe in limited understanding. I have to believe that when I die, it will be the result of many things and the cause of many others and that all of those things that I did not recognize will combine to accomplish things that I will never realize. Otherwise wasted years are just wasted years. I wonder if Amy will buy that.

POETRY

Danielle Gibbs
Louisiana Tech University

Dreaming the Oak

I saw the tall oak turning,
Its hazel leaves burning,
Amber, green, and brown
Soon they would rain down.

Chill-stung eyes closing
I sat dreaming, dozing,
wrapped in warm revelry
under the glory of that tree.

I saw that bare oak standing
Over the grey lake demanding
To see naught but perfection,
For it sought its own reflection.

Waking to midnight calling,
The full moon high and gleaming,
Looking for better protection
From its bright penetration,
I left the tree to its peering
For a warmer spot for dreaming.

Essay

Lu Ann Marrs
Mississippi College

Reflections on Hester Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections*

Although Hester Lynch Piozzi has earned her place in the history of the travel literature genre, she is today remembered almost exclusively as Mrs. Thrale Samuel Johnson's friend and confidante. For eighteen years she was his "Dear Mistress," his nurse, and the guardian of his secrets. The only rift in the relationship was when, after Henry Thrale's death, she married the Italian musicia Gabriel Piozzi. Stigmatized by her social set in 1780's London because of that marriage, she was nonetheless one of the most eagerly anticipated biographers of Johnson after his death in December 1784. Mrs. Piozzi had certainly known a Johnson few others had, and so her *Anecdotes of Dr. Johnson*, written while she was on her honeymoon tour and shipped to England from Leghorn, was greeted b great interest and exhaustive analyzes. But the *Anecdotes* has long been overshadowed by Boswell's monumental biography, and Mrs. Piozzi has to a larg extent been discredited to posterity by the rival biographer. Her *Observations an Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* were greeted with great interest in her day, but have, since the nineteenth century, largely languished unread until quite recently. Of Mrs. Piozzi's major works, it is the *Anecdotes of Johnson*, as I said, for which she is almost exclusively remembered. But, as James Clifford remarks, "for the majority of modern reader *Observations and Reflections* will remain Mrs. Piozzi's most valuable and entertaining publication" (348) and should also be the work that at last establishe Mrs. Piozzi on a par with Mrs. Thrale, Johnson's friend.

Observations and Reflections first appeared in print June 1789. Published by Strahan and Cadell in two octavo volumes of some 800 pages total, the work had been widely anticipated in the press and excerpts were published in the newspapers almost immediately (Clifford 343). Although Cadell did not publish second edition that year, the book continued to be in demand. In 1789 a one-volume edition was published in Dublin while the next year the book was translated into two German-language volumes. *Observations and Reflections* wa widely read throughout the nineteenth century, during which time it was highly appreciated, and in 1892 the Countess Evelyn Martinego Cesaresco edited

elections as *Glimpses of Italian Society in the Eighteenth Century. From the ourney of Mrs. Piozzi* (Barrows xxix, n4). A modern annotated edition of *Observations and Reflections*, edited by Herbert Barrows and published by the Jniversity of Michigan Press, appeared in 1967, and on-line the text is easily ccessible through Project Gutenberg and in facsimile through a Google Book earch.

Observations and Reflections is a compendious work. Arranged hronologically, the work follows the Piozzis' path through France, moves on to here Mrs. Piozzi's real interest lies, Italy, and then sums up in Germany. Her omments on France are thorough but uninspired; her comments on the German tates are perfunctory; but in Italy Mrs. Piozzi is in her element. She observes in etail—what the people wear, how they view their government, how their dialects re formed, what growth their land produces, what their sources of commerce are, ow good or bad their inns are. In this respect she follows the mainstream of travel terature. She also reflects on these issues: How does climate affect national emperament? How does agriculture in other lands compare to agriculture in ngland? How do manners in despotic states contrast with those in liberty-loving tates? She is as well a true daughter of her country and her century. Like many, ne is fascinated by the physical land, assessing landscapes sublime and beautiful. he is a staunch Anglican and writes with some antipathy to what she sees as the ack of morality in Catholic countries. While she never loses sight of her own dentity as a Briton, her work is as well a vindication of Italian culture. *Observations and Reflections* is a multi-faceted work; so much so that often the eader is left overwhelmed, and the impact of strong scenes and vibrant images essens from overload. But Mrs. Piozzi has a theme throughout—the comparison f two cultures, and she has an agenda—defending her husband by extolling his omeland. Only in her Preface does she refer to the scandal in England, and roclaims herself "More sinned against, than sinning" (vi).

Contemporary reactions to *Observation and Reflections* were mixed. lewspapers praised or condemned the work in line with previous stands taken oward Mrs. Piozzi's marriage. Thus the *Morning Post* condemned and the *World* raised (Clifford 343) . Anna Seward, Johnson's Lichfield friend, berated Mrs. iozzi for her "chamber-maid flippancy," and Horace Walpole sniffed at her excessive vulgarisms" (qtd. in Clifford 343). But others, Clifford notes, were pleased in spite of themselves." Walpole's friend George Selwyn felt that it 'should have a much better reputation,'" while William Cowper, noting it was the 'fashion . . . to condemn them'" observed that "we who make books ourselves re more merciful to bookmakers'' (Clifford 345). After a thorough evaluation of

Observations and Reflections' strengths and weaknesses, the *Critical Review* concluded with perhaps the most judicious observation of the reviewer: "Fastidious criticism . . . may reject the work; but no person of taste and good humour can be long angry. Her volumes will be favourites, when criticism is no more....".

Part of the "fastidious criticisms" of Observations and Reflections centered its organization, but Mrs. Piozzi follows a well-established eighteenth-century convention in structuring this massive book. Moryson, Coryat and Addison all use a chronological arrangement—they dealt with each city or region as they came to it in their actual travels. This type of arrangement, whether in the guise of letters or journal, gives a sense of immediacy and sense of veracity. I went there, I saw this, this is what happened. But there is at least one major drawback to such an arrangement. The reader would expect a vast range of information to be given and this chronological arrangement--what I discovered as I discovered it—would prevent a thorough discussion of each topic (geography, agriculture, politics), instead providing information piecemeal. There are, however, some advantages. In Mrs. Piozzi's tour, in which she visited Rome on two separate occasions, this chronological "journal" allowed her the luxury of focusing on new ideas inspired by that city. Even so, her choice of journal as organizing principle raised question in some critics' mind. In the largely favorable analysis in the *Critical Review* cited earlier, the reviewer remarks that "'Observation and Reflections' will be always pleasing; though in the loose negligent undress in which they appear, the title and form of Letters would have been preferable." But in the Preface to *Observations and Reflections*, Mrs. Piozzi explains her rejection of the epistolary form:

> For the book--I have not thrown my thoughts into the form of private letters; because a work of which truth is the best recommendation, should not above all others begin with a lie. My old acquaintance rather chose to amuse themselves with conjectures, than to flatter me with tender inquiries during my absence; our correspondence then would not have been any amusement to the Public, whose treatment o me deserves every possible acknowledgment. vi

It is then that she styles herself "more sinned against than sinning."

Acknowledging Mrs. Piozzi's aversion to "deceit," the reviewer notes, " We cannot blame so laudable an inclination, but, if she would not be a correspondent, she should have been a more correct observer. The style, which we might have praised in letters, is disgusting in the author of more collected works" (103-4). So, even the distinction between journal and letters raised correlative issues of style. And so what would be to a modern reader a charming scene would have been viewed as much too particular.

For example, Mrs. Piozzi includes an anecdote starring Mrs. Piozzi. Out for the morning air, she watches the sea and becomes quite homesick. "The ocean being peculiarly British property," she imagines herself back home. She then goes to the shore and steps onto the rocks as the waves crash against them. Looking back, she sees her driver "crossing himself at the carriage door, and wondering, as I afterwards found out, at my matchless intrepidity"(355). His admiration, however, is short-lived. ""The mind," she observes, " ... took another train of thought." She returns to the coach and screams, discovering 'a vast hornet" in the vehicle.

> Our attendant's speech to the coachman however made me more than amends: "Now, my friend, do but observe what a thing is a woman! She is not afraid even of the roaring ocean, and yet goes into fits almost at the sight of a fly.] This truly Tuscan and highly contemptuous harangue, uttered with the utmost deliberation , and added to the absence of the hornet, sent me laughing into the carriage, with great esteem of our philosophical Rosso, for so the fellow was called, because he had red hair (356).

Another question, the question of diction, was becoming an increasing concern, as some writers began to eschew the excesses of Johnsonian imitation (Clifford 346). Mrs. Piozzi certainly challenges convention by writing with a style and diction that seem "spontaneous." She consciously crafted her book to reflect animated speech. Though colloquialisms started gaining force toward the end of the century, a mean between "'the solidity of studied discourse and the freedom of colloquial conversation'" was deemed more acceptable (qtd. in Batten 45). The travel writer Dr. John Moore was criticized by "traditionalists" for language that was "'loose and careless, sometimes even vulgar'" (qtd. in Batten 45). A frequently used disclaimer would be for the author to allege that his work was originally written not for the public but for himself or for his close friends (Batten 45). This was a somewhat effective shield for the type of criticism Mrs. Piozzi drew—that her language was too colloquial to be serious. Letters would have accounted for the informality. Mrs. Piozzi, though, had pointedly commented in her Preface that this work was not based on letters, presumably because her former friends were not sending letters to her. Although one suspects that Johnson's friend Anna Seward might not have been unbiased in criticizing Mrs. Piozzi for her "chamber-maid flippancy, the *Critical Review* effectively spoofed Mrs. Piozzi's often gushing, breathless style—"Really, Madam, one cannot read ten lines without feeling *somehow* such disgust *so one* is tempted to lay down a work, where *one* meets with *so* many inelegancies, *such* colloquial barbarisms, which *one* must

always feel *somehow* unpleasant (104). That time was on Dr. Moore's and Mrs. Piozzi's side had not yet been established, and the issue of diction remained alive.

The diction wars point to another key issue Mrs. Piozzi engaged in *Observations and Reflections*. Exactly how personal should the travel writer be? Certainly not scandalous—John Durant Brevard, Batten notes, omitted in his travel narrative the interesting tale of his romp with a beautiful disaffected nun. But should a travel writer write about himself at all? Autobiographical content was strongly frowned upon, and Addison himself was criticized for his self-referential style. To a modern reader these narratives seem remarkably non-anecdotal. To a contemporary reader, however, the writer's use of "I saw," "I observed," "I felt", would seem "too personal." Later in the eighteenth century some writers would go to great lengths to avoid the first person pronoun, sometimes with laughably convoluted results (Batten 40). Although she herself would, as the *Critical Review* spoofed, use the impersonal "one" a great deal, Mrs. Piozzi appears to have had no such qualms about the first-person; she is ever-present in her account of her travels—the judgments are her, the analyses are hers, and one else's. But even so, Mrs. Piozzi is greatly concerned about what to include and what to omit. She speaks in the first person, she refers to her husband and to friends; but, on the other hand, she does not reveal that the journey the Piozzis are taking is a honeymoon trip. She does not openly belabor her social ostracism back in London, only making in her Preface an oblique reference to the lack of loyalty of her English "friends," a reference London readers could not have missed.

The reviewer for the *Critical Review* was certainly aware of and gently commented on the undercurrents at work in *Observations and Reflections*; but although he notes her "lurking sparks of resentment" towards Dr. Johnson, his criticism of personal references is pointed at the ever present first person pronoun. In her coverage of Florence, he observes that she is "a little too trifling and much to egotic--where I dined with a prince, where I gave a dinner, where Nardini played a solo, where we wrote the Florence Miscellany, etc" (108). While this particular reviewer characterized this flaw as minor, later reviewers would focus on this criticism, and the corresponding criticism of a too-colloquial diction.

Nevertheless, and perhaps as a result of Piozzi's colloquial and personal voice, *Observations and Reflections* is indisputably entertaining. Note, for instance, her description of November in Italy: "It was on the twenty-first of last month that we passed from Turin to Monte Casale; and I wondered, as I do still, to see the face of Nature yet without a wrinkle, though the season is so far advanced. Like a Parisian female of forty years old, dressed for court, and stored with such variety of well-arranged allurements, that the men say to each other as she passes.-

"Des qu'elle à cessée d'estre jolie, elle n'en devient que plus belle, ce me semble[E]." [Footnote E: She's grown handsomer, I think, since she has left off being pretty.] (52). Elsewhere in her travel narrative, Mrs. Piozzi's zest in the drawing room translates well to the written page and informs what is, despite its "loose, negligent undress," an artfully structured work, balancing the cultural habits, virtues and vices, of both the Italians, and the English.

This is Mrs. Piozzi's true agenda. She is an ardent Briton, but she recognizes Briton's vices. Britons may judge Italians, but they must also judge themselves. And so, the Italians have a rigid social structure, but one that allows for carefree interaction between classes, since there is no potential infringement on place. The English are able to rise above their class, but this also creates an artificial snobbery in those who wish to preserve their status against interlopers. The Italian are carefree and easy in the drawing room, but their gardens are artificially plotted and planted; and, conversely, the English who are so controlled and confined in their drawing room repartee have gardens that are landscaped to be natural and free. These comparisons pervade every aspect of Mrs. Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections*; one can argue that in this way Mrs. Piozzi truly manages to combine the *utile* and *dulce* by the freshness and liveliness of her comparisons and by the import of what she so entertainingly conveys.

Mrs. Piozzi's work is at once comprehensive, including insight and musings on art and nature, men and manners, history and contemporary governments, and immediate, with its journal-like recording of impressions and with its colloquialisms and its personal references. More importantly, her work is invaluable for its insight into the changing attitudes of the educated Briton of her day. *Observations and Reflections* is the work by which Mrs. Piozzi should be judged.

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POETRY

Jo LeCoeur
University of Incarnate Word

The Way To A Choctaw Giveaway

**is on foot, hours between each step, days beneath one tree,
nights listening to the invisible. Second best is come by horseback,
casino talk settled by hoof beats the way slow debris sinks,
clearing the water, clearing us to think in the language of gift.**

One Of Life's Supreme Satisfactions

**is to give a horse an apple. Mares tethered beneath the trees,
the crunch between strong teeth, jaws dripping juice.
Animals need soft talk, our throats husky with instinct. Only
the red gift-colt is skittish. He does not yet know happiness. He will
on parade in the grand gift-circle, sun gleaming red on his arched neck.**

Outside Her Tent, A White Woman Sits On A Giant Turtle

**It is a stone she worked all summer with railroad spike and hammer
to chisel its true turtle-shell. A borrowed horse helps her pull it
to the grand circle of blankets spread on the ground where she tells
how the earth was carved from a turtle's body, and then gives it away.**

Gift History Has Value, Tradition Is Tell It, Neither One Speaks

**A weathered hunter helps his wife to her feet, a bearskin pulled tight
around her shoulders. She unfurls its wordless story onto the lap of one
caught stealing blankets who lifts the fur to his chest and buries his face.**

God Knows How Tim Postoak Came By The Sing-Songy Naming Rite

**he gives to the brown hen in his arms: *Thousand-Breakfasts your name,
prayer under your tongue, feathery pillow, dawn wreathed in sun.***

**God's gift to Tim was a place to be born where we give him
the right to be. An occasional egg left in a mailbox is his gift to us.
And his God-knows-how-he-comes-by-it poetry.**

A Hum Follows An Empty Basket-Cradle Around The Giveaway Circle

A lullaby in its weave,* says Basket-maker, *a spirit caught in the hickory bark.
Along the circle, the empty basket picks up a little blanket, a tiny woolen cap.

Who Decides Who Gives Who Gets To Keep

the feel of a cradle putting on weight? A bandana-haired girl and a red gift-colt, their foreheads touching, their skittish eyes shut? A turtle asleep in the rock? Whose sleep is warm as a hunter's tonight? Who hugs a bear to our chest?

Essay

Richard Hutchinson
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The Ecological Apocalypse of 1972: Science and Social Movements in John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up*

It has now been 36 years since the Ecological Apocalypse of 1972, the event chronicled in John Brunner's novel *The Sheep Look Up*, a novel which has taken on renewed relevance in the new millennium (Brunner 1972). Of course, the apocalyptic scenario so realistically depicted did not come to pass, but it is "science fiction" only in the sense that Brunner was marketed as a sci-fi author: there is nothing in the book that could not have happened; it was merely an exaggeration of current events. The book deserves a retrospective in light of current events thirty-six years later. Cyberpunk author William Gibson recently mentioned the "brilliant" novel in commenting on the difficulty of predicting the future, noting that Brunner came closer than anyone to anticipating the reality of 2007 (Lim). Brunner critiques the mass media in modern capitalist society in a very straightforward way, and depicts Adorno's "culture industry" and Debord's "society of the spectacle" in a way that requires almost no knowledge of Frankfurt School neo-marxism (Adorno; Debord), which synthesized elements of both Marx and Weber. Brunner's novel illustrates the central role of a social movement, in particular, one charismatic leader and his erstwhile followers. According to the insights of German sociologist Max Weber, the tragedy so credibly depicted in *The Sheep Look Up* is the result of the improper balance between social rationality and charismatically directed emotion.

In the novel's scenario, the sun is rarely seen, the seas are dead or dying, and air filter masks are necessary because of the thick air pollution. Toxic chemicals fill the air and water, leading to a rising epidemic of birth defects. Pesticide-resistant pests are beginning to destroy the harvests of mechanized agriculture. Insurance companies are diversifying and getting out of the business because life expectancy is dropping too far (Brunner, 1972: 227). A sprawling Dickensian cast of characters emerges in short revolving segments (much like a Robert Altman film). There are two "everyman" couples: Philip Mason, and Angel City Insurance

executive, and his wife, Denise, represent the middle-class, and Pete and Jeannie Goddard represent the working-class. Pete is a policeman, and Jeannie works in a factory. We learn eventually that the Goddards are African-American. Other classes are represented, as well: Jack Bamberly, heir of the Bamberly Trust and head of Bamberly Hydroponics; Petronella Page, superstar TV talk-show host; Major Michael Advowson, M.D. is an Irish doctor.

Brunner also inserts a variety of short texts taking the form of signs, advertisements, quotations from the President, news announcements, and a curriculum vita in a jump-cut, disorienting style reminiscent of John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930-1936). Besides the style, shares leftist views with Dos Passos.[1] The raging prophet Marx looms, as profit-seeking corporations are found to be at the heart of the ecological crisis. But for Brunner, unlike Dos Passos, there are no obvious heroes, certainly not the working class. Brunner's vision is darker, more Weberian, and he sees individuals for the most part as trapped in huge, complex organizations and institutions that they do not understand.

In Brunner's novel, the all-encompassing crisis is not limited to problems associated with chemical pollution. The "war on communism" is going strong in the years following the Vietnam War, as a "pro-Chinese neo-Marxist tidal wave surging around the planet" (Brunner 1972, p. 128).** The Tupamaros of Uruguay have won and taken the country out of the U.N, and their movement is spreading. A "Tupa"-inspired movement is organizing in Honduras, and the Tupas have supporters in American cities. At one point, a bored young radical at one point picks up a copy of the *Tupamaro USA!* newspaper (Brunner 1972: 215). In this context, the right-wing U.S. president, Prexy, engages in demagoguery and threatens to curtail civil liberties. The fast-moving, chaotic sequence of events captures very well the ominous *zeitgeist* of 1970 America. But the ecological and political crisis in the novel spins into exaggerated chaos with toe-holds in real movements. At one point, the narrator refers to "the first day" of a bombing wave that follows a military massacre of sixty-three Trainite protesters, an incident similar to the Kent State shooting of student protesters by the National Guard in May, 1970 (Brunner 1972: 268). At another, militant ecological activists are carrying out an escalating campaign of bombings of corporate targets in the wake of a series of ecological atrocities. Although Earth First! Vigilantism never approached this scale, the parallels to ecological vigilantism are clear. A study by the scientist Tom Grey shows that saboteurs are "striking at industries with high pollution ratings" (282). The novel's New Left revolutionaries reflect the widespread discontent of the decade.

The novel's analogue to the New Left is called the Trainites, a loose movement focused mostly on the environmental crisis instead of war. It gradually becomes clear that the central character is a scientist and author, Austin Train, the inspiration for the Trainites. When we first meet him, he is living underground under an assumed name, working on a garbage-hauling truck. But we learn that he has a Ph.D in chemistry and has authored five books, the first three republished with new titles for a mass audience: *Death In the Wind, The Resistance Movement in Nature, You Are What You Have to Eat, Guide to the Survival of Mankind, and A Handbook for 3000 A.D.* Train evokes the real-life scientist authors Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, and Paul Ehrlich, best known for *The Population Bomb* (Carson; Ehrlich).

Three very different types of followers consider themselves "Trainites." One is a large radical youth movement engaged in public protest, including disrupting traffic. A symbol and a slogan are found everywhere in urban areas in the form of graffitti – a stylized skull-and-crossbones, and "You're Killing Me!" This group resembles SDS and the 1970s' student anti-war movement. Another smaller countercultural movement more closely represents Train's ideas, and in fact includes people who are his close friends and comrades. This movement has created a network of four thousand to five thousand communes called "wats," trying to develop chemical-free organic agriculture, withdrawing from mainstream society and trying to build an alternative. Finally, there is a more general, broad layer of sympathizers, people who have read Train's books, or have simply seen him on television, or seen the Trainite street activists and agree with the need for radical social change. This includes "most of the more intelligent young people and some of their elders" (406).

Ostensibly, the environmental crisis is the center of the novel. "Trainites objected to orlon, nylon, dacron, anything that didn't come from a plant or an animal" (222). We learn that it is "...dogmatic Trainite policy never to bear your own as long as there are orphans to be fostered" (46), but it is not clear which Trainites hold this policy. "Environmental Acts" have been put in place, but "the Acts don't have enough teeth," and are largely ineffective (31). There are eco-friendly products, including a line of electric cars and a line of steam cars (Hailey steam cars), but consumerism is not having much impact on the crisis. But Train has nothing to do with this sprawling, decentralized movement. He makes it clear that he does not condone violence. Early on he calls them "harmless" (Brunner 1972: 47), but later he rails against their "taking his name in vain," and declares "I'm not a Trainite!" (317).

If the central conflict in the setting of *The Sheep Look Up* is the conflict between industrial society and the environment, the central conflict in the story of the novel is the inner struggle of Austin Train.

> "Of all the vices human beings are capable of, Austin Train detested hypocrisy the
>
> most. He hadn't realized that until a matter of three years ago or so ago, following the period of notoriety which had begun a couple of years before with the publication of his *Handbook for the Year 3000 AD* ... ...Suddenly, one might say overnight, he had become a celebrity, in demand for TV interviews, commissioned to write for popular journals, called in as a consultant on government committees. And then, equally abruptly stop... ...Sponsoring the programs on which he appeared as Cassandra: a plastics company, daily pouring half a million gallons of hot and poisoned water into a river that served eleven cities before it reached the ocean... ...It made him sick. Literally." (Brunner 1972: 88-89)

So Train becomes famous, a "prophet of doom," and has a mass following, only to suffer a breakdown and withdraw from public view. He says "... I just couldn't stand it any more once I realized what they were doing to me: using me to prove they cared about the world when in fact they didn't give a fart" (Brunner 1972: 44). In living among the urban poor while underground he is exposed to chemical pollution which causes his hair to fall out, a fact that only takes on its full significance at the novel's end.

Austin Train is simultaneously a scientist and a prophet, a charismatic leader in Max Weber's sense (Weber). As a chemist, he knows the truth of the harmful effects of chemical pollution on humans and other living things. But that is purely rational observation and experimentation. He is also engaged emotionally and morally, and sees the need to act on that knowledge. It is the unique combination of scientific rationality and the emotional energy of charisma that gives Train immense potential power. He is conflicted as to how to wield that power, if at all. He knows through painful experience that he cannot control his message in the realm of the mass media. He also knows that his followers are out of his control, and that he has become a symbol, a mythic Hero figure that has eclipsed the real, embodied Austin Train. He thus exemplifies the archetype according to Campbell, "[a] hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself" (Campbell 1988: 151). Whether the heroic deed is physical or spiritual, the universal hero's journey always involves "...leaving one condition and finding

the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or more mature condition" (152). The real Austin Train rejects his heroic role, but he is eventually driven to speak out again, leading to the culmination of the novel.

In Weber's sociological theory, charismatic authority is a type of social relationship that can upend society. Charisma, as Weber defines it, is not just a characteristic of an individual, but characterizes the relationship between a leader and followers. In a traditional (agrarian) society, a leader's authority comes from his position as a male elder. Weber calls this patrimonial rule. In modern society, a leader's authority comes from the law, and Weber calls this legal-rational authority. Charismatic leaders, often religious, can emerge in either case, and pose a revolutionary challenge to the prevailing social order (Weber 1111-1158). Austin Train stands as an exemplar of scientific rationality, and this is the potential source of his authority in mainstream society. But Train and all the various Trainites realize that capitalist, industrial society is not using its own scientific knowledge to alter its practices. In Weberian terms, means/ends rationality (*zweckrationality*), while formally rational, is not necessarily substantively rational.[2] Train and those he has inspired act on this realization in several ways that are neither coordinated with one another nor complementary but all driving toward a confrontation.

Confrontation becomes a necessity because of the failure of rationality, particularly as represented by scientific, industrial institutions. Moses Greenbriar of the Bamberly Trust contemplates, as he talks with a scientist, "[w]hat would happen if someone didn't come up – and very soon – with a rational, scientific practicable plan to cure this country's ills?" and he bemoans the uselessness of Prexy and his "cabinet of mediocrities" (Brunner 1972: 284). He notes the drift of uncommitted support to either the Trainites, the Marxists, or the radical right (Brunner 1972: 284). Gerry Thorne of Global Relief searches for Austin Train, because "...he seems to be about the only person who might lead us out of this mess" (240). Noting the danger signs of dead seas and shortages of water and food, the scientist Lucas Quarrey responds "We need something to break us out of this – this isolationism we've drifted into... ...We're divorced from reality, in the same way the Romans went on thinking of themselves as unvulnerable and inchallengeable long after it ceased to be true" (240). Once rationality has broken down, Train seems to be the charismatic leader who might lead the people to salvation. Notably, Brunner certainly does not celebrate the failure of rationality. Once rationality has broken down, Thorne and Quarrey are assassinated, in one of the few expressions of outright malevolence on the part of the leaders. At one point a character bemoans the impossibility of getting a refrigerator repaired: "[d]amn

silly not being able to get the old one repaired! But none of these kids nowadays would have anything to do with technical matters. Like it was black magic, and just touching it put you in the devil's power" (303).

Train seems to be the answer because he retains some rational ability but has charismatic power, as noted by both revolutionaries and the government. An FBI agent leading an interrogation exclaims "[u]nless we find him and pillory him in public, make him look like the fool and traitor that he is, he can walk back into the spotlight any time he chooses and take command of an army a million strong!" (291). Ossie, a fake Train carries out the kidnapping of Jack Bamberly's nephew, then asks "why doesn't the mother come out and lead the revolutionary forces?" (Brunner 1972: 270). The real Austin Train emerges to do an interview on Petronella Page's show. He is arrested and charged with the kidnapping. But in the interrupted interview, we see Train's charismatic power as he tranforms Page with a vision of the world before massive pollution (338). Page converts, and saves a tape of Train, saying "the Trainites aren't defeated" (400). Train's heroic stature promises and threatens.

Brunner is not subtle about suggesting Austin Train as a Christ figure, a messiah. This is not meant in a religious sense, though it is used for several purposes: to quickly convey Train's ethical stance, to emphasize Train's heroic destiny, and to foreshadow the nature of his final act and the novel's culmination. When we first meet Train, living underground, we find that he has decided to renounce his fame and "live as the poor are living" (Brunner 1972: 41). When Petronella is contacted and Train's public re-emergence is imminent, she learns that he has been underground for forty months, which leads her to reflect that "...it was pregnant but *pregnant* with overtones. Forty days the waters were upon the face of the earth, foty days in the wilderness tempted of Satan." (332). In reference to the militant Trainites, he says "..."I wrote their bible and their creed, and if I were put on oath I couldn't deny that I meant every last word" (44). He is asked "[d]oes it worry you, having your name taken in vain?" (46). He responds that he is very concerned about the potential of escalating violence, and that he is likely to be blamed. In talking to Train in preparation for her show, Page asks him about the Trainites. Train says "I am no more responsible for the actions of the Trainites than Jesus for the behavior of the Christians on whom Paul of Tarsus projected his personal neuroses" (336). At another point he consciously identifies with "that great heretic St. Francis of Assisi," imagining Francis in his place being interrogated on national television. Because the meek are chosen of God, he will try to be meek. But he adds, "[b]esides, I like animals better than you bastards," scarcely a saintly, let alone Christ-like, sentiment (Brunner 1972: 88). When asked

"what are they going to do to you?" by a friend, he says "[c]rucify me" (315). He will assert himself rather than allow anyone calling himself Train or a Trainite speak for him. He rails against the militants, saying "...I've been taken over – *made* over – into the patron saint of of bombing, sabotage, arson, murder, God knows what" (319). Referring again to others taking his name in vain, he says it does bother him, "My God, it does! It was the thing I finally found I couldn't stand any longer. *I'm* not a Trainite!" (317). He adds, "But then Jesus wasn't a Christian, was he?" Now in full prophet/messiah mode, Train seizes the role he had been evading. "I have a mission. I don't want it. But who the hell else is there? ...I think I may be able to save the world" (317-318).

Brunner marks Train as a charismatic prophet, in Weberian terms, and Train embraces his prophetic calling. We see his moment of conviction when he decides he must reemerge and take action. "Suddenly, in recent weeks, the conviction had come on him: I matter. I count. I have an insight. I think a thing no one else thinks. I believe with the certainty of faith. I must *must* make others hear and understand. When it is time" (Brunner 1972: 91). Knowing that his message is one that threatens the powerful, Train decides to emerge with full knowledge of the likely outcome.[3]

When Train finally seizes the opportunity to address the nation at his trial, he says "...at all costs if the human race is to survive, the forcible exportation of the way of life invented by these stupid men must. . . be . . . stopped" (Brunner 1972: 412). "Although it's already too late for us, it may not be too late for the rest of the planet! We owe it to those who come after that there never be another Mekong Desert! (413). At that point Prexy orders that the transmission be ended, and a moment later the court is destroyed in a bomb blast set off by the ersatz Train. At that point America goes up in flames. Oddly, the moment suggests yet another reference to Biblical heroes. Like Samson he pulls the building down on himself as he dies in the rubble (Judges 16: 29-30). At that point the significance of Train having lost his hair while living underground becomes more clear.

Some critics have seen this as a sign of hope (Goldman 1978), and it is true that the collapse of American industry and the demise of its military can be taken to mean that the rest of the planet will now have an improved chance of survival. But it seems clear that the dramatic conclusion is a tragedy, not a triumph. There is no redemption, no resurrection, just a final act of strength, an attempt to make a difference, to use the charismatic authority in the face of the apocalypse. The nonviolent, scientifically-informed wats are just flotsam in the surge of revolution and reaction. Train's attempt to use reason has failed, and love and compassion are no match for fear and anger in the revolutionary denouement. All he can do in

the end is incite the destruction of the source of the problem. If the ending is a victory, it is a Pyrrhic one.

The prophetic implications of the book matter, though they are grimmer than the reality. In reality, the warnings of Rachel Carson did lead to significant reforms. The revolutionary situation did not come to pass. Ironically it was Richard Nixon, the bete noire of the New Left, who presided over a wave of environmental legislation including the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Endangered Species Act. The 1970s were an Environmental Decade, and Brunner's novel for a time seemed to be a worst-case scenario that was no longer relevant. There was a center that held, a middle that was missing in the novel's future.

Still, Brunner's novel was prophetic. Brunner indicated awareness of problems that are only recently being widely acknowledged. The evil Prexy was partly based on both Governor Reagan of California and the newly elected President Nixon, and both the later President Reagan and President George W. Bush arguably have seemed quite Prexy-like at times. today, environmental alarmism has reached a new level, sparked by the twin threats of the depletion of fossil fuels and the climate change brought on by emissions of carbon dioxide and other global warming gases. In Brunner's novel, a character mentions Welsh nationalists and a war in West Pakistan, both in fights over water (Brunner 1972: 226). And in the same passage, she notes "...the danger of further dustbowls like the Mekong Desert, the effects of bringing about climatic change" (226). The theory that human management or mismanagement of natural resources has global ecological consequences has taken hold. Al Gore and the Inter-Governmental Panel On Climate Change (IPCC) won the Nobel Peace Prize last year, and governments and corporations are moving in the direction of serious action to check carbon emissions. However, so far the closest thing to the Trainites in the U.S. has been the much smaller Earth First! and the tiny Earth Liberation Front (ELF), a decentralized network of groups, some of which have taken responsibility for property destruction of homes and ski lodges under construction and jumbo-sized SUVs. So while it is not the central focus, the global environment and the climate are seen as encompassed by the ecological crisis.

Probably, another breakthrough like the wave of 1970s legislation is needed, this time accompanied by stronger treaties that build on the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. The green movement is large and diverse, global in scope, and includes scientists, economists, and legislators in addition to students. But it is still altogether possible that not enough will be done quickly enough to prevent serious

ecological consequences in the twenty-first century. Charismatic leaders will surely arise, perhaps green religions, and the environmental movement may well come to include a larger radical faction than it contains today. The limitations of rationality and the power of emotion in driving social relations remain all too clear, and every attempted "fix" ramifies in unintended, unexpected ways. Though many of the details may seem dated, *The Sheep Look Up* remains quite relevant in its broad outlines as a cautionary tale.

Notes

1. Brunner first tried out this style in *Stand On Zanzibar*, which won the 1969 Hugo Award.
2. The point is captured nicely by ecological economist Herman Daly, who says the market will efficiently allocate goods like loading a ship, but does not know when to stop, and the optimally loaded ship sinks (Daly and Farley, pp. 4-5).

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Poetry
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Three Pool Poems

The Pool With/Without Goggles

I

Legs are trees walking,
some whiter, some darker.
Light blurs into bands.
Leaves smudge.
The blue world presses against the eye.

II

Legs are pale, muscular, mosquito bitten,
thin, shaven, scratched,
tanned, prickly, brown,
dimpled, hairy, scarred. . .
Light flickers in sharp lines
and oak pollen floats by fallen oak leaves.

The Cannonball

Knees curled to chest,
arms wrapped around shins,
he sinks to the bottom,
rises slowly and suspends,
held only by the hand of water
that touches us both everywhere.

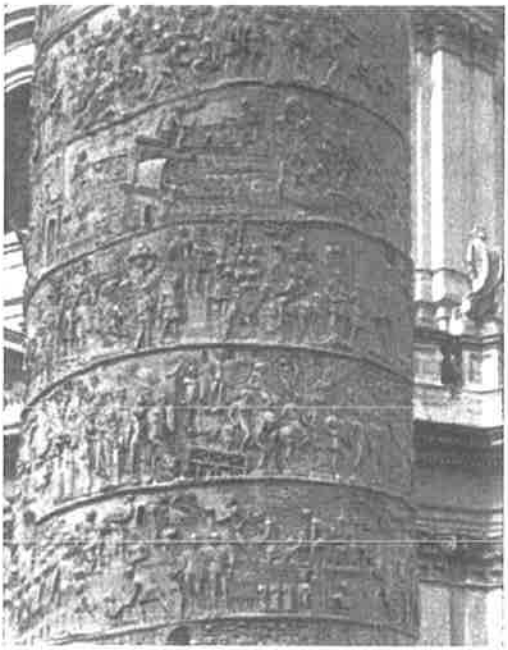
The Pool Pump in Winter

The cicadas' chirr died with September.

And in October the bullfrogs that croaked all summer from rain-bloated ditches buried themselves beneath the mud.

Tonight it's December and even the crickets are silent.

Though by spring the water will yellow with algae, the bottom pile with pine needles, oak leaves, dead millipedes and spiders, only the pool pump drones on its low rumble and clank.



Essay
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The Sun Never Sets on Alice's Wonderland

Midway through Lewis Carroll's dreamlike tale, *Alice in Wonderland,* the speaker describes the young heroine as one "who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking" (58). This is arguably an understatement for a rather short narrative that contains over fifty references to eating, drinking, or enjoying food. Dan Ratner of Brown University speculates in "Victorian Hunger and Malnutrition in *Alice in Wonderland*," that "Carroll demonstrated an understandable preoccupation with food in Wonderland as a way of sharing his thoughts on hunger in Victorian society" (Victorian Web par.1). Although the story is certainly rife with allusions to predatory carnivores, perhaps most significant of these allusions is the emphasis Alice places on the hunting prowess of her cat, Dinah. Significantly, the four short poems Alice recites also all include violent and grotesque references to "dining." Therefore, Carroll is not using the food imagery solely as a commentary about British Victorian starvation; rather, he incorporates the baser images of frenzied feeding to satirize England's global imperialistic reign.

Upon close examination the reader discovers startling similarities between the brutal, predatory beasts in the verses and the relentless, devouring nature of Imperial England. However, Alice's innocent reactions to the gruesome gobbling in these poems and to the horror with which all the creatures regard her allusions to Dinah mirror the popular Victorian mind-set that ingenuously wished to improve the rest of the world by making it English but that failed to notice the wolfish, greedy aspects of its imperial reign.

While in Wonderland, Alice certainly does partake in many strange rituals of eating, such as the Mad Hatter's Tea Party and the temptingly labeled cookies and drinks. On this subject, Anya Weber asserts in "Food, Drink, and Public Health in the Alice Books," that in Wonderland "while its effect may be strange, to eat and to drink are necessary steps in becoming odd and warped enough to fit through the appropriate doors of an odd, warped land" (Victorian Web par. 3). Indeed this may be so; regardless, the true importance of dining in the novel is not in the digesting of biscuits and tea. A politico-sociological reading of the tale requires the reader to

examine the constant threat of devouring creatures as oppressive, Imperial England's military occupation.

One of the tale's most menacing forces of carnivorous terror is Alice's cat, Dinah. Although the cat itself does not accompany Alice down the rabbit hole and into Wonderland, Dinah is alluded to repeatedly by her doting owner. Initially used as a topic for attempting to start a "pleasant" conversation, Alice's cat soon becomes a threat, a power that Alice, at first, mistakenly wields over the heads of the frightened Wonderland natives. Therefore, in true fashion of Victorian England, Dinah, the image of an all-consuming unknown, unseen power, becomes an earth-shaking threat to all of the weaker creatures; she becomes Alice's symbol for an all-conquering England. The image of Dinah as a ferocious beast is reinforced repetitively by Alice's dialogue. In fact, when Alice mentions Dinah, it is usually in some respect to dining. Even as she tumbles down through the rabbit hole into the magical world, Alice worries about who will feed Dinah her dinner if she cannot. Close upon the heels of this worry, Alice laments that Dinah cannot be with her during the long and exhausting fall. She complains aloud: "Dinah, my dear! I wish you were down here with me! There are no mice in the air, I'm afraid, but you might catch a bat, and that's very like a mouse, you know. But do cats eat bats, I wonder?" (Carroll 3). Quite likely, Alice is subconsciously struck with the wish to see her pet at least partly because of Dinah's famed ability to catch small rodents. After all, Alice is chasing a small animal down a tunnel. She later bemoans the fact that Dinah is not accompanying her since Dinah could fetch the Mouse back to finish his story. Thus, early on the underlying imperialist theme comes into focus because of Alice's unnaturally strong interest in maintaining power over and eating up other creatures by force and threat.

Once Alice begins to interact with the inhabitants of Wonderland, she soon discovers that the adoration with which she regards her cat is not reciprocated. Ignored by the Mouse when she tries to engage him in polite conversation in her native language of English, Alice immediately reverts to French inquiring, "Ou est ma chatte?" (14). Angered at the lack of respect for her imperialistic tongue, Alice unconsciously and inadvertently alerts the Mouse's natural fear of cats. Her query has the desired effect: "The mouse gave a sudden leap out of the water, and seemed to quiver all over with fright" (14). Now having sufficiently gained some emotional control over the animal, Alice attempts to appease the terrified mouse. The direct correlation between Alice's power and her attitude toward the various creatures of the tale is evident here; Alice begins to feel sympathy for the tiny animal she has rattled. However, her sympathy is not as powerful as her imperialist pride, and she quickly revives the taboo topic of Dinah.

Strangely, Alice's imperialist demeanor becomes twisted when she haphazardly tries to win the Mouse to her way of thinking by suggesting persuasively that the
Mouse accept her cat Dinah as a friend. She ventures smarmily: "I wish I could show you our cat Dinah. I think you'd take a fancy to cats, if you could only see her. She is such a dear quiet thing, . . . and she sits purring so nicely by the fire, licking her paws and washing her face" (14). Indeed, Alice offers reasons that the Mouse, much like a country that is being encroached upon by England, should not be afraid of a bigger, potentially destructive power. Alice describes Dinah as "dear" (14) and "quiet" (14), insinuating that the threatening force is practically timid and shy, even like the Mouse itself. Much like a conniving, questing England, which was thirsty for connections to unfamiliar territories, and of course more conquests, Alice draws parallels between the opposing forces in order to allay fear. By portraying the predatory Dinah/England as sweetly grooming herself in a contented fashion, Alice focuses the mouse's attention on the cat's demure pose, as well as the security the cat feels, which she hints could be shared by the Mouse.

Nevertheless, Alice bungles her persuasive tactic by going into too much detail in her state of happy nostalgia when she fondly remembers Dinah's affinity "for catching mice" (14). Therefore, Alice exhibits a careless disrespect for the Mouse's comfort and security and proceeds to alienate it thoughtlessly. Her feeble attempt to alter her conversation to a proper topic is disastrous because she is unable to escape her imperialist mentality. Insensitive Alice gleefully discusses another dangerous and threatening enemy with the quaking mouse. Alice's new "suitable" topic is a terrier that "kills all the rats" (14). Again, Alice tries fruitlessly to explain the glories of this loving pet, but she inevitably reveals the truth about the animal's predatory prowess. Not only does her fascination with the dog's hunting skill make an impression upon the reader, but her appreciation of the monetary value of the pet is of importance. Because the dog is "so useful" (14) at catching vermin and performing other tricks, it is worth "a hundred pounds" (12). Here Alice clarifies her understanding that the monetary value of allies increases if they are willing to help gather and conquer for the greater power. The terrier, a puppet of its master, the farmer, is evidently more valuable than many other sorts of pets because it can hunt out threats to the farm/empire. In contrast, Dinah does not serve a higher power; therefore, she is a prime example of England scooping up prey solely for the purpose of satiating itself.

Alice again commits the inexcusable *faux pas* of praising Dinah in front of weaker animals. Almost unbelievably insensitive and unaware of how

outrageous is her regret that Dinah cannot be there to fetch the little Mouse back to finish the story he was telling, Alice goes on. She explains "eagerly" (Carroll 21) to a Duck, a Dodo, a Lory, a Magpie, a Canary, an Eaglet, and many other animals: "Dinah's our cat. And she's such a capital one for catching mice, you ca'n't [can't] think! And oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!" (21). By having chalked up another social disgrace, Alice reinforces the image of a cold, uncaring England. She is either too emotionally removed from this land's vulnerable inhabitants or coolly unwilling to change her choice of topic, further demonstrating her lack of consideration for the social, religious, and food chain order in Wonderland. Naturally, the birds are mortified both by Alice's flippant boasting about such a matter and by her attempt to endear Dinah to them. Alice goes beyond the point of ineffective diplomat and enters the realm of ignorant clod with her complete lack of social and political sensibilities. Saddened by the animals' quick departure, Alice laments her cat's bad reputation crying: "Nobody seems to like her, down here, and I'm sure she's the best cat in the world! Oh, my dear Dinah! I wonder if I shall ever see you anymore" (Carroll 22). Alice cannot comprehend that no one in this mixed-up world likes the idea of Dinah. A willful Alice has, after all, plummeted to a faraway, foreign land where not one of the inhabitants appreciates the treasures of her home. When she bewails her fear that she will never see her devouring Dinah again, Alice's homesick feelings mirror those of an unhappy missionary's daughter. Vainly and insensitively working to bring foreigners not merely to accept but to worship her home, the idealistic young girl is stunned by the foreigners' lack of respect and admiration. Their fear of and their frustration with the predatory power are confusing to Alice since she lives within the empire, which seems to her no more threatening than a kitten.

Rapidly, Alice's formerly accidental outbursts become her concealed weapon, her switch-blade to hold against other animals' throats if they disobey or anger her. Daniel Bivona notes in his article, "Alice the Child-Imperialist and the Games of Wonderland," Alice's tendency to ignore the negative or even the threatening impact of her presence. While Bivona's article focuses on the many Wonderland games and rituals Alice engages in, the article also states: "Alice's struggle for recognition by the creatures, her will-to-master, drives her beyond any bounds of decency (if there were any such conception of the rules of decency not bound by constraints of time, place, and culture). If there is rule violation in this text, surely Alice is the violator *par excellence*" (153). Truly Alice is scrupulous only by an imperialistic definition. She never deliberately causes any harm, yet having finally perceived that the mention of Dinah gives her an upper-hand, Alice

uses her secret weapon for self-fulfilling purposes.

Immediately following Alice's interaction with the Mouse, she encounters the mysterious White Rabbit. Although the White Rabbit tells Alice to enter its home, the invitation is based on the understanding that she is someone else, his maid Mary Anne. The identity confusion, which Alice does not bother to rectify, gives Alice unchecked access to all of the White Rabbit's possessions and his home. Once inside, safe under the guise of house maid, Alice quickly abuses this position and indulges in the Rabbit's beverages. Yet, this time, Alice is not invite to partake by the drink itself. The narrator notes, "There was no label this time wi the words 'DRINK ME,' but nevertheless she uncorked it and put it to her lips" (Carroll 24). Through false pretenses Alice has obtained an ideal position to usur resources, and through those resources, she takes over not only the home, but also the inhabitant. When trapped inside the White Rabbit's house, which she virtually destroys with her colossal stature, Alice quickly and muscularly squelches any attempts to force her from the home. Furthermore, now safely encamped in and, i fact, filling the house, Alice is at liberty to maintain her dominant position with th reinforcing threat of power-from-back-home, Dinah. When the White Rabbit suggests that the house must be burned to remove Alice, she angrily counters, "If you do, I'll set Dinah at you" (29). Alice has at last consciously begun to use her empire's force as a club to keep herself in charge and literally unharmed from resisting locals. Much like the Victorian England method of infiltrating and subduing country after country, Alice too has invaded a private, foreign turf and has inserted herself as a power from within.

Literary analyst Robert Chapman comments on Alice's need to situate herself as a superior power in Wonderland in his article, "Pig and Pepper and Social Theory." Chapman asserts: "Victorian social theorists had a myriad of theories to justify the rule of . . . England over its empire. The thinking went that the superiority of one over another could be established then rule was justified an just" (Victorian Web par.1). Furthermore, Chapman goes on to explain that many English Victorians maintained the belief that the grown humans of the "inferior races" were intellectually and emotionally equivalent to children of the "superior race." With these same Victorian imperialist concepts, Alice indeed becomes the more powerful, "superior race" in Wonderland. She certainly believes that she is at the very least, intellectually equal to all of the creatures in Wonderland, which she demonstrates time and time again with her comic displays of reciting facts an literary recitations, as well as her attempts to engage in battles of wit with the March Hare and the Mad Hatter. However, this belief coupled with the added power of her newfound height and her carnivorous feline sword, gives her self-

pproved permission to usurp all control of the White Rabbit's house and later the ntire kingdom of Wonderland.

Once Alice has become too enormous to escape from the house safely, she ecomes the embodiment of Victorian England fattening its empire from the esources gleaned from countries it has colonized and taken by force. Once a small ower, Alice/England has become grossly enlarged by stolen commodities, then inds itself too engorged to leave without being damaged. The country that the nglish empire is bleeding dry could be left a hollow shell of itself, which the nhabitants would rather burn than accept its being filled with greedy intruders. In related theory, critic James R. Kincaid notes Alice's innocence throughout her estruction of Wonderland in his article, "Alice's Invasion of Wonderland." Kincaid states: "From the perspective of all those whose values are ignored and vhose emotions are plundered, it doesn't matter if Eden is destroyed by purposeful nalignity or by the callous egoism and ruthless insensitivity that often pass for nnocence" (92). Thus, while Alice may not initially be trying to devastate the land he bursts through, her lack of concern for the damage and terror she causes, shows ne audience her insensitive, selfish, and above all else, imperialistic nature.

Alice's imperialistic fervor is further reinforced by the four short poems she ecounts for various Wonderland locals. The first short poem Alice recounts offers hilling insight into her supposedly childish mind. The narrator does comment that vhen she begins the poem, "her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words id not come the same as they used to do" (Carroll 11). Now that she has become ost in this world that has no knowledge of England, Alice subconsciously, utomatically assumes the role of conqueror, and her childish rhymes reflect the ffect that the persistent Victorian brainwashing has had on her mind.

Describing a hungry crocodile's scales, claws, and smiling teeth as it wallows unsuspecting fish, Alice's recitation indicates that the grinning reptile is ymbolic of a ravenous England desiring to "Improve his shining tail" (11). Moreover he "improves" his own being by soaking in the foreign waters of Egypt nat give him a newer, richer, and "golden" (11) appearance. Here, imperialistic eign is lurking in foreign waters and literally absorbing wealth from another ountry while becoming fatter, feasting upon its helpless, duped inhabitants. Much ke Dinah's seemingly sweet, benevolent bathing in front of the cozy fire, the rocodile makes itself "cheerful" (11) as he "neatly spreads his claws" (11). His ttempts to become non-threatening and appealing to the tiny fish resemble ngland's own attempts to appear helpful and prosperous in order to convince veaker powers that the empire can be trusted. Donald Rackin comments on this trange recitation in his article, "Alice's Journey to the End of Night." However,

instead of placing an imperialist construction on the verse, he chooses to villainize the creatures of Wonderland. Rackin maintains that the grotesque poem, "subverts the sentimental convention that animals are innately moral, and this subversion ties in neatly with Alice's late encounters with the animals of Wonderland: for the mos part they will not be like Watt's busy little bee; they will be more like Alice's nast crocodile" (315). Rackin's interpretation proves problematic if one examines the actions of the creatures in the poems in contrast to the creatures in Wonderland. Wonderland is full of angry, blustery incidents, but no fatalities. Even the most menacing and dangerous characters such as the Queen and the Duchess never succeed in killing anyone. Nevertheless, the verses such as the crocodile poem, revolve around flesh-hungry, animalistic feeding. Rose Lovell-Smith interprets in her article, "The Animals of Wonderland: Tenniel as Carroll's Reader," the impulsive, prehistoric drive of the poems' beasts. She states, "Carroll's crocodile, all tooth and claw, signifies other things; amorality, the struggle for existence, predation of the weaker by the stronger" (386). Wonderland is place of threatenin rulers and dangerous adventure, yet Wonderland itself is not the imperialist conquer, the all-gobbling force that is represented in the four poems recited by an emissary of England.

Alice goes on to recite another disturbing poem, "You Are Old, Father William," in which she describes a revolting old man consuming a meal of goose. This particular verse also keenly and subtly mocks England's lack of strength to aptly tend to its own crippling social problems when it states that Father William's "jaws are too weak / For anything tougher than suet" (Carroll 36). While England was dispensing armies across the continents to increase its empire, its own long-ignored problems of labor, prostitution, and poverty made it the topic of jokes and criticism in other Victorian novels such as Dickens' *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*. In "Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and Contemporary Politics," George P. Landow examines Francis F. Abele's evidence that Carroll did, in fact, feel passionately about England's rampant social problems especially concerning "abuse of animals, the existence of slavery, mistreatment of factory workers, and the degradation of women" (Victorian Web par. 5). This poem depicts England crudely glossing over its internal problems; despite his frailty, Father William not only eats the flesh of the fowl but "finished the goose, with bones and beak" (Carroll 36). The gruesome image reinforces feelings of disgust towards Alice's macabre taste in fiction and directs thinly veiled anger at England's nasty tendenc to gulp down other countries' cultures and ruling powers Grendel-style, leaving n remains behind. Also, Father William's consumption of the bird is reminiscent of Dinah's rumored ability to swiftly gobble down birds. Both Father William and

Dinah are ruthless. In fact, when asked by the youth how Father William has managed to devour the entire fowl, Father William maintains that there is not a problem at all with his jaws. Furthermore, Father William asserts that his chewing strength will continue, "the rest of my life" (36). Thus, symbolically, the English empire has denied its domestic social flaws and has quietly acknowledged its intent to persist in swallowing other lands.

Alice's third recitation tells of an animal preparing itself to be eaten. The Lobster states, "You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair" (86). This disturbing image of an animal critiquing the manner in which he is to be served is further darkened by the Lobster's terror of being eaten by a shark. Possibly aware of how appetizing he has become, the tiny crustacean now lives in fear of the beast skulking around him in the waves. The parallel between predator and England continues in these verses as England has been transformed into a prehistoric eating machine, ceaselessly prowling for fresh, weak prey to satiate its insatiable appetite.

Not surprisingly, the fourth and final recitation is the most subtly violent and distressing of all. A Panther and an Owl share a meat pie, or rather, the Panther feeds on the pie, and the Owl has only the pie plate "as his share of the treat" (87). The Panther then allows the Owl to keep the spoon, and even though the last line of the poem is left incomplete, the rhyme scheme makes obvious the Panther's intention of temporarily satisfying his hunger by devouring the Owl. Again, England has the role of brutal predator, which in this case initially eats in false, uneasy harmony with the weaker creature, being left inedible scraps. Mimicking England's tactics of peacefully working alongside other countries, then turning on them in violence, the Panther-Owl poem is one of creeping, sardonic horror. The usually shrewd Owl is not wise to the threat of the Panther and apparently accepts the pittance of food and even the worthless treasure of the spoon, gratefully, not expecting the Panther to use the fork and knife to consume it later. The image of the British Empire is unsettling, and England is once more portrayed as resolute, mindless teeth and jaws.

Significantly, Alice laments after each of her poems that she has recited them incorrectly, and she has. The Caterpillar, Mock Turtle, and Gryphon all agree that Alice's poems have been altered from the originals; they are "wrong from beginning to end" (38). Alice botches the stories and, subsequently, unmasks both the true nature of England's imperialistic regime and her own completely ignorant, initially innocent perception of hostile political takeovers. The childish innocence with which she both incorrectly recites these poems, and then reacts to their inappropriateness reflects the commonplace, adamant Victorian belief that imperialism was merely improving the world and not causing any significant harm.

Representing the Victorian population, which blindly accepted the Crown's decisions to "improve" the world with often fierce subjugation, Alice misses her marvelous hunter Dinah and only occasionally wonders about her own poetic words, which seem jumbled and strange. Like the masses of English citizens in the empire, Alice suspects that something is wrong and disturbing, but she cannot discover the reason for her discomfort. Maybe the reason "the words did not come the same as they used to do" (11) in her recitations is that Alice has literally fallen away from the empire she is familiar with and into a gross exaggeration of the principles of imperialism. Removed from her comfortably superior country, Alice cannot help seeing, at least subconsciously, the immorality of Victorian England's ideas of world "improvement."

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POETRY

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Us in a Mirror

It's done. Filliped match split light, our faces
Fire in expressionless orange. Her hard violent
Lips pull ember to the filter. Snapping thin paper
Reels. Crisp tobacco burns departs
into her body, rifles through her nostrils
against my jaw shaved smooth. I flick the match
into the toilet, it hisses into the water. Ash falls
on tile. Our torsos swallowed by the room's
dismissive gray. Rosined muscles, taut,
she prepares to breathe for one.

Red River Gorge

Teenage boys with buck
Knives chip initials
Into land bridge
Sandstone. Panicked bigleaf
magnolias and yellow buckeyes spit
seeds against the lichen
covered rock arch. Kentucky augite gouged. The boys call
bird dogs back
to the hollow. Mouths
full of quail, muddied
feathers stuck to snouts
and ears. Shotgun shells
in the nettles. The boys walk
chucking acorns into Red River.
Pouches stuffed
with northern bobwhites.
The covey roosted near the ground.

log Killing Weather

ows hooked on the walls of the dry barn, hind
anks hung raw, pink bellies split open, hearts
id on the sawdust, fetlocks swept up in piles.
Ve saved their hooves in tin pails, chopped above
e phalanx, they pickled well. Mother jarred
nd labeled each season in the kitchen.

ard slick floors glued hay to my boots those thick
ogged mornings, slicing bacon, cleaving hunks
f pork for the grinder. I counted scars
n my hands, palms up too, sawed nicks and bites,
cabbed thumbs pruned as if long soaked in water.
hose blood stained blades and lips of hooks clipped hands,
gain and again, buried me inside
e slaughter, inside, fried on the skillets.

ESSAY

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"Edgar Allan Poe's Use of Gothic Conventions in 'Ligeia'"
By Alan Brown

Edgar Allan Poe is generally considered to be one of the creators of American Gothic. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James, Poe often projects an ambivalent attitude toward the Gothic in his writing. In works like "Young Goodman Brown" and *Turn of the Screw*, the authors leave it up to the reader to determine whether or not the strange occurrences in the tales are supernatural in origin. Poe's "Ligeia," which he once cited as his favorite of all his works, reflects the two primary approaches to the genre at that time: the explained school and the supernatural school. In "Ligeia," these two conflicting schools of thought are embodied in the German-born Ligeia and the Anglo-Saxon Rowena. The fact that the fascinating Ligeia triumphs over the dull Rowena reflects the interpretation that Poe wants the reader to accept. However, Poe also adopts a third approach to the Gothic, one that was used by William Bedford in his novel *Vathek*.

"Ligeia" covers much of the same ground that Poe explored in tales like "Morrella." A wealthy man falls in love with a woman of unusual beauty, more akin to the Hebrew model than to the Greek ideal. He is astounded by her intellect her learning, which he says "was immense—such as I have ever known in a woman" (180. He is particularly impressed with the power of her will. In a quotation erroneously credited to Willaim Glanvill, the narrator says, "Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor to death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (179). Within a short span of time, Ligeia, like so many of Poe's heroines, dies of an unidentified illness. The grief-stricken narrator tries to assuage his grief by moving from the "city by the Rhine" to an abandoned abbey in the wilder parts of England. He marries a woman who is the antithesis of Ligeia—the fair-haired, blue-eyed Lady Rowena Travanion, of Tremaine. Unable to put the memory of Ligeia behind him, the narrator becomes addicted to opium. Rowena dies, quite possibly by his hand, and is transformed into Ligeia in the end of the story.

"Ligeia" was published in 1840 in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. In 1839, Poe made a couple of minor revisions, including Rowena's struggle with an invisible foe (Thompson 79). These revisions followed a letter Poe had written to Phillip P. Cooke on September 21, 1839. Poe wrote that Cooke was "right" about the "flawed" technique of "Ligeia": "I was forced to be content with a sudden half-consciousness, on the part of the narrator, that Ligeia stood before him," Poe wrote. "Your word that it is "intelligible" suffices—and your commentary sustains your word. As for the mob—let them talk on. I should be grieved if I thought they comprehended me here" (78). Poe's praise of Cooke's suggestions is veiled in irony because he had told Poe that the story could be improved if the Lady Rowena of Tremaine grew darker with the passing of each day. When "Ligeia" was published in 1840, the ending was even more abrupt than the version that Cooke had read. The opium-clouded consciousness of the narrator suggests that the sudden appearance of Ligeia might take place only in his fevered imagination. Still, the possibility exists that Ligeia might actually have possessed Rowena, body and soul.

Before probing the Gothic elements of "Ligeia," one must first examine the two stages in the development of the English Gothic tale. In her book *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800*, J.M.S Tompkins places the genteel romances of Anne Radcliffe in the first category of Gothic fiction. In novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, violence is rarely depicted. The supernatural elements are always explained away, either logically or scientifically. Thus, the reader experiences emotions no more intense than a sense of unease, generated by the mystery that slowly builds through the novel. Radcliffe's restraint reflects the doctrine of the Enlightenment, whose emphasis on logic and reason had not entirely faded away at the time she was writing (Thompson 75). Tompkins says that in its second stage of development, English Gothic literature was influenced by German Gothic stories. In his book *The History of the English Novel*, Ernest A. Baker traces the source of German Gothic to German folk tales, in which goblins, elves, and ghosts "satiat[e] the greediest appetites for crime, diabolism, and nameless horrors" (176). German Gothic abandons the civility of Radcliffe's books for horrific scenes consisting of what Tompkins describes as "protracted butcheries" (245). The supernatural events in English novels written in the second stage of development are genuine, eliciting mind-boggling sensations. Spine-chilling fear, produced by a sense of impending doom, propels these novels and stories to their often grisly conclusion. The supernatural elements in these works are real. No pat, scientific explanations are supplied to put the reader's mind at ease. Indeed, novels like Matthew Gregory

Lewis' *The Monk* thrill the reader with their depiction of demons and mangled corpses.

When "Ligeia" was published in 1840, works written in the explained Gothic vein were still popular. Americans were still reading the works of Charles Brockden Brown, which definitely belong to the explained school of Gothic literature. After 1835, however, the explained Gothic was being rapidly replaced with the more terrifying supernatural Gothic (Thompson 75). The absence of a tidy, clear-cut ending in "Ligeia" reflects Poe's approach to the Gothic. In this story, he neatly straddles the rational endings of the explained Gothic writers and the clearly supernatural ending of the supernatural Gothicists. Poe embraces a truly American hybrid of Gothicism which G.R. Thompson refers to as "Psychological Gothicism" (80). For example, the narrator's description of the bridal chamber he has prepared for his new bride, Rowena, clearly reflects his morbid state of mind: "The ceiling of gloomy-looking oak was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Drudical device" (185). Rowena becomes a daily reminder that the only real love of the narrator's life—Ligeia—is dead. Therefore, his marriage to the Lady Tremaine is an occasion for mourning, not celebration.

However, an even closer reading of "Ligeia" reveals that in this story, Poe is attempting to do far more than simply create a shining example of American Gothic. In the Gothic devices that constitute the frame of "Ligeia," one can see how Poe has made the creaky, European Gothic conventions his own. For example, in the prototype of the Gothic novel---*The Castle of Otranto*—Horace Walpole creates the standard setting for a Gothic story: the haunted castle, complete with dungeons and hidden passage ways. Poe transports the setting of "Ligeia" to a castle-like structure—an abbey—instead. His Gothic-inspired mansion is an appropriate home for the narrator because of his similarity to a monk. Like a priest, her worships a deity, in this case, a beautiful, dead woman. Indeed, the narrator ascribes his failure to ask Ligeia her surname to "a caprice of my own—a wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the passionate devotion" (176). Ligeia, whose eyes resemble the "twin stars of Leda" (178) is not a goddess, but like Leda, she has been touched by God and, therefore, is worthy of pious devotion.

The narrator is also better suited for a monastery than a genuine castle because of the premium he places on chastity. The Ligeia he worships is a woman with a highly-trained intellect, a woman whose idealized beauty and powerful intellect can guide him through "the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation" (180). This is the Ligeia who is the object of his devotions. However, Poe makes

it clear that there is another side of Ligeia which befuddles him: "Of all the women whom I have known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion" (179). Critic Daniel Hoffman says that in Poe's world, sexual desire is "the affection of an impure nature, one not sufficiently devoted to the transcendence of its fallen state to be worthy of inhabiting the paradisal star where purer spirits dwell" (246). Perhaps, by cloistering himself away in a place where monks routinely chastised themselves for entertaining carnal notions, the narrator finds it easier to concentrate on that side of Ligeia that elevates him to a higher plane instead of anchoring him in the physical world.

Poe's use of the abbey as the setting of his tale brings to mind another Gothic element: a blatant critique against the Catholic Church and the clergy. In Poe's story, the abbey is not a place where celibate men dedicate their lives to prayer and meditation. Rather, it has become a shrine to a very desirable woman. The narrator himself is celibate, like a monk, but he is also a drug addict who quite possibly commits murder in the House of God. The resurrection of Ligeia which takes place inside the abbey is blasphemous because Christian churches celebrate the resurrection of the Jesus Christ, not the rebirth of a ravishing woman. The medieval setting also recalls the days when the devotion to the Virgin Mary had reached cult status. Beginning in the eleventh century, for example, devotees recited several salutations to the Virgin Mary, including the Ave Maria and the Salve Maria (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). By contrast, the object of worship in "Ligeia," is an earthy, passionate woman, not the Blessed Virgin. The blasphemy in Poe's tale, albeit not as explicit as Lewis' assault against the Catholic church in *The Monk*, is nevertheless an attack against the religion that is at odds with the personalized theology which is the basis of some of his best tales and poems.

Another Gothic convention on which Poe places is own stamp is the virginal, helpless maiden who is pursued by the heartless villain. In *Castle of Otranto*, for example, the pure-minded Isabella is stalked by the lord of the castle, the licentious Manfred. In "Ligeia," however, the fair-haired (and, one suspects fair-souled) Rowena is not only victimized by a male—the man who takes her has his wife,—but also by his former wife, Ligeia. Unlike Hippolita, Manfred's faithful, patient wife in Castle of Otranto, Ligeia surrenders her will to no man. Like a vampire, she drains Rowena of her very identity, turning her into a carbon copy of herself. In "Ligeia," virtue is not its own reward, as it is in some of the earlier British Gothic works.

One could also argue that at times, Poe's manipulation of Gothic conventions borders on satire. For example, the bridal chamber the narrator

prepares for his new bride bears a closer resemblance to a funeral parlor. The sole window is tinted of a "leaden hue, so that the rays of the sun or moon passing through it fell with a ghastly luster on the objects below" (185). Obviously, the narrator decorated the room to please himself, not his wife. That Poe intended the reader to see not only absurdity but humor as well in the narrator's abortive attempts at interior decoration can be found in the next paragraph: "Some few ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure, were in various stations about—and there was the couch, too—the bridal couch of an Indian model..." (185). Poe's inclusion of Oriental elements in his story recalls William Beckford's novel *Vathek*, which recounts the efforts of a pleasure-seeking Caliph to satisfy his deepest desires with the lusty Nouronihar, who is a far cry from Horace Walpole's virginal heroines. *Vathek* satirizes the excesses of Gothic novels, especially those that focus on the exotic. One can find in the narrator's excessively morbid bridal chamber Poe's implicit admission that he, too, like the hacks who were grinding out Gothic novels by the hundreds in the mid-19th century, had a tendency to bask a little too much in melancholy musings.

In the final analysis, one can argue that "Ligeia" is at heart a romance. Like many other writers in the Romantic period, Poe did not feel compelled to provide a rational explanation for the ending of his tales. Take, for example, Roderick in the "Fall of the House of Usher," who simply collapses and dies under the weight of his prematurely-buried sister, Madeline. Of course, "Ligeia" also bears the imprint of a writer whose obsession with beautiful women exerted a powerful influence on his personal life long after they had been interred. However, in the grotesque ending of Poe's favorite tale, the reader senses that even Poe realized that living with the dead is really no life at all.

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POETRY

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After a Hard Rain

In memory of Susan

White-blue sound, your voice
on the answering machine
promises a return call,
a promise that can't be kept—
and even that remnant of an echo vanished
into nothing but vacuous blue sky.

Somewhere in recent times your smile emerged;
your daughter snapped the shot.
From a silver frame,
you smile at me.
A thousand remembered smiles and moments
rush through me as waves and I drown
in the reverberation of your laughter—

it comes back to me in shells,
through twists and funnels,
the tunnels of memory,
the phantom wind,
a ghost of light through trees,
branches reaching between stars.

A taste of salt, as if from the sea—
you are somewhere by an ocean
plucking shells from sand, your brush stroke
of pastels painting rice fields as if in dream,
and carving all the heavens with bright wings,
and I am here, on a half-wrecked boat
ever paddling my way towards your horizon.

Fiction
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"Salvation"

Christopher swears that once he moves to Jackson permanently he will never go to church again. He has had enough of the Delta and of the fire and brimstone black Baptists to last him a lifetime. Christopher is a pretty good kid until the age of twelve. Then, like most budding blades, he sees the first hair between his legs and loses his mind. All boys go through this; it is just more severe when there's no staminate blueprint available. And matron blueprints for male journeys are like state maps to city travelers. They can point you in an approximate direction, but they don't know any of the avenues to muscularity. No man will ever admit this, but the first time a young boy is able to look his mother in the eye, a sudden thought flowers like an unwanted weed in the soil of his mind: "I think I can take mama." Now, most of them—nearly all of them—will never be outright disrespectful to their mothers. But their reactions to their mothers' demands become slower and slower. This is their rebellion, a statement of maturing independence. The longer it takes for them to act on a mother's demand, the more that delay means, "You can't really make me do anything. The only reason I'm doing this is because you are my mamma, and I love you. But don't push it, 'cause I'll leave, and you can't stop me." Thus, it takes three or four demands to get the trash carried out or the yard cut.

Strangely, young boys do not wish to be disrespectful to their mothers. They just cannot help it. Daily, to Christopher's ears, his mother's voice begins to sound like a squeaking wheel, grinding against his last protruding and pounding nerve. When she opens her mouth, all he hears are fiberglass fingernails pulled across a chalkboard. And, it is always interrupting him at the most inopportune moments. The Saturday that he plans to sleep in, she wants him to clean the house. The moment he wants to play ball, she asks him about homework. He's like a fish swimming against the current, and his mother is an unnecessary wave, pushing him backward. So, like any smart fish, he dives deeper beneath her radar, waiting until she leaves to sneak to the arcade, or hiding magazines inside his schoolbooks, or sweeping dirt under the sofa and rug. When boys commit these acts of rebellion, it is as if they are standing outside themselves watching themselves on somebody

else's television. Puberty is a tornado, and Christopher is a trailer park. It is that driving desire to be a man. It is like being given the keys to your favorite car, but you do not know how to drive. Instructions or not, nature will take its course, which means the engine will start whether or not he's been to driving school. Parents can only hope to have done a good job of instilling in their children proper values and a clear road map. For the one eye of puberty is blind to values. Puberty is like the twilight zone for teenagers. It has its own rules about out growing childhood, and mind over matter is a thrown-away falsehood. Being a man is a philosophy. Being a male is a fact of biology. It is the most awkward time of life, where he is trying to complete a Rubik's Cube in the dark. Both the mind and the body are expanding, looking for an identity, looking for new roads to navigate. Parents fight to keep down the glass ceiling and monitor the speed limit. One can only pray that the ceiling does not explode and cut anybody or that the car doesn't mishandle a steep curve.

In puberty, Christopher is a wild flower. With divorced parents, his petals reach in all directions, easily mingling and getting entangled with uncultivated weeds. Ironically, Christopher likes having divorced parents. It means two of everything—two Christmas celebrations, two Thanksgivings, two birthdays. It also means less stability. Christopher's first wet dream comes with a large side order of embarrassment, instead of a heaping helping of understanding. Like blood to sharks, the other kids know that this instability is an issue for Christopher. It is a trump card that they hold, ready and waiting to use during this Darwinian growth spurt. The Dozens, for instance, is another rite of passage during male gestation. Christopher has the quickest wit, but the other kids are always able to get him to break down by "snapping" on his absentee daddy. Right in the middle of Christopher's good roll, one of the kids will interject, "At least I know where my daddy is. Yo' daddy been gone so long they had him on America's most wanted." To this, Christopher replies, "Shut up. I do know where my daddy at. He in Jackson." "Jackson?!?" one of the kids—maybe Bighead Bernard—responds, "Man that's a whole city. Can't you narrow that shit down to maybe a voting precinct?" The kids gleefully explode with laughter. Another kid—probably Skillet—chimes in, "Yeah, can you get us to a neighborhood instead of a congressional district?" By now the kids are doubled over and lying on the ground, eyes drowned with tears and throats and bellies filled with laughter. Christopher's usually swift tongue slows to a snails pace, filling his mouth like it's two sizes too large. The embarrassment of being the only one on the street whose father does not live there, reaches up and strangles his words, momentarily

separating his brain from his voice box like an emotional tollbooth. The scalpel of the joke is not that Christopher doesn't know where his father is. The sharpness of the quip's dagger lies in the reality that he is the bastard oddball of the tribe. It cuts deep, rendering his larynx silent. We all have one thing that suffocates us. The "Daddy" joke is Christopher's plastic bag. So, Christopher, with no verbal retort availing itself to him, options for a physical course of action. He punches the closest kid to him, and the rest of the kids respond by taking turns making a ghetto piñata of him. This scenario repeats itself throughout the school year and twice during summer days. Because of this, he spends a good bit of time between Jackson and Clarksdale, his mother hoping that it will save him some beatings and her from having to buy new school clothes.

Having to go to Jackson every summer and holiday break gives him a clear understanding of the differences of life in the Delta and life in Jackson. In Jackson, church, though still mandatory, is not the central focus of most people's lives. Neither his father nor his father's friends attend church regularly. In the Delta, Christopher does not know any grown folks who do not attend church—except for the heathens who attend the juke joint, but they are all going to hell. Of course, no one ever talks about the piano player who is able to pull double duty—Saturday night in the cafe' and Sunday morning in the church. It seems that everyone else, except for the piano player, has a reservation for condemnation. However, Christopher believes that their hell of a good time is worth eternal damnation. The biggest difference is the overwhelming amount of activities to do in Jackson in comparison to Clarksdale. During the summers spent in Jackson, there is very little down time. Jackson has malls, several movie complexes, semi-pro ball teams, clubs, museums, cultural festivities, and the many events that take place at Onyx State University. To a kid coming from a community of twenty-two thousand, this is a mecca. Clarksdale has high school sports, church, and television. There is still the green bus that comes during the summer mornings to pick up kids who want to chop some cotton to earn some money. This bus and this summer activity creates a different type of young man than the one who spends his summers at the mall and at the park.

Even names seem to be different. They seem to reflect the differing attitudes and philosophies of the people. In Clarksdale, Christopher's best friend's name is Robert. Robert's mother's name is Roberta, and his father's name is Robert. Robert's mother is a twin. His uncle's name is Robert. What are the odds that she would fall in love and marry a man named Robert who is named for his

uncle, Robert? There is no doubt what Robert Jr.'s name would be, but Christopher is never able to understand why the other seven brothers and sisters are named Robert as well. All eight children are named Robert. They are all given the same first name and different middle names. Robert Earl, Jr., Robert David, Robert Willie, Roberta Robert, Robert Kelly, Robert Hughes, Robert Donnell, and Robert Franklin. What is even stranger is the manner in which the mother addresses them. She calls them all Robert. Yet, each one knows when she is referring to a specific one. The kids claim that they know who she is calling by the tone and inflection in her voice—that she can say Robert nine different ways—ten, if you count the one she has for calling all of them at once. Christopher just shakes his head and blames it on the Delta sun, always thinking, "I gotta leave this place before I either understand or believe this shit, or, worse than that, before my name becomes Robert." In Jackson, the names seem to be a bit more progressive. Christopher has an Aunt who is married to this real Africentric, militant brother. Everything that he does, says, wears, and eats identifies with The Movement. When they conceived their first child, he wanted the name to reflect his philosophy. When Christopher's Aunt was in labor, she was unable to bear the pain. Due to the amount of medicine and other complications, she was unconscious when it was time to name the baby. His uncle seized this moment to name the child "Twenty-Four Karat Black Gold Jackson." Needless to say, when his aunt awoke, she hit the ceiling. Once they were able to calm her down and remove her hands from around his uncle's throat, they finally settled on "Ebony Gold Jackson." Once hearing about the story, Christopher continues to call his cousin "Black Gold," partly cause he thinks it's a cool story and partly because his uncle's attitude goes against everything that most of the church folks preach.

The kids are even different. Christopher always blames it on the over abundance of church duty in the Delta. Christopher especially hates a kid named Tony Coleman. Every time Christopher does something wrong, his mother mentions Tony Coleman. Tony Coleman this, Tony Coleman that—if you let Christopher's mother tell it, Tony Coleman was the Second Coming or was, at least, born of the Virgin Birth. Christopher hates Tony Coleman worse than he hates church, school, and rained out baseball games. At every opportunity, he tells Tony just how he feels about him. Since he was a baby, the entire community has pegged Tony as the next minister. During church services Tony sits up front with the grown folks. Christopher sits in the back, a couple of rows from the other children. He does not get along well with most of the children because they, according to him, mindlessly accept the rules of what they should be, but he hates

Tony the most because he perpetuates the rules like a middle-school recess evangelist. Tony is everything that Christopher's mother wants. Tony is everything that Christopher hates.

After services Tony always approaches Christopher and says, "Wasn't that just a lovely sermon from the reverend."

As true as the day following the night, Christopher always responds the same way, "Man, I don't know. I was sleep—like I always am."

"Don't be sleep when the Lord comes back," asserts Tony.

"Well, the Lord better not come back at night or during church services. 'Cause if he does, I'm gon' be sleep."

"You're hopeless,"

"And you're a pain; be gone preacher boy." Christopher snaps.

Tony turns to leave, "I'm going to pray for you Christopher."

"Good", Christopher proclaims, "I have a test tomorrow, and I ain't looked at the book."

The truth is that Christopher is an excellent student. It is Tony who has problems with schoolwork. When they get back their homework or test papers Christopher always takes this opportunity to point out Tony's deficiency in class, "I don't understand it. You know the whole *Bible*, yet you can't study for a unit test. Are you sure your line to Jesus is working?" Tony never speaks in anger to Christopher; he only responds, "I'll do better next time. The Lord knows what I need."

"You need a tutor. Won't you pray for the Lord to provide that," Christopher spits out, smiling like the Grinch who stole Christmas.

To this, Tony calmly responds, "Instead of mocking me and the Lord, why don't you offer your services to help me."

"Unless the Lord done gave you thirty pieces of silver as payment to me, you can forget it. In fact, tell the Lord to call my people, and we can work something out."

"I will pray about this situation and about you Christopher." This makes Christopher's blood to boil.

School is a breeze to Christopher. He reads all the time. His father always gives him books for his birthday or Christmas. Christopher never gets a toy without a book. Because of this, reading, remembering, and analyzing come easy to him. The problem is that Christopher knows that he is smart and questions everything, including his mother's old religion. This causes constant problems

between Christopher and his mother—this and the fact that Christopher wants to move to Jackson to prove that he knows where his daddy is...to be with his daddy.

When church ends, people begin to fellowship as they leave the building. As parishioners file in their various directions, they look like a well-organized ant community, streaming to and fro' in meticulous regulation. In his usual spot, the minister greets worshipers, graciously taking their compliments and redirecting them toward God while passing out words of encouragement like Tylenol capsules. As usual, Christopher is trying to figure out a way of getting out of church without having to pass by the minister and acting like he understands and agrees with those words of encouragement that his brain generally rejects like a body turning away an incompatible organ. Turning to go the other way, Christopher hears the one phrase that always twists his stomach into knots. "The Lord's will be done, Sister." Like a fiery flash of light, the minister notices the wrinkled raisin scowl on Christopher's face as a response to his last statement. In a mathematical fashion, the minister bids farewell to the leaving worshipers while making his way toward Christopher. Christopher, noticing the minister's traveling direction, tries to hang a U-turn at the *Daniel in the Lion's Den* portrait, but he is cut off by someone who wishes to admonish him for chewing gum during service. Giving this old person the brush-off along with a hand full of wet gum, Christopher attempts to dash for the side exit, but is met by the equally swift minister.

"Ah, good day young Christopher."

"If you say so Rev."

"Is it not a good day?"

"You tell me; you're closer to the Big Man than I am."

"On the contrary Christopher, we are all equally close to him." Getting no response, the minister digs deeper. "I sense that something is bothering you. Care to share it?"

"Do I *have* to if I don't want to?"

"No, Christopher, no one *has* to do anything that they don't want to?"

"But, you'll think less of me if I don't tell you, so I really do *have* to tell you *if* I want to stay in your good graces."

"No, Christopher, my love is unconditional."

"So, why isn't God's?"

"It is."

"Is it? If so, why does He give us our *own* will, then gets pissed off when we follow that instead of His *precious* will?"

The minister, understanding that this is a loaded question, wants to answer both the physical and metaphysical aspects of Christopher's question. Looking at Christopher's awkward twelve-year-old stance and understanding his choppy but intense statements, the minister realizes that puberty is prying countless doors that seem to be flying open uncontrollably with no male hand to pass a key or hold the doorknobs. And of course, the minister's understanding has been made keener with Christopher's mother coming by asking for prayer for her wayward son who, as of late, has refused to do anything that his mother asks.

"God loves us Christopher. So when God made man, it was a lot like us having babies. When we get old enough, we all want to have babies because we all have love to give."

"Not all the time," Christopher interjects.

With a raised eyebrow, the minister carefully wades the waters of Christopher's assertion, "What do you mean?"

"Well, according to my mama, my cousin Dorissa's baby wasn't born out of love but as a mistake."

"It may have been a mistake *when* she had the baby, but babies, themselves, are never mistakes. Babies are the best example of our capacity to love for babies are wholly dependent on our love. So, we have babies to satisfy our desire to love, unconditionally. And this is a big investment because sometimes there is a chance that the babies will not always love us back or will, a lot of times, disappoint us. It is the same with God. He created us so that he could love us. However, he did not make us robots because he wanted us to love Him back of our own free will. It's also like having friends. You don't want your friends to love you because you can give them candy. You want them to love you just because they love you."

"Yeah, but God promises us candy."

"How so?"

"Those who live like he wants us to live gets to go to heaven, and those who don't are sentenced to hell. How fair is that?"

"Well, it's *His* world. So, obeying *His* rules is a small price to pay for having all of your needs met. But also, God's rules are not about making Him happy, but about making all of us happy. His rules teach us how to love the world like we love ourselves. Our will tends to be selfish and only concerned with what we want, which often times causes us to hurt others. God's will is about making the world perfect. But even if we go against His will, He continues to love us, even if He is disappointed in us. Just like with parents. Sometimes parents are disappointed and let down, but they continue to love us."

"Like the time I painted the lyrics of Prince's "Sexuality" on the walls of the church basement?"

Stumbling to find composure and to put that image and incident from his mind, the minister replies "Yes, like that. Your mother was disappointed, but she forgave you because she loves you."

"So why did she beat me?"

"To teach you a lesson. Yes, your mother was angry with you, but that whipping didn't come from anger, it came from love. It was wrong of you to damage somebody else's property."

Looking like a brightly shining black imp, Christopher asserts, "But *you* always say that the House of the Lord belongs to us *all*."

"Yes, it does, but it belongs to us equally. No one person has more claim to it than another. So, no one should do anything to it that will damage it or keep others from being able to use it. And on a bigger level, that's how the world works. The *world* belongs to us *all*, and no one person has more of right to it than anyone else. That's the lesson that your mother was trying to teach you."

"But why the whipping?"

"Sometimes, especially when we are young, we are able to remember things if we can associate them with something, like pain. For instance, a shepherd is supposed to protect his sheep. If a sheep wanders too far from the flock, it risks harm. Sometimes, a shepherd will break the sheep's leg to teach it a lesson. The pain of the break is associated with the harm that can come when we fail to follow God's rules. When we fail to follow God's rules, we open ourselves to the harm of the world. We must always remember that God's whippings are tempered with the comfort of love; whereas, the world's whippings are tempered with the sting of ambivalence. The memory of the pain of the whipping causes you to remember that it is wrong to damage property. You are also reminded that there are consequences for your actions."

"Like when coach makes us run laps for messing up?"

"Something like that. So now do you better understand why it's best for us to follow God's will."

"What you say makes sense Rev., but what's in my mind don't always jive with what's in my heart. I mean y'all always talkin' 'bout don't, don't, don't, and I'm all about do, do, do. Ya'll in the slow lane Rev. And, that's good for y'all 'cause y'all old. But I'm a new model with low miles. I needs to be in the fast lane. Later, Rev. I gots to go."

With a combustible combination of sadness and joy, the minister watches Christopher leave with his mother and grandmother. Just then, one of the church's busy bodies addresses the minister. Her big drooping hat with an ostrich feather flowing from front to back precedes her immediate presence by a full three seconds. Yet, her biting words always bring an exclamation point to her arrival.

"That young man got the Devil in 'im."

Without looking toward the elder, the minister responds in a soft, warm, and watery tone "Don't we all..." his words rebuffing the good sister and at the same time sending up a prayer for Christopher.

Quickly, the elder busy body snaps, "Yes, but some more than others."

Turning toward the elder, "You're right sister." As a grin begins to explode across the elder sister's face, the minister continues, "David was much more of a hell-raiser than Moses, but he continued to have the heart of God. If David can get into the pearly gates, I'm sure that Christopher has a chance." Noticing the elder sister's displeasure, the minister ends. "That boy's a house divided...as we all are...And from time to time, we all need a helping hand of mediation...More than anything sister, we must be careful how that hand is administered."

For Christopher, going to church ranks right up there with going to the dentist. It is not the church going that he hates as much as he resents the fact that he does not have a choice in going. Christopher knows that three times a week he is going to be in church. Of course he has to go on Sunday. But he also has to go to choir practice on Mondays at six o'clock and Bible study on Tuesdays at six o'clock. For most people, Wednesday is hump day. For Christopher, Wednesday is "No Church" or "Release" Day. His friends take every opportunity that they can to tease him about the amount of time he spends in church. On Saturdays, when the church is being cleaned, his friends yell out, "Hey Christopher, the doors of the church are open; shouldn't you be there cleaning?" Christopher responds with some favorite four letter expletive, and a fight ensues. Other than a fight here and there, Christopher manages to reconcile himself to going, but he is never able to understand Sunday evening church service. "What is it that the Rev. is going to tell us tonight that he couldn't have said this morning? I mean is it my fault that he forgot something?" This never makes sense to Christopher. So one day, during the spring of his twelfth year while watching a caterpillar break free from its prison and become a sovereign butterfly, Christopher decides, "That's it! I'm not going back to church tonight. They can do what they want to do, but I'm not going back!...Now I just have to think of a way of not going and not getting killed." Christopher wants liberty; he just is not ready to trade his life for it. Then,

standing in his car port, looking at the vacant lot next door, Christopher is overcome with the most brilliant idea of his life. Because of the years of natural erosion, the vacant lot is filled with small hills. After a good rain, the hills become a good surface for an excellent battle royal of "King of the Hill." The rain turns the dirt mountains into muddy slopes. The kids climb to the top of a mountain and try to knock each other down the hill into the muddy water.

Christopher rushes inside to put on his new, navy blue, three-piece Easter suit and brown plastic-leather shoes, which is not more than four months old. His mother is not home, so he knows he will be able to sneak back out in his suit. While getting dressed his grandmother notices, "Baby, it's two more hours before church. You getting dress awful early." "Well, grandmamma," Christopher responds smugly, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." After he finishes getting dressed, he announces, "Grandmamma, I'm going to stand on the porch until it's time to go." Then he dashes out the door. He does not stop running until he is at the edge of the largest mud hill in the lot. The kids begin to tease him, "Boy, you better get home befo' your mama catch you out here and beat your ass with the flyswatter like she did when you ate all the chicken wings that were reserved for the pastor." All of the kids laugh, but Christopher stands defiantly, mocking them with his King Tut-air of confidence. Then he speaks, as if he is Jesus shedding new light onto his disciples, "I'm not going to church tonight."

Bighead Bernard responds, "Nigga you goin' somewhere wit dat Easter sui on."

Skillet chimes in, "His ass goin' to the hospital if his mamma catch him ou here."

Becoming disgusted with their obvious and heavily weighted wet ignorance Christopher puffs out a heavy breath of air and heads up the muddy mountain.

"Dat nigga done lost his mind," yells Beaver-Teeth Brad. As Christophe trudges up the side of that mud heap, flecks, chunks, and pieces of mud begin to fl everywhere, landing up and down his pants legs. Once at the top, shoes covered i wet blackness, socks soaked to the toes, and pants legs fading in and out fron black to blue, Christopher stands there as if he has just conquered Moun Kilimanjaro. With one last defiant, smug puff of breath, Christopher dives hea first into the muddy pool of water at the bottom of the hill. Splash! A triumphan gush of water thrusts upward, falling down and covering Christopher's entire soul He is dirty from the inside out, and he loves it. He stands up and falls back into th water to ensure that his back is completely covered in muddy water. Then he lie on his stomach and crawls up the muddy mountain, grinding in as much mud a

possible. He slides on his back down the mountain and back into the water, for good measure. Christopher has become the preacher at his own muddy baptism, creating his own rite of passage to break free from the conservative clutches of the church and his mamma. The other kids stand there in shock. They know that Christopher's mother is not above beating the hell out of him right there on the lot. Speechless, they watch him crawl out of the muddy pool and slush back into the house. As he gets farther away from them, Bighead Bernard somberly proclaims, "I knew all of that church was gon' run dat boy crazy. You saw him; he was out here trying to baptize himself."

Once in the house, Christopher tries to conceal his joy at being able to finally out smart his mother and grandmother. His grandmother notices him but does not say a word. Feeling full of himself, Christopher speaks, "Grandmamma, I slipped in the mud....I...I guess I can't go to church to night." It is difficult being humble when inside he knows that he is a genius.

His grandmother finally speaks, but there is very little emotion, "Go take a bath."

Stunned by her lack of emotion, Christopher assures himself, "I guess she knows when she's been whipped." Once down the hall, he swaggers into the bathroom. He finds the Ivory liquid, begins to run a bubble bath, and undresses.

"Leave the clothes on the floor next to the door," his grandmother tells him.

Christopher gets into the tub and begins to enjoy his victory bath. His grandmother's arm slides through the door and picks up the clothes like a snake looking for a nest of bird eggs. After a couple of minutes, while still in the tub, Christopher hears the washing machine. "She must not want them to stain," he thinks to himself.

Like the calm wind blowing in storm clouds, Christopher's grandmother comes into the bathroom, locking the door behind her. Quicker than a flash of lightening, she brings her right hand from behind her to expose a well wrapped, well worn extension cord. All Christopher remembers is the first lick. Then his body goes numb. In the hurried excitement and panic of the moment, Christopher is only able to utter, sporadically, "Grandma wait...Grandma that hurts...Please stop grandma." Along with his pleas for mercy, Christopher's grandmother spits out sporadic phrases like an old hooptie needing a tune up, all the while allowing the licks from the extension chord to flow like Niagara Falls, slicing through him like nails on a rugged cross. "Boy...you and your damit ass...you must be crazy...out yo' damn mind...I'm gon'...yo' ass...." Between the snaps of the cord

along Christopher's backside, the splashes of water, and the verbal ejaculations of Christopher and his grandmother, there is a constant call for the Lord to "Come down rite now Lawd...Jus' come down rite now, Lawd...please Jesus…Oh Lawd!" And then there is blackness.

When he wakes up, the first thing Christopher realizes is that he is flat on his back with his arms spread out like an eagle. Next, he notices that he can hardly move and is only able to slightly raise his head. He tilts his head downward and notices that his brown Sunday shoes are on his feet.

"What the..." he groggily mumbles to himself. "Where am I?..." he continues to mumble.

As the darkness begins to give way to a faint, dulled light, he realizes that he is lying on his back on his bed, in his blue Easter suit. Years into adulthood, he never remembers getting dressed, only that when he arises from the dead, he is fully covered in the same cleansed clothes that were soiled by his dirty deeds. Now, there is not a spot of sin on the deep, dark navy blue suit or his caramel hide.

After initially regaining consciousness, Christopher remembers very little clearly until he walks through the church doors. He is greeted by the new central air conditioning of the church and realizes that his suit is still damp from having been washed a little over an hour ago. It is also then that he feels the severe pain and soreness of his body, which is covered in welts left behind by the extension cord like the famous nail marks left in the hands, side, and feet on Christopher's woolly headed ancestor. His back and thighs carry the brunt of the whipping. He has to move quite gingerly to ease the pain and keep the wet suit off his body. After being greeted by the preacher, his grandmother asks the reverend if he could spare a few minutes after evening services to lay hands on the child to help remove some of those rebellious spirits that have taken over the boy's body and mind. The minister looks at the wincing boy and thinks to himself that somehow the sermon of the extension chord is more than enough to drive away the evil spirits. Further, any spirits, which are still inside Christopher, are only there because they are in too much pain to move. But he feels confident that the leftover evil spirits will be leaving Christopher's body as soon as they are strong enough to do so. He does, however, do a laying on of the hands to appease Christopher's grandmother and to ask the Lord never to allow this child to try anything that stupid again. Thinking about Christopher's own analogy, he smiles to himself thinking that his grandmother pulled him in for a pit stop that he'll never forget.

Though Christopher never does reconcile himself to going to church, he never, again, attempts not to go. The welts on his body eventually fade, but the welts on his soul remain as a permanent reminder of what happens when he crosses God and grandmamma. Consequently, his petals no longer get tangled with wayward weeds, and he has become a better driver. He may not know his city of destination, but he understands the necessity of driving 55.

ESSAY

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"Nothing in America remains fixed for long": Examining William Styron's *Set This House on Fire* Through a Postsouthern Lens

When William Styron debuted on the literary scene in 1951 with the novel *Lie Down in Darkness* he was immediately hailed as the Faulkner of the next generation of Southern writers. Despite his celebrated acceptance into Southern letters, Styron spent considerable time away from the South, first serving in the Korean War and then exiling himself in Europe (Lawson 479). His next major novel, *Set This House on Fire*, was published almost a decade later and reveals this preoccupation with leaving the South and its strong sense of place. The novel was severely criticized by reviewers who deemed it melodramatic and verbose. As a result, *Set This House on Fire* has been largely forgotten in academic criticism in favor of his more popular novels such as *Sophie's Choice* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. But I contend that Styron's novel should be read apart from its customary comparisons to Faulkner and should be recognized as a text that disrupts traditional notions of Southernness. Specifically, Styron offers a compelling exploration of a Southern sense of place through the eyes of exiled Southerners, one that places him in Martyn Bone's spectrum of the postsouthern that developed during the post-Agrarian era of Southern literature. Employing Bone's historical-geographical materialist approach, I will investigate how Styron deals with the very pressing ways that capitalism, progress, and shifting boundaries have influenced the U.S. South far beyond its geographical borders.

One challenge to postsouthern authors and to Styron critics, specifically, is to move beyond the influence of William Faulkner in order to read texts apart his iconic influence. While Styron was heavily influenced by Faulkner's novels, particularly with his first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness*, he was also affected by the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Penn Warren, and Thomas Wolfe (Lawson 480). Indeed, we see a much stronger tendency toward Fitzgerald with *Set This House on Fire* with the solitary male narrator – a stockbroker even – who stands on the edge of a group of bohemians and, most of the time, simply watches. Styron

was obviously meditating on the meaning of life through existential questioning as were many of the European writers he encountered while in exile. But the pervasive presence of Faulkner in Southern writing continues to haunt Styron's career. As Michael Kreyling comments in *Inventing Southern Literature*, "William Faulkner unwittingly left to southern literary history and criticism a 'perfect exemplar' that goes by the same name as the writer but is not the actual person: 'Faulkner' rather than William Cuthbert Fa(u)lkner (1897-1962). To a few authors, as a part of their 'greatness' we thrust upon them, we grant such out-of-biography sovereignty" (127). Faulkner's iconic status is a barrier for Styron who came in the generation of novelists immediately following Faulkner's, when the United States was looking for its next Southern icon. What reviewers and critics often fail to recognize, however, is that "we invested Faulkner with authority on many subjects: race relations, the history of the native people of the Old Southwest, the viability of the American Way versus totalitarian 'ideology,' the future of democracy and of the human race under the cloud of the atom bomb, the meaning of Christianity, the role of the artist in society" but that Faulkner remained reluctant to engage in debate on these issues (*Inventing Southern Literature* 130). Southern writers who follow Faulkner have to deal with this "invention," to use Kreyling's term, of universal authorship and must overcome the "certitude that Faulkner said it all for southern literature" (xv). Styron, as an immediate heir to Faulkner's legacy, faced immense pressure from critics and readers who expected him to take up the Southern literary mantle.

Styron achieves this literary break through exploring the power of parody and then by writing *Set This House on Fire*, a novel that is an anomaly in Styron's own canon: a "Southern" novel that is largely set in Italy, a cast of characters whose connection to the South is often tenuous, and an atypical Southern plot developed around the mystery of a rape-murder. Styron's first novel is an obvious parody of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and other archetypal Faulkner families. *Lie Down in Darkness* plays upon many of Faulkner's familiar tropes – an alcoholic father, unusual love triangles, a decaying aristocratic family, a mentally deficient child – in a flattering imitation of Styron's predecessor. Kreyling argues for the power of parody and notes that it is "perhaps the only type of power available (or desirable) to a writer or critic living in the post-conscious sequel to a successful age of inimitable originals" (*Inventing Southern Literature* 157). Kreyling cites *Lie Down in Darkness* specifically as a successful Faulknerian parody (158). But nine years, a war, and a self-imposed exile later, Styron was ready to break from the powerful influence of Faulkner and to move beyond parody. As Fred Hobson reveals, the generation of writers who follow Faulkner are concerned with history

and the past and had difficulty giving up traditional (read "Faulkner's") Southern themes (4 parentheses mine). While Styron did write *Set This House on Fire* with a mind to the inescapable past, a major theme of the novel, the story is focused on individual pasts rather than on regional or historical pasts. The novel remains sensitive to the common trope of seeking for answers, but places that search securely in the individual consciousness.

In addition, the three central characters in *Set This House on Fire* appear to be typically southern because they are enmeshed in both the desire to escape the South and in an inescapable love for it, but each man's central struggle takes place abroad. At the beginning of the novel Peter Leverett, the narrator, who admits to being "something of a square" (Styron 5), travels to Charleston, in order to uncover the truth about the violent happenings in Sambuco which have haunted Peter for years. Peter serves primarily as a witness since he arrived in Sambuco immediately before the violent events which he seeks to have explained. Only by urging Cass Kinsolving, who lies at the heart of the incident, to tell his version of the story can Peter find understanding and a sense of peace. Peter, who lives peacefully in New York, is haunted on a particular Sunday by "old questions *What am I doing? Where am I going?*" (7) and on that same day encounters a newspaper cartoon by Cass which throws Peter back into his memories of Sambuco. Peter's search, then, is entangled with Kinsolving's own suffering pursuit for peace and Peter functions mostly as an observer and witness to Cass's debasement and eventual recovery. Peter's role, as Mason's childhood friend and Cass's witness, is simply to fill in the gaps, so to speak, in their respective histories. But Peter represents established Southern traditions – he comes from an old Virginia family – though he is entranced by Mason's wealth and flashy lifestyle, "suggest[ing] the extent of the weakness afflicting the South" (Flanders 113). Peter's contradicting attractions extend to his alternating alliances with Cass and Mason during his stay at Sambuco and in his journey for understanding.

Cass Kinsolving, an alcoholic artist who is struggling with the horrors of his involvement in World War II, also seeks some sort of redemption from his past. The plot of the novel predominantly revolves around Cass's life and his memories of Sambuco; he even narrates portions of the novel and the reader has access to his rambling, stream-of-consciousness diaries. As the central figure, Cass is something of a mystery. At first Styron leads us to believe that Cass's involvement in World War II has sent him over the edge, but the reader rarely sees Cass dwell on his experiences in war. He is more interested in the psychological evaluations he receives in the Army hospital by a well-educated doctor who introduces Cass to classical literature. Throughout Cass's narrative he emphasizes the desperation of

his search to belong to some place that gives him peace and the inspiration to paint. As a result, he haphazardly drags his wife and children through Europe until he reaches Sambuco. Cass's search reaches a pivotal point when he meets Mason Flagg who, as Louis D. Rubin notes, exercises a powerful control over Cass: "For Mason could provide wealth, afford the glamor and excitement of 'life' – or so Cass tried to pretend. . . He sought escape into 'life' in alcohol, in false visions of Wordsworthian 'ecstasy' that gave him the illusion of beauty. . . All of these activities were ways of avoiding his true mission and refuge – the remorseless requirements of discovering how to paint the pictures he wanted to paint" (95). Rubin theorizes that Cass is representative of the modern artist, one who confuses dreams and reality, and who ultimately represents the dilemma of all artists who are struggling to find their own voices. Cass Kinsolving represents "the heir, so to speak, to a generation of fictional protagonists by southern novelists, it seems to me that his plight thoroughly mirrors the situation that confronts the southern writer of Styron's generation – a generation for whom the traditional institutions and embodiments of values have been so seriously modified that a new relationship between attitudes and values on the one hand, and 'real life' on the other, must be created" (Rubin 98). So Cass's suffering is not only representative of the modern artist, but of the Southern writer who must wrestle with the legacy of Faulkner in the search to find a truly original voice.

Cass ultimately does succeed in overcoming his demons and in finding his artistic muse, but only because he is finally able to grapple with his need for and love of his home, the U.S. South. Rubin explains that "Cass Kinsolving's particular past is dead, forgotten, inoperative – but Cass as Styron describes him is nevertheless a man who requires the stability of belonging to a place that is anchored in time and that possesses order and stability" (101). The importance of having a sense of place, or, more accurately, a sense of belonging is key here since Cass essentially searches for a security that does not exist in the postsouthern world. In order to survive, Cass has to find peace and stability within himself and not in any particular geographic location. He ends his narrative with a simple but profound conclusion: "'I can only tell you this: that as for being and nothingness, the one thing I did know was that to choose between them was simply to choose being, not for the sake of being, or even the love of being, much less the desire to be forever – but in the hope of being what I could be for a time. This would be an ecstasy" (Styron 501). Only by accepting his own desire to live and to carry on his work can Cass leave Europe and return to the South. Significantly, though, he does not return to his childhood home in North Carolina but to Charleston, a shipping city like Peter's Port Warwick and just as exposed to the ravages of

modern culture. This return to the capitalistic South emphasizes the inescapability of corruption from the outside world for both Cass and an idealized place.

Mason Flagg, a wealthy heir to a Hollywood producer and a manipulative and powerful man, embodies the corruption that threatens the South. Mason's role in the novel is unambiguous – he is the villain, but he is a villain who is also trying to find his own sense of belonging. Mason's evils are almost unbounded; he is a "sadist and a faddist, an exhibitionist and a pornographer, rapist, an incipient homosexual, and intellectual dilettante – altogether a psychopath who destroys wife, mistresses, and friends" (Rothberg 79). Mason has an almost irresistible power over others. When Peter first meets Mason at a Virginia boarding school, Peter says openly that "he [Mason] bewitched us all" and speaks at length of Mason's father who owns an estate called Merryoaks, "a Colonial plantation manor authentic in every respect – at least until the addition of a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a stainless steel boathouse" (Styron 75). Mason and his family are like the "authentic" plantation house, pretend Southerners whose Hollywood friends, impossibly glamorous to Peter, fill the rooms of the mansion on the weekends. Mason recognizes his failure to belong to the true Southern world of aristocratic old families, calling his father "'Old Colonel Flagg'. . . with that pained awareness he always had that he was not really a southerner, and that his family were Johnny-come-lately Virginians" (76). Like Cass, Mason represents a concept larger than himself: the "ugly American." In "William Styron's Southern Myth," Jane Flanders observes that Mason, as an "adoptive southerner" represents "the corruption of the South by alien sophistication and materialism which, in the form of rapid urbanization and commercialism, threaten to undermine the values of the plain people and what remains of an already weakened social tradition" (113). Years later, Peter encounters Mason in New York where Mason lives grandly among an artistic group of bohemians and is supposedly writing a play about his supposed exploits in World War II. Here, too, Mason fails to completely belong and expresses his discontent through violence against his beautiful wife and his mistress. Significantly, aggression offers Mason the only outlet for his frustrated isolation: "Flagg is, as an individual, so totally unfulfilled that his only release can be achieved through violence" (Phillips 195). This violence continues in Sambuco where Mason holds a powerful sway over Cass, debasing him to the point of drunken performances, and where he eventually rapes Francesca, the beautiful Italian peasant with whom Cass is obsessed. When Francesca is found brutally beaten and then dies, Cass kills Mason in revenge. Mason's death is itself a violent act that "exorcise[s] Cass's own evil" (Phillips 194) and allows him to save himself from complete self-destruction. Styron's exploration of individual history through

the searches of these three men demonstrates the importance of a "sense of place" that exists beyond physical boundaries to include an essential sense of personal belonging.

To fully address Styron's influence as a writer, we must consider how this novel is positioned in the postsouthern. Many contemporary critics envisioned *Set This House on Fire* as a novel that would fulfill the promise of *Lie Down in Darkness* and that would firmly establish Styron as a major American presence. But most were disappointed, remarking, as Arthur Mizener did, that the novel "strain[ed] after tragic significance" and "represented material that is solemnly hopped up, emotionally and metaphysically" (76). Mizener criticizes Styron's focus on man's existential crisis, stating that the "melodramatic quality is also evident in the book's long, explanatory mediations on Being and Nothing, The Denial of Life, and a host of other very big topics, most of which Mr. Styron tosses around with the ease of man who has heard them all discussed by the best expatriate minds" (76-77). Critic Abraham Rothberg quips that Styron falls "prey" to the "four horsemen of the literary apocalypse: self-pity, sentimentality, rhetoric and melodrama." In addition, Rothberg contends that Styron is "overwhelmed by things, by words, in that old Whitmanesque tradition. . . in which instead of artistic selection, there is enumerating, inventorying, cataloging" (81). Most reviewers chose to focus on the rather obvious themes of evil, depression, and existential questioning. But *Set This House on Fire* goes far beyond these themes to uncover how place and the past can haunt us in the present. Specifically, Styron places his characters' quest for spiritual regeneration within the context of the inexorability of the South. Their search is not one to uncover the South's history but instead to discover and to understand the history of the self. The sense of *places*, and particularly the characters' responses to capitalism and corruption there, in *Set This House on Fire* functions as a mechanism for uncovering this revelation. As Lewis A. Lawson explains in his biographical review of Styron in *The History of Southern Literature*, Styron grew up in Newport News, Virginia, an area both Southern/agricultural and American/industrial. "From the very beginning," Lawson concludes, "[Styron] must have had that double vision so useful to the artist, the ability not merely to see a thing, but to question it. Thus he never simply accepted 'place' unconsciously, but sensed that its impact, either for good or ill, upon an individual could never be escaped" (479).

It is precisely this double vision, this ability to envision both the idealized South and its darker reality, that places Styron securely in the postsouthern. In *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction*, Martyn Bone proposes a historical-geographical materialist approach to "help us recover the relation

between postsouthern literature and the sociospatial reality of the contemporary (post)South" (45). Bone's method emphasizes texts that recognize the impact of capitalism "upon the material production of place in our time" (46). *Set This House on Fire* is an unusual Southern novel in that it is permeated with images of the South though most of the story's action takes place abroad. Styron's sense of place, though, is undeniably tied to capitalist production, particularly with his vision of the U.S. South. There are two distinct "Souths" in this novel: the corrupted, capitalistic South that the narrator, Peter Leverett, experiences before he sets out on his quest for truth and the pastoral but violent South that features prominently in Cass Kinsolving's dreams and hallucinations. The first South is a changed landscape that contrasts so sharply with the idealized South that Peter seems to need since "Port Warwick, that is, is the *New South* – [exists as] the South of modern times, in which the comfortable, sleepy landscape is hardly recognizable" (Rubin 99). When he returns home to Virginia in 1954 to visit his father Peter remarks,

> Nothing in America remains fixed for long, but my old town, Port Warwick, had grown vaster and more streamlined and clownish-looking than I thought a decent southern town could ever become... [A]s a boy I had known its gentle seaside charm, and had smelled the ocean wind, and had lolled underneath giant magnolias and had watched streaked and dingy freighters putting out to sea and, in short, had shaken loose for myself the town's own peculiar romance. Now the magnolias had been hacked down to make room for a highway along the shore; there were noisy shopping plazas everywhere, blue with exhaust and rimmed with supermarkets; television roosted upon acre after acre of split-level rooftops and, almost worst of all, the ferryboats to Norfolk, those low-slung smoke-belching tubs which had always possessed their own incomparable dumpy glamour, were gone, replaced by a Yankee-built vehicular tunnel which poked its foul white snout two miles beneath the mud of Hampton Roads. (Styron 10)

Peter's disgust with the modernization of Port Warwick figures into Bone's description of Southern cities encountering "spatial confusion" because they "are not only built upon the local... but also bound up in the global, abstract flow and exchange of capital" (Bone 49). Indeed, to Peter, Port Warwick has become so generic that it could be interchanged with any American town: "[T]he town seemed at once as strange to me yet as sharply familiar as some place on the order

of Bridgeport or Yonkers. And, unhelmed, touched with anxiety, smitten with a sense of dislocation I have rarely felt so achingly before or since, I knew I could not stay there long. . ." (Styron 10). Peter has come to Virginia hopeful that he can find some answers before he faces the dark realities of his role in the deaths at Sambuco. His South, in 1954, the same year as the decision with Brown v. Board of Education which is only mentioned in passing in the novel, is one that changing both socially and economically. Peter leaves feeling more confused and uprooted than when he arrived and his sense of isolation is representative of the postsouthern break with the familiar South. "In America," Peter comments, describing the South but conflating it with the nation and offering a remarkably postsouthern description of displacement, "our landmarks and our boundaries merge, shift, and change quicker than we can tell: one day we feel rooted, and the carpet of our experience is a familiar thing upon which we securely stand. Then as if by some conjuring trick, it is all yanked out from beneath us, and when we come down we alight upon – what?" (Styron 10) This simple question, "what?", reveals Peter's complete estrangement from his sense of himself; he feels "as if [his] identity is slipping away, leaving [him] without knowledge of who [he] was and where [he] had been and where [he] was ever going" (16). Like Walker Percy's Binx Bolling, Peter feels cut off from the familiar Southern spaces he has inherited because they have changed beyond recognition and can no longer offer a sense of safety or redemption.

For Cass Kinsolving, the South serves both as a fragment of a time in which he was happy and a violent place from which he is constantly trying to escape. During his alcohol-induced hallucinations, Cass often sees scenes from his childhood home in North Carolina. These memories present a more forceful reality than the actual life he is experiencing in Sambuco, and he compares them to "great birds, so real that they were not like memories at all but fragments of life touched again, and heard and seen and breathed" (Styron 267). Cass's positive visions of the South are unfailingly idyllic and pastoral but there is a darkness at the heart of the scene:

> And in that turn made me think of home and the dusty roads and the marshes and the long-necked water birds flapping high above at dawn, and a bunch of Dr. Pepper signs hung out on a rickety little crossroads store, and how that store would look at noontime on a hot summer day when I was a boy, with the sun burning down around it on the blazing tobacco fields and buzzards roaming in the sky and a solitary nigger coming down the road with a kerosene can or with a pig under his

> arm, or with a croker sack dragging in the dust, and the nigger humming. (266)

Though Cass's memory of this childhood place seems tranquil, the presence of the buzzards and the black worker hints at a hidden world – death, hard labor, entrenched racism – beyond the beauty of the fields and the fondness he feels for the little country store. Through Cass, Styron reinforces the point that the old Agarian vision of the South is mostly a dream or a memory. As Martyn Bone explains, "Much like history, place melts into image and metaphor. The historical-geographical South gives way to the imag(in)ed South" (31). Cass's Agrarian dreams are simply that, reassuring reminiscences about a time in his life that seemed uncomplicated and unconsuming.

But, paradoxically, a different memory of the U.S. South causes Cass's suffering and it is this memory that he must expunge before he can truly seek redemption. During his narrative about the occurrences at Sambuco, Cass relates a story about the "Virginia that no one ever knew" (Styron 372), a tale that openly exposes the violence hiding under the beautiful landscapes of the imagined South. Cass is haunted by nightmares of death that lingers in the Southern landscape:

> Ever since I'd been in Europe about half of whatever nightmares I'd had – the ones I remembered, anyway – had been tied up with Negroes. Negroes in prison, negroes being gassed, me being gassed, Negroes watching me while I was being gassed. Like that terrible dream I had in Paris. There was always a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, and you'd have thought that as a nice southern boy who was maybe just a little brighter than some of my cornfed brethren I'd have had it all doped out little bit sooner... I'll bet you there's not one white southerner over the age of fifteen – Ten! Five! – who hasn't had nightmares just like the one I told you about, or at least variations on it, replete with Negroes, and blood, and horror. Suppose these nightmares lingered? You'd turn the Southland into a nuthouse. (Styron 369)

Cass's definitive memory of his childhood in the South relates to his own accountability in this network of violence. One summer, Cass works for a shopkeeper who is exceedingly scornful of blacks. Lonnie, the shopkeeper, determines one day to repossess a small radio from a black family that had fallen behind on its payments, and he takes Cass with him to invade the family's home. When they discover that the case of the radio has been cracked, both men systematically devastate the home and all of the family's possessions. Styron's

attention to detail in this passage is acute as he catalogs each precious item as it is destroyed, emphasizing the injustice of this scene and Cass's own agony at his participation. Peter feels the heightened intensity of this place as Cass describes it, "this solitary and forlorn and benighted hut, surrounded by hollyhocks and a bumble of bees and tattered washing on a line, with three creaking rickety steps that rose to an unlocked door which Lonnie, shirt sweatily plastered at his back, threw open with a clatter" (375). This place, this small shack, and his part in its destruction haunt Cass years later. Though he never repays the family and attempts to put the moment out of his mind, Cass recognizes that this violent experience is a catalyst for the guilt and self-pity that curse him daily: "'No, there are no amends or atonement for a thing like that. But there is another thing, and though it won't bring back any busted stove or plaster bulldog or picture either, it's something, and it's strong. What I mean is, you live with it. You live with it even when you've put it out of your mind – or think you have – and maybe there's some penance or justice in that'" (379).

Cass's murder of Mason works as an attempt to end the violence that he was helpless to stop as a child; striking out at Mason is, in effect, striking out at Lonnie and the cruel destruction of the sharecropper's shack. Further, Cass's desperate attempts to save Michele, a peasant farmer who is dying from consumption, represents Cass's desire for salvation through selfless (and hopeless) action. Though Cass's efforts to rescue Michele from a painful death are doomed, they reveal that he has not come to terms with his past failures – he cannot just "live with it" – but must work to stop this suffering in hopes of finding some redemption.

Significantly, Styron's novel explicitly relates the South to its criticisms of America as a whole. Cass frequently rants against the capitalistic greed of Americans, but the South is often curiously conflated with America as a whole. Peter, faced with the devastating loss of his childhood visions of Port Warwick, instead focuses on the general problems of Americans as a whole: "Perhaps one of the reasons we Americans are so exceptionally nervous and driven is that our past is effaced almost before it is made present; in our search for old avatars to contemplate we find only ghosts, whispers, shadows: almost nothing remains for us to feel or see, or to absorb our longing" (Styron 18). This loss of a historical past disturbs Peter so deeply that he cannot remain in Port Warwick. But, notably, in the U.S. South, which has traditionally been associated with a strong sense of the past, Peter denies the existence of a substantive past that might provide some meaning for Americans. Most of the novel's further criticisms of America fix upon its capitalistic fervor, another tie to Bone's historical-geographical material

paradigm. Americans are "a bunch of smug contented hogs rooting at the trough" who need "[s]omething ferocious and tragic, like what happened to Jericho or the cities of the plain – something terrible" (15) to happen to them in order to wake them up from their blind plundering. At one moment Cass, in a fit of rage at finding Americans at a café in Paris, cries that America is the "land where the soul gets poisoned out of pure ugliness," a place where "everything looks like a side street near the bus station in Poughkeepsie, New York" (283).

The sense of placelessness – the spatial confusion – that Bone identifies in the postsouthern is endemic to America as a whole and Peter and Cass despise this vulgar American crassness. Even in Sambuco they cannot escape the overwhelming presence of America when Peter bumbles onto the set of a Hollywood film in the middle of a picturesque square and Mason holds raucous parties with producers and starlets. Thoughout the novel Styron's characters are explicitly critical of the sweeping American greed to take over and commercialize everything that is precious or beautiful. Perched on the cliffs above Sambuco is a gaudy mansion with an immense lawn and a sign that reads "Behold Above You the Palatial Villa of Emilio Narduzzo of West Englewood, New Jersey, U.S.A." (480). For Cass and Peter, it is not simply the South to which they are drawn and from which they are repulsed, but America itself. With Cass, in particular, this rebellion against America is significant because, as Robert Phillips declares, Cass's "revolt, then, is against the American way of life, which is no way of life for an artist... Cass's failure as a painter and as an individual is intended to be emblematic of the artist's failure in our society today" (196). And if Cass is indeed representative of Styron or the Southern writer in general (Rubin) and the struggle to seek an original artistic voice, then the logical conclusion, which Cass ultimately accepts, is that the artist must return to his roots, to America, in order to expunge the devils of the past.

This revulsion towards America relates to the character of Mason Flagg himself, whose wealth seems unlimited and who "is the debasement of the American Dream. He is the man who apparently has everything – looks, money, women – and he is detestable" (Phillips 195). Though Mason is not one of Cass's gross tourists, Mason entrenches himself in capitalistic greed and deception. One of the ways that Mason holds power over Cass is through the groceries and alcohol Mason purchases at the Army PX. At the same time that Cass is repulsed by Mason he is utterly dependent upon him to provide food for Cass's family and the alcohol which Cass uses to drown out his feelings of loss and failure. Mason, who originally lives North of the Mason-Dixon line, is "the paradigm of the slick Yankee who embodies even more of the crass characteristics of the modern

America [Cass] so despises" (Phillips 195). Still, despite the materialism that Cass and Peter identify as crass Americanism, they both enjoy its benefits. Robert Phillips identifies a very real paradox in Cass's dependence upon Mason though Mason continually abuses him: "Cass has to remain tied to Mason in order to gain the financial means to save Michele [Francesca's ailing father] and thereby free himself through achieving a state of selflessness. There is an additional irony in that the medicine which saves Michele is a product of and made possible by the American affluence Cass so disdains" (194). In addition, Cass clearly longs for America at the same time he professes to despise it. In one of his rambling diary entries, Cass speaks of a dream (and his dreams continually reveal more of his mind than his words) of America that calls him to return. Notice again the conflation of the South and America in this description:

> [T]here are times when just the thought of one single pine tree at home, in the sand, & a negro church in a grove I knew as a boy & the sunlight coming down hot on a Sunday long ago & the sound of the negros [sic] singing In Bright Mansions Above (?) – then I feel or know rather that all I would need is that one trembling word to be whispered or spoken into my ear. AMERICA. And I could hold myself back no longer and blubber like a baby. (Styron 363-364)

The word "America" works like an incantation calling Cass back from exile, but it is obviously the South that features prominently in his memory. At the moment Cass decides to return to his homeland he again hearkens to very descriptive images of his Southern childhood as he relates his resolution to Peter:

> "Then you know, something as I sat there – something about the dawn made me think of America and how the light would come up slowly over the eastern coast, miles and miles of it, the Atlantic, and the inlets and bays and slow tideland rivers with houses on the shore, all shuttered and sleeping. . . And I kept thinking of the new sun coming up over the coast of Virginia and the Carolinas, and how it must have looked from those galleons, centuries ago, when after black night, dawn broke like a trumpet blast, and there it was, immense and green and glistening against the crashing seas. And suddenly I wanted more than anything in my life to go back there. And I knew I *would* go. . ." (499-500)

This passage, reminiscent of the final scene in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, paints a clear picture of the power of place to proffer connection and belonging. Cass has to reconcile his personal history before he is able to return to the South but his memory of place remains idealistic and nothing at all like Peter's

recognition of how the South has changed through capitalism. Once again the novel presents us with two visions of the South, both visually powerful, but one, Peter's unfamiliar, dislocated Port Warwick, undermines the other.

Instead of initially finding redemption in the South, the characters in *Set This House on Fire* look to Europe, and to Italy in particular, to provide that absent meaning. Styron's choice of Italy as a central setting is particularly notable because of the similarities between the development of Italian literature and the literature of the U.S. South. Michael Kreyling's essay "Italy and the United States: The Politics and Poetics of the 'Southern Problem'" posits that the parallels between Italian and American literature and politics from the late 1800s through the 1930s reveal striking truths about the construction of a regional identity and the signifier "Southern." He traces two clearly defined periods of regionalism and its related literary production: 1) the region as opposition to national norms, and 2) the region as the rejecter of modernity and, thus, the protector of tradition. Kreyling globalizes the development of regional identity by making this explicit comparison between the American South and the Italian South. Both the American South and the Italian South were economically and progressively behind their Northern counterparts, and both were traditionally agricultural and centered upon the small community. With both, he argues, the "Problem of the South" caused serious national conflicts that highlighted not only "the problem in history but also a problem in promulgating a single nationalistic narrative" ("Italy and the United States" 286). In Italy as well as in the United States, the South made it difficult for the nation to be truly united. Certainly one of the more interesting aspects of Kreyling's essay is the idea that the "South" as a signifier can have similar meanings to individuals all over the world. Southerners – at least in America and Italy – have a Southern sense of place and belonging that extends beyond physical boundaries. *Set This House on Fire* exemplifies this idea through Cass Kinsolving's memories and Peter's sense of himself as a Southerner even though he has not lived in the South for many years.

But Sambuco, presented as southern Italy, possesses the same ambiguous quality as the U.S. South: it is both pastoral and violent. Notably, Sambuco is not actually located in the Italian South but rather at the top of the "boot," so Styron's alteration of its location is both intentional and meaningful. Further, Italy as a nation was historically viewed as the "South of Europe" and therefore plagued by disease, ignorance, and poverty. Styron picks up on this strong sense of Southern place in Italy by contrasting the peaceful northern city of Rome with the isolated, poverty-stricken Sambuco. For Peter, working after the war in an American relief agency, Rome is peaceful and prosperous. He spends his days hardly working,

staring lazily out of the window at a carnival on the Circo Massimo, "blithe as a sparrow" (Styron 21). Still, Peter feels a strong awareness of his isolation and remarks that he "had come to the point where I sensed that my roots, such as they were, must be replanted in native soil or shrivel away completely" (19). Peter's visit to Sambuco is intended to be a casual vacation to round off his years in Europe, but from the beginning his trip is gripped by violence and despair. During his drive south from Rome to Sambuco Peter accidentally hits a man on a motorbike, injuring the man close to the point of death and destroying Peter's sports car. Peter arrives in Sambuco exhausted and disheveled only to discover that Mason is hosting a crowd of Hollywood types who have overrun the small town. Cass's trip to Sambuco is equally disjointed. In a drunken stupor after a mad binge in Rome, Cass heads south on his motorscooter, seeking someplace where he can find peace from the overwhelming tourists and his own nightmares. When his scooter breaks down, Cass hitches a ride from a trucker who drops him off "'where he is going'" though "the face in the truck could not have known where Cass was going, any more than Cass did himself" (316). Cass's rather mystical arrival in Sambuco and his encounter with a striking Italian peasant girl convince him that he has finally arrived at a place that will foster his creativity.

In contrast to Rome, Sambuco in the south is beautiful but poor, inhabited by peasant farmers whose twisted bodies remind Peter of the inhabitants of hell. But, notably, its central settings are all commercial – a hotel, a café, and the palazzo, a richly furnished mansion where Mason and his entourage are staying. The town is frequently filled with tourists despite its physical isolation. Like the South after 1945, Sambuco is becoming a "'geographical centre of accumulation'" (Harvey quoted in Bone 49) and capitalism is making a "tremendous impact upon the material production of place" in this remote village (Bone 46). Still, the Americans are not wholly responsible for this capitalistic alteration of place; Luigi, the town's nihilistic policeman explains to Cass that Italy, too, is materialistic and corrupt: "'[T]he vulgarity of our age is not confined to America, you see. It is a world phenomenon. . . Italy. It is the most vulgar country in the world" (Styron 344). Luigi, himself, is corrupt because he willingly takes bribes from Cass to keep him out of prison. But Sambuco's newfound wealth does not extend to the poor citizens of the town, the Italian peasants, and, like Cass's childhood South, therein lies the violence and darkness of this lovely place. A classism based on presumed ethnic difference prevails among the townspeople who readily ignore the hardships of peasant life. When Cass asks Luigi if he notices Francesca's beauty, Luigi's reply is remarkably similar to the Southern racism: "'All of them,' he said in tones reminiscent of those sleepy-faced shopkeepers of Cass's youth who went

on so about Negroes, 'all of them look alike'" (355). When Francesca is found raped and horribly beaten, the townspeople are quick to dismiss her as a peasant whore. But the townspeople are not the only ones to display an insensitive and racist attitude toward the peasants who are doomed to work the unfertile land. Mason views Francesca merely as a body to be taken and his servants as faceless, nameless creatures. As Jane Flanders asserts, "[E]ven in a novel without a single black character, Styron is again advancing ideas about racism. Here the Italian peasants are 'niggers,' and Flagg's cruelty, his arrogant refusal to see them as human beings, suggest southern racism, and Cass sees the parallel" (113). This clear comparison between the racism in Sambuco and the racism of his childhood prompts Cass to undertake his ill-fated rescue of Francesca's father, Michele, and to see his redemption in loving her. Upon hearing of Michele's illness, Cass visits Francesca's family and feels suddenly thrust into the violent memory of his failure to stop Lonnie from destroying the sharecropper's cabin:

> Here in the hushed light his eyes had barely made out the dirt floor and a single poor table and, beyond, empty, the cow stall with its meager bed of straw, and his nostrils were suddenly filled with a warmly sour and corrupt odor that bore him swiftly into some mysterious, nameless, and for the moment irretrievable portion of his own past, thinking: Lord God, I know it as well as my own name... It is niggers. The same thing, by God. It is the smell of a black sharecropper's cabin in Sussex County, Virginia. It is the bleeding stink of wretchedness. (Styron 416)

Styron clearly makes the connection between worldwide poverty and the universal destructiveness of racism. Though Michael Kreyling identifies Southern exceptionalism and refusals to conform to a national history as the "problem of the South" ("Italy and the United States"), Styron points to another, perhaps more pervasive problem, the economic and ethical backwardness of the South that promotes suffering and degradation. The "place" of race and the poor in the novel points to continued segregation despite the "advances" of capitalism. Like the U.S. South, Italy remains rooted in more traditional ways of viewing class and social place though it proclaims to be modern and progressive. Like Peter's altered Port Warwick, Italy does "not remain fixed for long" so perhaps there is hope for the type of social change that is occurring in the South in 1954.

William Styron's second novel, *Set This House on Fire*, represents an unmistakable break from the influence of Faulkner's legacy in Southern writing and should be critically accepted as a postsouthern novel. Under Martyn Bone's historical-geographical material methodology, the novel clearly addresses new ways of looking at the South, both from a transnational perspective and as a rapidly

changing region due to the influence of capitalism. Even Styron's major characters, Peter, Cass, and Mason, are searching for a new sense of place that they cannot find in the South because it has changed beyond recognition. Redemption – or, for Peter, understanding – in the story can only come from a true sense of *self* rather than a strong sense of place. Styron's use of Sambuco, Italy, the southern counterpart to the U.S. South to explore issues of race, violence, and the individual past allows for powerful reflections upon the "problems of the South" worldwide, globalizing the U.S. South in context to its role as the regional representative of America. Styron's criticisms of the South, and of America as a whole, ultimately return the artist – through the figure of Cass – to an acceptance, if not love, of his homeland.

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POETRY

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Eclipse

The dark is
light
that you can't see.
Will burn your eyes
blind
if you stare
Mama warned us
not to trust
the solace of the shade
to take on faith
invisible
danger, to understand
that daylight
sky can lie.
I'm glad that mama
can't see me now.
Too many cigarettes
caffeine jitters. Alone

Fiction
Henry Rogers
University of Central Arkansas

Shine

Well, that screwed the pooch. Proctor Wood squinted into the sun, then looked out at the steam rising from the mown and raked hay soaked by the sudden thunderstorm. There was no anger in his voice, only resignation. A man doesn't run a dairy for 30 years without learning that nature cooperated with a farmer only a little more often than the Cubs won the World Series.

"If I'd had my 'druthers, we'd uh finished this up today, but it ain't gonna be dry enough to bale before dark. You boys go on now. Be back about 10:00 in the mornin'. When we get done here, we'll get started on Big Bogey's back pasture."

The three high school boys working on the farm for the summer grinned at each other. The loss of a few hours work and a little pay was more than compensated for by an afternoon off during the hottest part of an Arkansas August. They headed for their pickups with a scattered chorus of "See you in the mornin', Mr. Wood," and "Have a good evenin', Mr. Wood." Their freedom may have been unexpected, but it didn't take them long to decide what to do with it.

"Where you headin', Nicky?" asked Will Purdom.

"Shady Lake."

"You goin' swimmin'?"

"Man, I'm goin' because Bobbie Sue Edge is life guardin' out there. I just love her swim suit," Nicky said, climbing into his truck.

"There sure ain't much of it," Will replied.

"Yeah, that's why I love it." Nicky smirked and revved his engine. "You comin', Rabbit?"

Rabbit Cole laughed. "Nah, man, I'm goin' fishin'. And you horny toads better stop and lift the front ends of your trucks a few times before you get to the lake or you'll make even bigger fools of yourselves than usual."

"Fishin'!" Will sounded shocked. "Rabbit, I'm getting worried about you. Fishin' before females ain't normal."

Rabbit hopped over the rusted out running board of his ancient Ford pickup into the driver's seat. He pressed the starter button and, after the engine kicked on, leaned out the window. "You may not think so, but I'll catch a lot of what I'm

after before you even get a nibble from what you're after." He waved and pulled away, followed by loud and impolite suggestions concerning his fishing rod.

Rabbit had his spinning rod in the truck, so he didn't need to go by his home to get it. He knew Drexler had the day off from working at Billings Funeral Home, so he figured he'd just head for his house. He concentrated on shifting the old pickup's three on the column while he drove. Nicky, who apparently had started driving the day he got out of diapers, had taught him how to match rpms with shifting gears, so hed gotten pretty good at going from first to third without using the clutch. It was a lost art, he thought, since most of the kids his age couldn't drive a stick shift at all. Still kind of neat to be able to do something even that insignificant that most other people couldn't do--not that they'd want to.

It was about 5 miles from Wood's dairy to Ponton and another 3 out to Drexler's place. Drexler's parents had very little money--his stepdad worked in the shirt factory, Ponton's only industry, and his mother in the high school cafeteria--so they didn't even have a telephone. If Rabbit wanted to get hold of Drexler outside of school, he just had to drive out there. He didn't mind doing it, though. He and Drexler had been friends since the sixth grade. It didn't bother either of them that Drexler had no money and his own parents had enough not to have to worry about it. Rabbit had always admired Drexler for his gumption. His real father had deserted his mother, sister, and himself when he was 12. Drexler was so mad about it that he went to the courthouse by himself and had his first name legally changed from his worthless daddy's to Drexler. When Rabbit asked him why "Drexler," he said he saw a billboard advertising Drexler farm equipment on his way to the courthouse and liked the sound of it—"although almost anything would've been better than Bill Tom," he'd admitted. Rabbit had allowed he thought Drexler was ok, but he was just glad Drex hadn't seen a Viagra sign instead.

Rabbit cut up over the hill past the old hospital on the east side of town and headed out the dirt road. When he pulled up in front of the James' house, Drexler was outside working on his "new" car--new for him, that is. It was an old Studebaker that his stepfather gotten in a trade for a 22 rifle and a squirrel dog. It had once been black, but the paint had long since faded to a pallid gray, and it listed badly to the driver's side because the older boy who had owned last weighed almost 400 lbs and the springs on that side had collapsed. Still, it occasionally ran and was therefore better than nothing, which was what Drexler had had before. Drexler had done what he could to improve matters, although his efforts didn't always have the desired effect. The previous owner had painted two white lightning streaks down the top of the car, which was just too "redneck" for Drexler.

So, he bought some black paint and painted over the stripes, but since the new paint was black and the old paint was gray, there were currently two black lightning streaks down the top. "Better than it was, anyway," was Rabbit's friend's only comment. Now he was trying to repair one of an apparently endless series of flat tires.

Drexler stood up when Rabbit stopped his truck right beside him, the dust it churned up swirling around the boys and sticking to their sweaty faces and arms. "Quit foolin' with that piece of junk and let's jerk some fish jaws," Rabbit said. "That shower got me the afternoon off."

"Huh," grunted Drexler. "Didn't even get a drop out here, as you can tell from the road. Typical weather. Ok, I'm in. Let me grab my pole." He headed into the house and emerged in a minute with his rod and a beat-up metal tackle box. He dropped them in the bed of the pickup and jumped in the cab. "You got any water dogs?" he asked.

"Nah, we'll have to run by the Sinclair station and get some from Prunes. Won't take long, and it's on the way out to Six Mile. I figured we might fish up from the bridge out past Big Flat. We've never hit that before."

"Prunes probably has," said Drexler. "He's sure fished everywhere else. Might give us some tips, if he's in the right mood."

"He will be," Rabbit said, grinning, "since we'll be buying some bait from him."

He headed back toward Ponton, hit Main street, and pulled in under the old green and white Sinclair sign at the junction with highway 8. Prunes McCarthy, all skin, bones, and Adam's apple under his red Razorback ball cap, ambled out to meet them. His real name was Lester, but he'd been Prunes ever since he was a kid and had pulled out his two front teeth swinging from a rope by his jaws, an event which left him looking like he was sucking on something sour. He could have been anywhere between 50 and 70 years old, had pumped gas at that station since before either of the boys were born, and had done little except hunt and fish practically every day of his life. "You boys need'n some gas?" he asked.

"Nope, just some water dogs," said Rabbit.

"Round back, then," Prunes directed, leading the two behind the station. He had an old freezer up against the wall of the mechanic's bay. It was half full of moss and about 50 water dogs, salamanders he caught under wet rocks and leaves around springs in the national forest outside Ponton. Prunes took a couple of empty milk cartons from a shelf over the freezer, stuffed some moss in them, and grabbled around in the big box until he'd put a dozen water dogs in each carton. "Where you plannin' on fishin' this evenin'?"

"We thought we'd take a shot at Six Mile up from the bridge on 8," Rabbit replied. "You ever fish that, Prunes?"

"Yeah, a few times. It's pretty good for a stretch, but when you get to a long hole about half a mile from the road, you might as well shut it down. Nothing much above that."

"Well, thanks for the dogs and the info. We'll try to bring sufferin' to a few fish," said Drexler. They paid for the bait, walked back to the pickup, and got in. Prunes gave the old truck a slap on the back fender as they pulled off. "You boys do good," he called after them, "but don't waste your time above that big hole."

Rabbit pushed the old Ford up to about 60, which is about all he figured it could handle without some serious internal combustion problems. No matter how eager they were to start fishing, he didn't want it blowing up on them. That wouldn't exactly go over too well with his father, either. It was only 12 miles out to the creek, however, and since it didn't get dark 'til after 9:00 at that time of year, they'd have plenty of time to fish. "I wish this bucket of bolts could run faster," Drexler pretended to complain. "The basses' asses is grass, and we got the mower." One of the secondary pleasures of going fishing was letting their grammar disintegrate--no parents or old lady Bixler, the English teacher, to correct them.

"At least it runs," Rabbit said, "Which is more than can be said about your—to use the term loosely—transportation." He paused. "Old Prunes seemed pretty insistent about us not fishing past that long hole, didn't he?"

"He's probably got a honey hole up there he wants to keep to himself," Drexler answered. "We'll see when we get there."

Fifteen minutes later they reached the old wooden bridge across Six Mile creek, parked the truck on the shoulder, and walked down a path to the water, dust puffing up from their tennis shoes. They shook their milk cartons around until a water dog dropped wiggling into their hands and hooked it through an eye with a weedless hook. Rabbit had been a little squeamish about putting a hook through an eye when he first started fishing with the salamanders, but he got over it pretty quickly when he saw how many fish they caught. Drexler was more practical—or cold blooded. "Only place you can hook the little buggers," he reasoned. They had to use weedless hooks, otherwise the water dogs would crawl under every rock in the water and keep them hung up all day. Rabbit preferred fishing with a fly rod, but Drexler didn't have one, and Rabbit knew they'd have a better chance of catching fish in deep water when it was so hot, and that's where the water dogs went.

When they were baited up, the two stuck the milk cartons up under the fronts of their t-shirts. "Makes us look like hunchchests, or hunchbacks with our heads turned around," said Drexler.

"Anybody who saw you cast would think you had your head on backwards," Rabbit jabbed him.

"I can fish circles around you," said Drexler as he unleashed his first cast—which went straight into the branches of a tree hanging over the creek bank.

"I admire the distance, Drex, but you may have misjudged the water level just a bit," laughed Rabbit.

"Dad damn it," said Drexler, but he laughed too. He gave a mighty jerk on the line, and the water dog came flying back at him like a bullet, right at his face. Rabbit cackled as his buddy ducked frantically out of the way. "If you're that determined to swallow a water dog, I think I'd take it off the hook first."

"Aw, bite the big one, Smartass," was Drexler's witty comeback.

When Drexler had gotten his gear back in order, the boys waded in and started up the creek, one fishing near each bank. When the creek narrowed down at times, one of them would fish that pothole while the other leap-frogged him to the next spot. They caught a couple of small bass and several goggle-eye, but there was little real excitement until Drexler suddenly started backing rapidly out of the water while something writhed at the end of his line. "Rat crap!" he yelled. "I've hooked a damn snake!"

"Don't get your shorts in a knot, Drex. It's not a cottonmouth anyway."

"How do you know it ain't a cottonmouth, Smartass. I ain't even gotten a good look at it yet." Drexler was not reassured.

"Because if it was a cottonmouth he'd be climbing up that line to take that rod away from you and bite your ass for good measure."

"Whatever he is, he ain't getting' the chance. He can have the damn water dog," said Drexler, grabbing the line with one hand, yanking it up to his mouth, and biting it in two with his front teeth.

After Drexler had replaced his hook and salamander, and both boys had caught their breaths, Drexler's lost from momentary panic and Rabbit's from laughing at him, they kept working their way up the creek. It was twilight when they reached the tail end of the big pool Prunes had told them about. It was long for a stream the size of Six Mile, about 50 yards, curving around to the left out of their sight. It was deep on that side, with tree branches hanging far out and low over the water so that it was dark under them even when the sun was bright. Spots like that always made Rabbit uncomfortable for some reason. He didn't mind throwing a bait beneath the limbs, of course, but he really didn't want to go under

there himself. It wasn't fear of snakes or anything, he'd had plenty of them run over his feet or between his legs while he was fishing, but somehow such places were just too damn dark.

"I know we don't have time to fish it before dark," said Drexler, "but let's just wade up this shallow side and see what's up there, see if Prunes does have a hot spot he wants to keep for himself."

"Ok," Rabbit agreed, "but then we'd better bust it back to the truck."

The boys slogged up the far bank as quickly as they could in the knee-high water. At the head of the pool they found a tiny creek running into it and hit an acrid odor so strong they both stopped in their tracks. "What the Sam Hill is that smell?" asked Rabbit, wrinkling his nose disgustedly.

"Oh, man, I know what it is, and I wish I didn't," said Drexler. "That's mash. There's a still around here, and it's real close. We do not want to be here."

"Is it that big a deal, Drex, really? I mean, we're just fishin'"

"Moonshiners don't care what you're doing if you stumble on their still. My uncle Lewis took me up to one of his buddy's stills when I was about 5. Blindfolded me while we drove up this old logging road, kept it on me while he carried me piggy-back up to the still, and put it back on me when we left—and I was only 5 freakin' years old! I've never forgotten the smell of that corn mash."

"All right, I'm ready, but it can't be that bad," said Rabbit.

"The hell it can't," said Drexler, who was 6'2" and strong as an ox, but whose voice got high and squeaky when he was excited or nervous. "Remember what happened to old Bill Little when he went hunting up near Black Fork two years ago."

"Nobody knows what happened to him," replied Rabbit.

"Exactly," squeaked Drex. "Let's get the hell out of Dodge."

But when they turned around, there was a man standing about 15 feet behind them.

"Oh, shit," said Drexler.

Rabbit's heart gave one huge pound and then seemed to stop dead. The man just stood there not moving or saying anything. He was a black silhouette with the sunset behind him, short and broad, wearing a flat brimmed straw hat. After a few seconds Rabbit got enough breath to choke out, "Ah, ah,...Howdy."

Nothing from the man. "We wuz just fishing up the creek. Fixin' to head home, right this minute." Drexler's grammar had completely collapsed.

The man still said nothing for another 30 seconds. Then, in a voice flat and without inflection, he said, "I think it'd be a good idea if you boys was to step over to that clearin' there and meet my friends."

"We surely do appreciate the invitation, sir." Rabbit knew his voice was quavering. "But we really do need to be getting on home."

The man stood there for several more seconds, then said again, in the same toneless voice, "I truly do think it'd be a good idea if you boys was to step over to that clearin' with me."

Rabbit could almost feel the air next to him vibrating from Drexler's shaking, and he knew he wasn't any steadier himself. But the man's tone and presence didn't seem to leave them much choice—they didn't want to find out the hard way whether or not he had a gun.

"Well, I guess we might come up for just a minute," Rabbit finally got out.

The man didn't say anything else, just pointed up a faint path that ran next to the little stream. They followed it about 30 yards and came out in an opening where there were two more men standing on the far side of a small fire. The liquor manufacturing was obviously in full swing over another fire at the edge of the clearing, and the smell of the mash was almost palpable. Two battered 4-wheelers painted in camouflage were parked next to a stump. They both had scabbards with 30/30 rifles in them strapped behind the drivers' seats. "There's a reassuring sight," Rabbit thought despondently. The first man walked closer behind the boys, so that they reluctantly moved nearer to the fire and the other men. "Visitors," he said.

The smaller of the men by the fire—short like the first one but knife-thin—looked at them for a moment. "You boys lost?" he asked.

"Nuh ,nuh, no sir," Drexler squeaked again. "We was just fishin'....and just fixin' to head back down the creek and home."

"Son, you sound like a mouse that's been stepped on," the man said. There was no amusement in his voice. "Your folks expecting you anytime soon?"

"No, sir, we usually fish late and get in after dark." Rabbit could have kicked himself as soon as he said it, but he wasn't exactly thinking straight.

"So if you was to have a accident or somethin', nobody'd start looking for you for quite awhile, huh?" It was more like a statement than a question. The first man started to laugh. He laughed both when he breathed in and breathed out. Harsh and raspy, it reminded Rabbit of the sound Horace Silvey's butcher's saw made when it was cutting through a beef bone. He wished he hadn't thought of the similarity.

"Well, actually they wouldn't wait all that long," Rabbit tried to cover up his gaffe.

"Yeah, not too long," echoed Drexler.

"They're probably expecting us pretty early this evenin', as a matter of fact." Rabbit's words came faster.

"Yeah, pretty early." Drexler again.

"Boy, are you a goddam parrot?" For the first time a slight edge came into the man's voice.

"Yes...I mean no sir." Drexler's voice had become falsetto.

"Then put a sock in it," the man said. "You boys ever fish up here before?" he asked.

"Nosir, we never have, but Prunes...", Rabbit stopped. He didn't want to get Prunes dragged into this.

"Prunes McCarthy. What did Prunes have to say 'bout comin' up here?"

"He said fishin' was no good above that long hole—no sense comin' up here," Rabbit answered.

"I'd say Prunes give you pretty good advice, wouldn't you?"" The man's question was clearly rhetorical.

"Yessir, he sure did," Drexler blurted out. "Fishin' up here's terrible. I mean, it really sucks. It may be the worse fishin' hole...". His voice trailed away as he realized he wasn't keeping a sock in it.

It was then that the third man, who had stood further from the fire and been hardly visible in the growing darkness, stepped closer to them. He was huge, the largest man Rabbit had ever seen, and the way the other two almost imperceptibly edged back made it clear who was the real leader of the trio. He had a beard, although it had grown too dark to see its color, and wore an enormous pair of overalls. Rabbit couldn't make out his features clearly, but his eyes were unnerving, reflecting the fire like flat mirrors, like there was nothing behind them. He looked at Rabbit. "You Doc Cole's boy?" he asked in a tone apparently devoid of curiosity.

"Uh, yessir." Rabbit swallowed hard.

"Thought so. Look like him." The big man was quiet for a bit, then asked a strange question. "Your daddy ever say anythin' about birthin' a baby in a barn?" He still sounded like he wasn't really interested in Rabbit's answer.

"Well, yessir, he told me about doing that a few years ago. Said the feller couldn't get his wife to the hospital, so Dad drove somewhere out in the country and sure enough did deliver a little boy in this man's barn."

The man paused again. "He say anything about getting' paid?"

Despite the man's appearance of disinterest and his own fright, Rabbit realized he was talking about himself. "Yessir, said the fellow was short of money, so he gave him some liquor from what he called his 'private stock'."

"What'd he think about that?"

Rabbit was too shaky to consider the possible implications of his answer. "Well, he said the shine—uh, the alcohol, I mean, would peel paint off a wall, but that was ok, that he did the best he could for the man and his baby and he reckoned the man did the best he could for him."

The man was silent, seeming to consider what Rabbit said. Then he looked back at the boy with those disturbing eyes. "You boys are kinda lost out here, ain't ya?"

"Not real—" Drexler began, but stopped when Rabbit jabbed him in the ribs.

"Yessir, lost as a goose we are," Rabbit said, as enthusiastically as he could manage in his shaken state. "No way we could find this place again. No way." He realized he was beginning to babble.

"But you could get home from here?" More a statement than a question.

"Yessir, sure, yessir," Rabbit's response was almost comically eager.

"Sure, sure," Drexler began.

"Jeezus, boy!" said the thin man.

"Sorry," Drexler gulped.

"Then I 'spect you better head on to the house 'fore your folks start wonderin' 'bout you." The thin man opened his mouth to say something, but shut it quickly when the bigger man glanced his way. "Get on now," he said.

Rabbit almost peed in relief. Drexler's knees looked about to buckle under him. "Yessir, we sure will, and we sure do appreciate your consideration," Rabbit practically gushed. His heart almost stopped again when the big man spoke one more time. "I want yuh to give your daddy a message for me."

Rabbit's heart restarted. "I'd surely be happy to," he said.

"Tell him that feller from the barn didn't figure he'd been paid appropriate for that feller's boy. That feller figures now he has been. Your daddy will get it."

"I'll sure tell him just that." Rabbit was dimly aware he'd said "sure" about a hundred times. He and Drexler looked at each other, turned, and headed down the path to the creek, fighting an overpowering urge to run as hard as they could. Once out of sight of the clearing, however, they tore through briars, branches, and honeysuckle vines without concern for any cuts, ripped clothing, or broken fishing rods, with Drexler gasping "Thank you, God, thank you God" all the way to the truck. They scrambled into it, Rabbit crushed the starter button muttering "Start, you mother, start!" and when the engine turned over, Drexler repeated, "Thank you God!"

The boys were halfway back to Ponton, Rabbit struggling against wanting to run the old Ford wide open, before their breathing returned to near normal. Finally

Drexler said, still in a shaky, high-pitched voice, "I thought we'd walked into the middle of *Deliverance* and banjo music was going to start playing any minute."

"What're you gonna tell your folks, Drex?" asked Rabbit. "We must look like we got run over by a hay rake."

"Not a DAMN thing! That I met Godzilla—fell into the briar patch—hell, I'll think of somethin'. I sure ain't recounting what really happened. Those guys might find out we outed their still, and that would not be good."

"No shit, Sherlock," said Rabbit. "As that skinny guy said, we better keep a sock in it."

There were no lights on when they reached Drexler's house. "Looks like everybody's asleep. Maybe I can sneak in and not have to answer any questions," he said hopefully.

"Good luck, then," said Rabbit. The two boys looked at each other for a minute, smiled thinly, then Drexler climbed out and tiptoed in his front door. Rabbit eased the truck away slowly, then drove as normally as possible to his own home. He shut the engine off and let the pickup roll down the driveway to its parking spot, the only noise its tires crunching on the gravel. He crept inside as quietly as he could, but he had to pass by the kitchen to get to his room. Doctor Cole was sitting at the table relaxing for a bit before going to bed, which he often did when he'd had to make late rounds at the hospital. He looked up and smiled when Rabbit came in. His eyebrows went up when he saw the state of his son's face, arms, and clothes. "You and Drexler run into some fighting fish?" He knew something was up.

Rabbit stood still for a moment, then sighed and sat down. He had discovered, much to his chagrin, that he was a lousy liar. This inability, which Drexler liked to refer to as a 'moral failure,' caused him real grief at times, especially when he found himself in a tight spot. Some of his friends had developed prevarication into an art form—Drex could always come up with some plausible falsity when he had his tail in a crack. Rabbit, however, couldn't even tell a harmless lie to a complete stranger; he certainly couldn't fool his father, and he would have felt guilty if he'd even tried.

"We did have a little adventure," he admitted.

His father didn't say anything, he just waited.

"We ran into these three fellows up above the bridge on Six Mile about dark."

"Were they coon hunting?" Doctor Cole asked.

"No sir, they sure weren't hunting." Rabbit's mouth twisted in a crooked smile.

His father didn't say anything for a minute. He'd been a country doctor for years, and he knew there was only one thing men would be doing in the woods at night if they weren't hunting—and he knew what that might mean for anyone who accidently ran into them. A strained look came across his face, then relaxed just a little since his son was there across the table from him. "They make you boys nervous?" he asked.

Rabbit smiled again, weakly. "I thought Drex was going to lay a golden egg," he said.

"What about you?"

"Felt like I would lay two," Rabbit admitted, not sheepishly.

Neither of them spoke for several minutes. After a while Rabbit said, "There was this one fellow, he knew who I was, he was the hugest man I've ever seen...".

"Big Morton," his father interrupted. He knew every person within a 50 mile radius, even over into Oklahoma.

"He was more than big all right," said Rabbit. "Anyway, he wanted me to give you a message—said you'd get it, if I told you just what he said." He paused

"Which was?"

"He said to tell you that he didn't figure you'd been paid proper for giving him his son. He said to tell you that he figures you have now."

Doctor Cole sat there for a moment, looking at his son with what seemed to Rabbit unusual intensity. Then he smiled just a little and gave a barely perceptible nod, more to himself than to Rabbit. He pushed his chair back from the table, stood up, and started down the hall to the bedroom. After he'd taken a few steps, he turned around. "I think it might be a good idea if you and Drexler didn't fish Six Mile for awhile," he said.

"Yes, sir, that's a very good idea. Maybe not for quite awhile. It's what I was thinking myself," Rabbit agreed. "Maybe we'll just go swimming at Shady Lake for a couple of weeks."

Essay

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Wilde's Dorian Gray as Aesthetic Vampire

Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), creates a man with a double self, and part of this double self is a parasitic character who feeds off of the surrounding characters in the novel, including his own double—his portrait. Once Dorian realizes the temptations of eternal youth, he becomes a monster, an inhuman predator, striving to experience all of life's forbidden pleasures. By day, he appears to be a perfect Victorian gentleman, but at night he rampages throughout the seamy parts of town seeking not only sensual pleasures but also opiates to dull his overwrought senses. Dorian's parasitic character is illustrated through his relationships with Basil Hallward, the artist, Sibyl Vane, the actress, and his own portrait. In each relationship he pursues and waylays the innocence of the object of his desire, and when he is sated with sensual experiences, he leaves his target an empty husk.

When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is examined, however, in conjunction with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the character of Dorian begins to appear less like a parasitic man and more like an aesthetic vampire. During Van Helsing's lecture to his friends when he explains the attributes of vampires, he discusses the "curse of immortality" (Stoker 190). This "curse" is part of Dorian's wish and subsequent misery in that he remains forever young, while his portrait shows the deterioration of age. As "Un-dead" vampires, both Count Dracula and Dorian are liminal figures, forever trapped in an artificial life while another individual or object feeds their "youth." When he feeds on human blood, Dracula becomes a younger, healthier looking man similar to Dorian's feeding on the youth from his portrait. Moreover, Wilde's description of Dorian's evening exploits sounds like he easily could be describing Dracula: "Such hideous things were for the darkness, not for the day" (Wilde 118). Under the cover of darkness, both Dorian and Dracula pursue innocents and "suck" the life out of them, but a great difference lies in the objective of the pursuit and what each monster takes. For Stoker's Dracula, "The blood is the life!" (Stoker 130).

In contrast, Dorian Gray pursues not physical blood, but rather an aesthetic experience.

In *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles*, Linda Dryden notes: "In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde explores a moral atavism brought on by the release of an unbridled hedonism and an unhealthy desire for all things aesthetic" (10). While Dracula pursues the very life of the Englishmen he encounters, attacking life, family, and cultural values, Dorian seeks nourishment from his victims' artistic talents and imaginations. Wilde wrote of himself: "I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction" (qtd. in Hicks 229). For the vampiric Dorian, *art*, not blood, is life.

In "'A Wilde Desire Took Me': The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*," Talia Schaffer explores connections between Dracula as character and Wilde. She calls Dracula: "Wilde-as-threat, a complex cultural construction not to be confused with the historical individual Oscar Wilde. Dracula represents the ghoulishly inflated vision of Wilde produced by Wilde's prosecutors; the corrupting, evil, secretive, manipulative, magnetic devourer of innocent boys" (472). Her argument also links Harker to Stoker, claiming that Stoker allows Harker to experience imprisonment like Wilde's so that Stoker can show his ambivalence about the Wilde trial—Stoker's concurrent victimization and sympathy. According to Schaffer, "To homophobes, vampirism could function as a way of naming the homosexual as monstrous, dirty, threatening. To homosexuals, vampirism could be an elegy for the enforced interment of their desires" (473). Schaffer analyzes the scene in which Harker has a "wild desire" to obtain the key to Dracula's room and must frisk Dracula in order to find it. Harker finds Dracula in his coffin after a night of feeding on victims, and the prisoner is horrified by his captor's appearance. Schaffer compares this depiction of Dracula as graying and swollen with blood to descriptions of an overweight, aging, and "easily exhausted" Wilde from 1895 (473). Schaffer's discussion of Stoker's ambivalence toward Wilde's trial and homosexuality is valuable; but what if, instead, Stoker's Dracula is a conservative reaction to an earlier vampire, a vampire representative of the Decadent Movement that Wilde championed?

This scene that is integral to Schaffer's link between the prosecutors' version of Wilde and Dracula also can be read as a connection to Dorian Gray. While Dracula looks like an older nobleman when he interacts with Harker in the castle, the victim finds a terrifying creature in the coffin when he searches for the key. Dracula's appearance as "bloated" and "gorged with blood" revolts Harker, and he claims that the vampire looks like a "filthy leech" (53). This description could very well be a description of Dorian's portrait after nights of debauchery. He is certainly replete in those

circumstances, but unlike Dracula, Dorian's "closeted" portrait would show the awful, grotesque changes rather than his own body. As an aesthete, appearance is everything, but Dracula frankly shows the monster that Dorian is becoming. If Dorian can be read as an aesthetic vampire who values art above all else, falling into dissolution for the sake of experiencing all forms of sensuality, Dracula would seem to be a picture of what individuals like Dorian do to society. Stoker's heroes defend what Dorian and Dracula corrupt: the English family and culture.

Dorian's destructive path begins, predictably, with an artist. He exercises a seductive power over Basil Hallward, the painter of his portrait. From the very beginning of the novel, the powerful attraction Dorian holds for Basil is apparent. In a discussion with Lord Henry Wotton as the two gaze upon the unfinished portrait of Dorian, Basil claims that he cannot exhibit the painting because it is too personal for him: "I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it" (Wilde 2). Basil claims that the portrait is more about his changing feelings about Art as he paints a near-perfect subject rather than the subject himself. For Basil, this experience of painting Dorian is more personal than any other. When he describes his initial introduction to Dorian, he does so in very sensual terms. Basil notes that he grows pale when he sees Dorian for the first time and is unaccountably drawn to the young man. He tells Lord Henry, "A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (5). Basil tells Lord Henry that he has always wished to be independent, but clearly the personality of Dorian Gray is a powerful one that threatens to eclipse Basil's agency.

Even though Basil claims an artist's desire for independence, he allows himself to be attracted to Dorian and his beauty; and, as he becomes a student of Dorian's figure, Basil begins to lose himself in this relationship. According to the artist, "[Dorian] is absolutely necessary to me" (7). The two men see each other every day, and Dorian becomes a kind of symbol for Basil's conception of Art as a form: "[Dorian] is all my art to me now.... He is much more to me than a model or a sitter.... His personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now create life in a way that was hidden from me before" (8-9). Here, Basil connects art and life. For him, Dorian's portrait is a creation of life itself—he can "create life" like Wilde. Basil believes that he is artistically inspired by Dorian's perfection of form; however, the relationship seems to be more one-sided than he might

like to admit, even though he declares to Lord Henry that he is obsessed with Dorian. He believes that Dorian's presence inspires him to new greatness and a new appreciation for beauty and its translation through the artistic medium, but the power in the relationship lies with Dorian alone. Basil may be creating the painting, but the subject is sucking the artistic lifeblood from him. He admits that he has "given away [his] whole soul" to Dorian and that "the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me" (9). Basil may be the artist, but Dorian controls the relationship and Basil's creativity, and in this merging of unequals the weaker link of the two ultimately will be destroyed.

Once Dorian has milked Basil for his creativity, the artist becomes useless to him, and Dorian disposes of him in an integral scene. When Basil comes to visit Dorian, horrified by his horrible acts and the corresponding disintegration of his painting, Basil becomes superfluous. He appears as a voice of repentance and a recall to innocence, the innocence Dorian lost when he wished that he could have all the sensual experiences he wanted without any consequences. Basil pleads with Dorian to save himself through prayer: "The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also" (115). Repulsed by this rebuff, the dark, true Dorian attacks the innocent Basil in a vampiric manner. Instead of biting him, though, Dorian plunges a knife into the back of Basil's neck, "into the great vein that is behind the ear" (116). After the stabbing, Dorian allows the blood to run out and pool on the floor because the blood is not his object. The pooling blood represents Basil's life and his lost creative energies that were poured into the fateful portrait that affords Dorian his immortality. Once Basil becomes a useless annoyance for Dorian, he is discarded. For Dorian, life is useless when it has outlived an aesthetic purpose.

In addition to the manner of the murder, the implement used to kill the artist and the disposal of the artist's body also echo vampire folklore. Using the knife to stab Basil's throat can be read not only as a form of vampiric biting, but as "staking" as well. This death by "staking" with a knife also prefigures Dorian's own demise at his own hand. Moreover, in a strange transference, Dorian wants Alan Campbell to make Basil's body disappear. He describes the chemical reaction that he needs in terms easily understood as the next step after a staking: "When he is missed, there must be no trace of him found here. You, Alan, you must change him, and everything that belongs to him, into a handful of ashes that I may scatter into the air" (123). At the end of Stoker's novel, when Dracula is "staked," or rather stabbed in the heart by Mr. Morris's bowie knife, the monster's "body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight" (Stoker 325). Basil experiences this same

fate. He created the medium by which Dorian's essence could be changed and deeply connected to the portrait, thus he is partly responsible for the monster Dorian has become and faces a violent end at the hands of his idol. If Dorian kills the creator, then all that remains is the artistic creation and Dorian—pure Art.

Dorian also pursues his attraction to small-time actress Sybil Vane, with similar results. His infatuation with Sibyl is clear when he describes her to Lord Henry: "I love Sibyl Vane. I want to place her on a pedestal of gold, and to see the world worship a woman who is mine.... Her trust makes me faithful, her belief makes me good" (Wilde 56). In this passage, Dorian not only describes his infatuation, he also describes his parasitic desire for Sibyl and all that she represents for him, not because she is herself. He enjoys the characters that she plays—her art. Additionally, his desire to place her on a pedestal of gold seems to have more to do with what he gains from an imagined idealized relationship than with what she would gain. He wants to see the "world worship a woman who is *mine*," which implies a much more possessive relationship. He likes how she makes *him* feel, and he desires the world's worship of himself *through* her.

Sibyl, furthermore, is very much like Basil Hallward in her growing dependence upon Dorian. On the evening of her worst performance, she tells Dorian that he is everything to her: "You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection.... You are more to me than all art ever can be" (63). As in his relationship with Basil, Dorian is the dominant partner who is imbued with an impossible ideal, and once again, he dashes that ideal when he rebukes Sibyl, leaving her distraught and suicidal. Moreover, like Basil, Sibyl has outgrown her usefulness. Her art is flat since she poured everything she had into Dorian, and she "produces no effect" (63). For Dorian, sensual and artistic experience is paramount, and Sibyl just does not produce the sensations he desires. Once Dorian casts her off, she sinks into despair and ends her life.

Dorian distances himself from the implications of Sibyl's suicide, converting the experience into a play, a Greek tragedy. When he learns of Sibyl's suicide, he admits his wrongdoing: "So I have murdered Sibyl Vane ... murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife" (72). His parasitic side wins over his moment of pseudo-repentance, though: "She had no right to kill herself. It was selfish of her" (72). Lord Henry assures Dorian that not one woman has ever done for him what Sibyl did for Dorian, and Dorian abstractedly contemplates the disconnected and apathetic feelings he has about Sibyl's death. He claims that the situation is like "a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have

not been wounded" (73). He transforms the death and his responsibility for it into an artistic form, negating Sibyl's humanity and feeding upon the sensual and artistic catharsis he gives to her suicide. Reminiscent of the nitric acid that Campbell uses to dissolve Basil's body, Sibyl commits suicide by taking "prussic acid" (72), dissolving her presence from the novel.

While the supernatural portrait does aid Dorian in his crimes against Basil and Sibyl by absorbing the consequences, it also is the only way that Dorian can be wounded. The picture acquires these supernatural attributes because of Basil's powerful emotions during the creative process and Dorian's wish: "If it [aging] were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! .... I would give my soul for that!" (19). When Dorian realizes that his wish has come true, he initially wants the portrait to be his conscience so that he can monitor it and avoid cruelty and selfishness; but as the novel continues, he begins to look on the picture as an excuse to experience forbidden pleasures: "Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins—he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all" (77). For Dorian, the wish makes the painting a scapegoat for his wild nighttime passions. He will forever glean youth and beauty from its canvas, leaving it vile and degraded from his debaucheries. Not surprisingly, when he makes the move to destroy the painting with the same knife that he used to kill Basil, he ultimately kills himself.

Because he tries to attack the painting with this knife, his death has the same echoes of vampire folklore as Basil's ritual murder. Wilde writes, "It [the knife] would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace" (164). Unfortunately, by plunging the knife into the portrait, Dorian ultimately stakes himself, and he is found lying on the floor, dead, "with a knife in his heart" (165). Even though he does not intend to commit suicide, he does kill a monster since he can no longer prey upon others. The portrait, however, remains: "When they [the servants] entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty" (165). The picture returns to its normal image after Dorian's death, whereas he becomes "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage" (165). All that remains is the artistic creation, the art that Dorian fed upon while alive; his corpse is withered and frail—his beauty has faded and disappeared.

Dorian's actions, veiled in his self-absorption and existence as an aesthete, destroy the characters around him. Even though he believes that

art is life, rather than Dracula's credo on blood, he is consuming people in order to gain that sensual experience. He destroys Basil, the creator of his supernatural painting, Sibyl and her family, and finally his own body; only the Art that he so desperately wanted remains embodied in his portrait. Conversely, in this intertextual relationship, Dracula can be read as a reaction to the vampiric Dorian. In Stoker's novel, Dracula's actions are clearly destructive to life, family, and values, all aspects that Dorian damages simply by ignoring them. Dracula shows the danger and horror that Dorian does manifest but hides in his painting behind closed doors and in his outward role as an upstanding young aesthete by day. Through his depiction of the terrors of Dracula and the heroism of the small group that finally destroys him, Stoker holds Dorian and Wilde's Decadent Movement accountable for their emphasis on art and de-emphasis of life itself.

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Poetry
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Eve and the Spider

If a spider had come to Eve in the garden, and if she did not run
scared after it swung down on a silver thread, eight legs dangling,
her startled face reflected in each eye of the multiplet of eyes,
how would she be tempted even if she understood what enticement the fangs clicked?

The serpent, she saw, was mostly backbone, had four legs enough like her own limbs, and his eyes, though slit and set to the side of his head, numbered just two.
But it was his mouth, the hinged jaw and pink tongue (even if it was forked and a bit long),
that convinced her most despite its slithery speech.

My Kindergarten Bomb Plot

Out of rocks, sticks, and chunks of dirt dug from the cracked Texas earth, we built our bomb, packed it all down a metal pipe that stood between the monkey bars and wooden fortress.

A pack of a few boys, I can't recall who or what kindled that kind of fire in our brains, but for three days we whispered of our task in class, lunch, and the line to recess, careful the teachers—those gardeners of our minds, guardians of the playground—could not overhear our plan to blow up the school.

On the third day when the pipe was stuffed almost to the top, we covered its mouth with a round stone for a detonator, fell back behind the concrete tubes, counted down from ten, then slabbered blast sounds until spit ran down our chins.

We didn't stay to imagine the slide's wrung spine, the swing set's scattered limbs, or the merry-go-round wilted in its socket.

Our plot complete, we ran to play on the dragon constructed of old tractor tires, seeds dreaming, unconscious of the green explosions we might become in spring.

Essay/Humor
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Finding Friendship in the Company of Women: Reading Beyond Stereotypes in *Designing Women* and *Steel Magnolias*

Ah, the Southern Woman – sometimes irreverent, funny and wise, sometimes even friendly. My colleagues Allison Chestnut and Iris Easterling are going to look at some lines, scenes, and/or broad ideas that our two pieces offer as gifts of grace – the wonderful comic vision of what it means to be southern. What we propose to do today in our joint presentation is to look closely at not only the dimensions of friendship and community defined in two representative popular culture pieces but also the relationship between friendship, on the one hand,

> **Charlene: We're having so much fun in New Orleans. We followed this jazz band down the street to this big ole party. We partied for two hours until I realized it was somebody's funeral**

and the exaggerated humor and stereotypes in southern women

> SUZANNE: **Julia, why do you always have to look a gift horse in the mouth?**
> JULIA: **Because, if you look one in the rear, it usually kicks you.**

and southern culture,

> JULIA: **Mary Jo, I have never seen one person eat so much in all my life. I mean, the inside of this car looks like we're on some kind of a pig tour.**
> MARY JO: **Can you believe it? I mean, who would have thought -- homemade food in a gas station? I mean, is that just in the South or what? I mean, now you can go in get your tires checked, buy some birth control in the bathroom and have a little turkey and dressing on the way out.**

on the other. We are focusing on the popular sitcom *Designing Women* (163 episodes, CBS 1986-1993, and various syndications) and the play and film versions of Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolias* (off-Broadway 1987, movie 1989, Broadway 2004), though we recognize these picture representative selections of a popular culture type, including The Ya Ya Sisterhood, the Sweet Potato Queens, and the various female communities and friendships in southern culture defined by Eudora Welty, Fannie Flagg, and Lee Smith, among others. The enduring success of these pieces owes much to the comic dimensions of southern women characters who reveal much about life in Atlanta or the small-town south in addition to themselves.

> Clairee: **I've just been to the dedication of the new children's park.**
> Truvy: **Yeah, how did that go?**
> Clairee: **Janice Van Meter got hit with a baseball. It was fabulous.**
> Truvy: **Was she hurt?**
> Clairee: **I doubt it. She got hit in the head**

Memorable episodes or scenes from both the television series or the movie/play depend, in large part, on our laughter at our stereotypes and our friendships and at our ourselves in fresh ways. However, both *Designing Women* and *Steel Magnolias* are, finally, as much about friendship and community as they are about the south and southern women. The magnolias face illness, death, and loss, and the designing women survive a variety of incidents that threaten to destroy their relationships.

Finally, though, the most revealing way to discuss the relationship between friendship and the exaggerated humor of southern women and southern culture is to see how life's darkest moments can be turned into moments of relationship and hope through laughter, both restorative and redemptive. Flannery O'Connor's bad boy in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," known for his famous line about the grandmother after he shoots her three times – **"She would of been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every day of her life,"** is followed by the more revealing **"there it's no real pleasure in life."**

In contrast, our two pieces show us that it's important not just to laugh, but to know the value of it.

We don't laugh enough. In his annual joke session on the Prairie Home Companion, Garrison Keillor notes that children laugh about 300

times a day, adults about 17 times a day. In a recent interview, the novelist Lee Smith says,

> **"the thing is you've got two choices: you can just go in the closet and close the door after you, or you can make a joke and figure out ways to make it through the world." Further, she says, "I think humor is very, very helpful. I came from a funny family that loved making jokes and telling stories. For me, one of the functions of story and of writing is that it provides a way to make it through the night somehow."**

The Christian reader recognizes that laughter and humor and story and friendship are gifts from God.

Jill Connor Browne, the Sweet Potato Queen, stereotyped as she is in her vibrant costume and manners, writes of the power of play – the magical, restorative power of play, and the importance of recognizing that life is to be lived fully each moment, each day. Her time, she says, is now; our time is now.

So, the Southern woman and those old stereotypes that we recognize as reasonably close to the truth, sometimes – the good old girl,

> Truvy: **There's so much static electricity in this room, I pick up everything but boys and money.**
> Clairee: **Well, you know what they say: if you don't have anything nice to say about anybody, come sit by me!**

the southern lady,

> JULIA: **I can't believe that all my life, I've tried to create some semblance of grace and style. Now I'm going to be remembered as that woman --**
> **SUZANNE: -- Who mooned Atlanta.**

the steel magnolia,

> Truvy: **When it comes to pain and suffering, she's right up there with Elizabeth Taylor.**

Clairee : **That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.**

the conjure woman,

Ouiser: Yes, I pray! Well, I do! There, I said it, I hope you're satisfied.
Annelle: **I suspected this all along!**
Ouiser : **Oh! Well don't you expect me to come to one of your churches or one of those tent-revivals with all those Bible-beaters doin' God-only-knows-what! They'd probably make me eat a live chicken!**
Annelle: **Not on your first visit!**

the pageant queen,

JULIA: **You probably didn't know that Suzanne was the only contestant in Georgia pageant history to sweep every category except congeniality, and that is not something the women in my family aspire to anyway. Or that when she walked down the runway in her swimsuit, five contestants quit on the spot. Or that when she emerged from the isolation booth to answer the question, "What would you do to prevent war?" she spoke so eloquently of patriotism, battlefields and diamond tiaras, grown men wept. And you probably didn't know….. that Suzanne was not just any Miss Georgia, she was *the* Miss Georgia. She didn't twirl just a baton, that baton was on fire. And when she threw that baton into the air, it flew higher, further, faster than any baton has ever flown before, hitting a transformer and showering the darkened arena with sparks! And when it finally did come down…, my sister caught that baton, and 12,000 people jumped to their feet for sixteen and one-half minutes of uninterrupted thunderous ovation, as flames illuminated her tear-stained face! And that…. --- just so you will know --- and your children will someday know --- is the night the lights went out in Georgia!**

CLAIREE: Nancy Beth is such a pretty girl. Do you know she was Miss Merry Christmas, Miss Soybean, and Miss Watermelon?
TRUVY: But dumb as a post.
CLAIREE: Empty is the head that wears the crown

the belle from Hell,

OUISER: **The only reason people are nice to me is because I have more money than God. I'm not as sweet as I used to be. I'm not crazy, I've just been a very bad mood for the last 40 years!**

the New South bitch,

JULIA: **I have been a Southerner all my life, and I can vouche for the fact the we do eat a lot of things down here..... and we've certainly all had our share of grits and biscuits and gravy, and I myself have probably eaten enough fried chicken to feed a third world country --- not to mention barbecue, cornbread, watermelon, fried pies, okra, and .....yes.....if I were being perfectly candid, I would have to admit we have also eaten our share of crow, and for all I know --- during the darkest, leanest years of the Civil War, some of us may have had a Yankee or two for breakfast. But..... speaking for myself and hundreds of thousands of my Southern ancestors who have evolved through many decades of poverty, strife, and turmoil.... we have surely eaten many things in the past, and we will surely eat many things in the future, but --- God as my witness - -- we have never, I repeat, NEVER EATEN DIRT!!!**

your mama, Bailey White's grandmama who keeps writing her memoirs on the back side of her grocery list and leaving them at the checkout counter at Piggly Wiggly, the Sweet Potato Queen, the Dixie Chicks, the Ya-Ya sisterhood, Aunt Bee, Scarlett O'Hara, Dolly Parton (it takes a lot of money, she says to make a girl look this bad, though her character in *Steel Magnolias* says it takes a lot of effort to make a girl look this good), Blanche DuBois, Oprah Winfrey, Aunt Jemimah, Faith Hill, the lovely Emmy Lou andall the double named girls from childhoods in the south – June Starr, Ruby Viola, Bessie Carolyn, Mary Margaret – Aunt Bertha whose wig floated off in the baptistry, the redneck wife whose hairdo got stuck in a ceiling fan, that chip-kicker redneck woman to whom Lyle Lovett sings, "ooo, ooo, give back my heart."

Such a list only scratches the surface of the grits girls (acronym for girls raised in the south) who are full of the three m's – moonlight, magnolias,

and mint juleps – as well as spit and vinegar and something more than that. Here's the beginning of Bailey White's *The Lips of a Stranger*:

> "We should have known things were not going well when Mama found a tick doing isometrics under her panty hose. Nothing along the tick's trudge up the evolutionary ladder had prepared him for panty hose, and he was exhausting himself scrambling and heaving against the nylon. Every now and then on of his knees would punch through the mesh. Mama and Louise and I were on our way to a cousin's wedding. It was a big wedding. She was marrying someone from "outside," and we had been told to look sharp.
>
> "I've got to get him out of there," Mama said. "I have to go in from the top, and I can't do it sitting down. Besides I've got to pull this panty hose up one more time before we go into church." Mama doesn't wear panty hose often, and she had brought Queen size by mistake – she thought it meant the size of the average queen. The panty hose drooped around her legs in swags, and after she walked a few steps, the crotch would work its way down and appear below the hem of her dress, like a spectral pudendum. She started to pull off the road. "You can't stop, my sister said, we're late already." Nobody spoke. We were late because Louise had decided at the last minute that her knit dress made her look like a zipper. "It didn't look like this in the catalog," she had wailed, eyeing herself sideways.
>
> Finally, after striking pose after pose in front of the mirror, she had discovered one rigid posture that was satisfactory, and with the fierce concentration of a tightrope walker she had maintained it since we left the house. Now she looked something like a ruler, the kind with the metal edge.
>
> I was sitting in the back seat admiring my lips in the rearview mirror. My cousin had given me some lipstick, not the ordinary kind but some beautiful incandescent goo in a little plastic tub with a screw-off top. Pot O'Gloss it was called; you rubbed it

on with your finger. Now my lips looked and felt like the lips of someone I had never known. I had to keep them slightly parted, because when they touched, they were so slick they would skate across each other and leave little pearly smears of Pot O'Gloss all around the edges."

Of course, we could just watch Paula Deen cook up her best stuff for *Southern Living* or get the same picture of two friends sharing family recipes so familiar that they don't need writing down,

TRUVY: What is that other one you were telling me about...cuppa, cuppa,
cuppa?
CLAIREE: That's so easy you don't have to write it down. Cup of Flour, cup of sugar, cup of fruit cocktail with the juice. Mix it up and bake at 350 'til gold and bubbly/
TRUVY: Sounds awfully rich.
CLAIREE: It is, so I serve it over ice cream to cut the sweetness.

or see in her creation of the Sweet Potato Queen that Jill Connor Browne has, like the great chef Emeril, as he adds handfuls of garlic or a whole bottle of bourbon to whatever he's making –just kicked the friend-based stereotypes of southern women up a notch, BAM!! I don't mean simply that her dishes of choice like "white trash trifle" or "chocolate stuff" are laced with Fat Mama's Knock You Naked Margarita Mix – much more than that.

M'LYNN: for desert they served an original creation called "Dago" pie. I think that says it all. Jackson is from a good old Southern family with good old Southern values. You either shoot it, stuff it or marry it.

The key is to know southern culture and manners first-hand and then to laugh at the stereotypes and at our "very own selves" in fresh ways. To laugh at how we behave,

JULIA: **I'm saying this is the South. And we're proud of our crazy people. We don't hide them up in the attic. We bring 'em right down to**

the living room and show 'em off. No one in the South ever asks if you have crazy people in your family. They just ask what side they're on.
PHYLLIS: **Oh? And which side are yours on Mrs. Sugarbaker?**
JULIA: **Both.**.
PHYLLIS: Basically, it isn't just one thing, it's a bunch of odd things that Aunt Bernice does. She puts sheep placenta on her face before going to bed, and she keeps these small dolls in her closet with pins stuck through the necks. And the only picture in her bedroom is not of my sons, instead it's of some big dumb pig and says ***"May all your dreams come true. Love, Neal."***
SUZANNE: Excuse me, that is "Noel", not Neal. I know that pig. I gave her the sheep placenta. My housekeeper gave her the voodoo dolls. I don't so what's weird about that. I have some myself -- it's a little hobby, y'know. Some people like golf. Some people like revenge.

at women, at men, the dumb Bubbas with literal minds,

SUZANNE: **Myself, I prefer the older established type.**
MARY JO: **You mean rich.... and terminally ill**?

some dumber than a bag of hammers

MAN: **Allow me to introduce myself – Ray Don Simpson.**
JULIA: **There's no need for introductions, Ray Don, we know who you are.**
RAY DON: ***(smiling)*** **You do?**
JULIA: **Of course. You're the guy who is always wherever women gather or try to be alone. You want to eat with us when we're dining in hotels, you want to know if the book we're reading is any good, or if you can keep up company on the plane. And I want to thank you, Ray Don, on behalf of all the women in the world, for your unfailing attention and concern. But read my lips and remember, as hard as it is to believe, sometimes we like talking just to each other, and sometimes we like just being alone.**

And some of whom may need killing, quite rightly,

CHARLENE: **Julia, what did he say to you?**
JULIA: **Charlene, why do you always want to know these things?**
CHARLENE: **Oh I'm just curious. Come on, we all told.**
JULIA: **All right Charlene, if you must know he said, "Mmm-mmm.**

Lookin' good. I want it. I need it. Got to-got to-have it-now." ....I keep a list of people who touch my behind without permission. Some of them have died unnatural and untimely deaths.

and especially to laugh at one's self – and thus to be restored and redeemed through a wonderful comic vision of what it means to be southern and human at the same time (maybe not an oxymoron, by the way).
Part of the deal here, of course, is what Willie Morris calls the peculiar nature of southern humor and some ongoing obsession in the larger culture with all things southern – local color with exotic places, real peculiar characters, and a language that's quite distinct. The plural of y'all is all y'all. We know about the redneck jokes from Jeff Foxworthy – you might be a redneck if you think Campho-Phenique is a miracle drug, if you've ever bbq'd spam on the grill, if the primary color of your car is bondo, if your family tree doesn't fork – the list goes on. Maybe you've seen the section of southern humor at bookstores with spinoffs like Games Rednecks Play, Hick is Chic, and the Distinctive Book of Redneck Baby Names, like Jimmy Joe and Clovis, or the redneck wedding book where the gifts are a chainsaw, a frog gig, a carbide lamp, and a winch for the pickup, and these are gifts for the bride.

Another feature that southern women understand about southern culture and the dumb bubba nature of southern men is the literal mind. For girlfriends who find themselves so bound to such men, the beauty parlor provides the safest place to compare their lots in life.

Ouiser: **He is a boil on the butt of humanity!**
Shelby: **Remember what Daddy always says - an ounce of pretension is worth a pound of manure!**
Truvy: **Oh, Sammy's so confused he don't know whether to scratch his watch or wind his butt.**
Truvy: **Louie brought his new girlfriend over, and the nicest thing I can say about her is all her tattoos are spelled correctly.**
M'Lynn: **Oh Ouiser, Drum would NEVER point a gun at a lady!**
Ouiser: **Oh! He's a real gentleman! I bet he takes the dishes out of the sink before he PEES in it!**
Truvy: **I'm just screamin' at my husband; I can do that any time!**

You might remember Roy Blount's interview on the Tonight Show when Jay Leno asked him about the peculiar nature of the southern mind (no, that's not an oxymoron either). Anyway, Blount said, someone asked Bubba, the good ole boy,

"do you believe in infant baptism?"

And Bubba said,

"Believe in it? Hell, I've seen it done!!"

The literal, the concrete, the actual experience, the actual place. After he's pitched into the street, the old boy in Oh Brother Where Art Thou exclaims earnestly,

"Thrown out of Woolworth. Wonder if that's just the one store, or the whole chain."

Hard to believe that he beat out 1,000,000 other sperm, isn't it?
When Conan O'Brien was listing just last week some suggested new slogans for the back of the new state quarters being issued, he said for Mississippi, "not just dumb, but Mississippi dumb."

BERNICE: **I don't think this safe sex is what it's cracked up to be. My husband and I weren't that happy and we always had safe sex. I mean we had it in bed.....and I was usually asleep. I don't think you can get any safer than that.**

Such is the stereotype and we laugh, most of the time, unless it gets too personal and too close for comfort. We could appropriate the phrase "And the Laugh Shall Be First" from Will Willimon's book of religious humor and add "But what's so funny about the South" and play off both the scripture and the assumption that the South is dead last in everything.

MARY JO: **Why are you so quiet down there, Julia?**
JULIA: **I'm just trying to say my prayers.**
CHARLENE: **What were you praying for?**
JULIA: **If you must know, I was praying, Number One, that you all would let me go to sleep. Number Two, that I'm not seated next to Club Mel at breakfast. And Number Three, I was thanking God that I did not**

grow up with a mother who wore a leopard skin head band, white see through t-shirt and glued rhinestones to her fingernails.

You've probably seen the little paperback, *On the Night the Hogs Ate Willie*, springing from Pat Conroy's assessment of southern literature and culture:

"On the night the hogs ate Willie, Mama killed Daddy when she found out what he'd done to Sister,"

Conroy says, sums everything up in a single sentence. It's possible, of course, to go too far with self-parody, with self-conscious self-parody of southern stereotypes – watch me be southern, y'all. Drive south, Cousin Vinnie, and have a big grit. We might try to reduce southern culture to a soundbyte or a t-shirt about grits, or fried chicken or friendship. Maybe we could reduce stories of friendly relations into a phrase that we could put up on one of those little signs on the wall in a Cracker Barrel so we could be southern and literate at the same time.

Ouiser: A dirty mind is a terrible thing to waste.
CLAIREE: At her age, she should be playing 'beat the clock.' She's just like her old dog....both have trouble learning their new tricks.
BERNICE: **I think we should get some bricks and some baseball bats and go over there and teach them the true meaning of Christmas.**
BERNICE: **And whenever we go to McDonald's, she always wants to know what the fish is like. And I always have to say, "It's square fish, Phyllis. Okay?"**
CHARLENE: **If God had intended you to do good works, you probably wouldn't have been born so shallow.**

I'm not prepared to do that –it seems to trivialize something powerful, like a bumper sticker trying to capture religious experience, as if honking one's horn was some key to discipleship. What I am prepared to do is to admit that stereotypes have come to mean pictures in our heads that have as much to do with preconceptions as reality. At the same time, I think that notions of the south as unique region, a distinctive place, persist, and I also know that I see identifiable comic types and comic characters every day, both out of the myth I've constructed in my head and the contemporary world in which I live. I know these people, and most of you do as well. Sometimes the best humor is in the combination of or contradictions in both the myth and the

contemporary world, as in Willie Morris, Roy Blount, or in Steel Magnolias or Designing Women. The sunny south and the ignorant south, the progressive south and the lazy south, the disappearing south and the enduring south, the world of male and female stereotypes set against a changing scene like downtown Atlanta.All of these are evident in our collective image in films, tv shows, gospel and country music, the blues, southern football, Elvis, community and family, the garden south, the new south, the post-modern south, the lost cause, civil rights, crackers, – Lord, what a place!

Curiously, we think that it may be the very nature of the exaggerated characters, the stereotypes themselves, with their sometimes outrageous behavior and their flamboyant language, that open the doors to friendship, grace, joy and laughter. The characters transcend, somehow, our sense of them as simply funny, or as simply southern. You might recall the rubric about tragedy and comedy that reads – "**out of tragedy, perception; out of perception, laughter**."

To this we might add, "out of both, friendship."

POETRY

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Mississippi Courage: A Lighthouse to the World
(for Medgar, Fannie Lou, and Ms. Devine)
from ***Da Black Book of Linguistic Liberation***
By C. Liegh McInnis © 2001, 2007

Courage is a lighthouse guiding ships to salvation.
Courage is a fire that burns down the dead weeds of racism
that rise to suffocate the voices of liberty.
Courage is an antibiotic that kills the bacteria of hatred.
Courage was the nucleus of the Mississippi Trinity.
Three lamps full of freedom oil
that shined the path to manumission:
an insurance salesman, a sharecropper, and a teacher.
Three instructors of liberation, teaching that
righteous knees only bow before God and that
the children of God have an unyielding, organic duty
to protect the meek like umbrellas shielding us
from the acid showers of colonialism or overcoats
shielding us from the frozen winds of prejudice.
Three bucking broncos, railing against
pale cowboys who lurk in the dark of the night
armed with the silver bullets of white supremacy.
Three lambs of justice who boldly walked into
the snake pit of the South and the lion's den of America
to take their freedom from Ross "Nebuchadnezzar" Barnett,
Pharaoh Bilbo, and his side-winding, salamandering scribes,
the *Jackson Daily News*.
The insurance salesman, the sharecropper,
and the teacher bore the cross of change.
They were the fertile soil in which we planted our seeds
of hope, as they petitioned us to invest the collateral of our talents
into the mutual fund of the movement.
That's why we must be tired of paper-tiger intellectuals
and playboy revolutionaries who care more about their
Cadillac payments than the dilating of ebony education

as they are standing on the backs and trampling the program of work
of Medgar, Fannie Lou, and Ms. Devine.
They midwifed and nurtured the germination of the movement,
which caused a rippling of flowers and trees sprouting
through the winter of racism to the spring of transformation.
Like Shaka they were the pounding tom-tom heart
of a militant movement,
like Jesus they came to heal the sick, and
like Mohammed they laid down the blueprint for their people.
Still everyday people fighting for everyday concerns.
Speaking volumes with their actions,
this trinity shook the fibers of the universe.
Through intellectual guerrilla warfare with the spirit of
Jomo Kenyatta, they showed that
you can't teach people to stand if you are on your knees,
taking up the sword of justice and the spirit of protest.
Ministers for justice and preachers of the gospel of freedom,
teaching us to be the engine of organizations
rather than be driven or run over by them.
With little possessions, they fought for the disposed,
each one crying 900,000 tears for 900,000 Black citizens
at the mercy of mis-educated teachers and chicken eating preachers,
all the while refusing to fight evil with evil
believing love to be the only antidote for hate.
For what is love if it is not the courage to love yourself.
Courage is love, and no greater love than a man
who would lay down his chivalric cashmere coat of life for another
so that we may walk unblemished over the cesspool of struggle—
his payment to be beaten, kicked, sprayed, spit on, spied on,
lied on, bombed, and tuned out by his own
for a few crumbs of token positions and jus' enough money
to move cross the tracks into the homes that white folks abandoned
to preserve Mississippi tradition.
In the name of emancipation, equality, and liberty
their legendary, lingering legacy demands
that we heed the call to make this Capitol a bold, new city.
So, [i] don't know if [i]'m going to heaven or hell,
but wherever [i]'m going, [i]'m going for Mississippi.
[i]'m going for Mississippi.