POMPA: Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association

Editor, Lorie Watkins
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Editor's Note

By Lorie Watkins

The editor's note for this, the forty-first volume of the *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association (POMPA)* continues our rebuilding and return to in-person conferences after the COVID lock-down. The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) volunteered to host the 2024 on the beautiful campus of the Mississippi University for Women (MUW), and we are grateful for their hospitality.

The conference organizer was Thomas Richardson, a long-time MPA member. As usual, there were diverse panels devoted to academic, creative, and pedagogical writing. In 2025, we will host what looks to be a much larger conference organized by another veteran MPA member Phillip "Pip" Gordon at The University of Mississippi. We are very excited to return to Ole Miss, the home of long-time POMPA editor Benjamin F. Fisher. Fittingly, the conference theme is "Legacies and Futures." We look forward to celebrating both.

The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

An Opportunity for Excellence

The Mississippi Philological Association
Annual Conference
March 1-2, 2024
Hosted by The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science
(on the campus of Mississippi University for Women)

Friday, March 1, 2024

Registration Opens 11:30 AM (Fant Memorial Library Lobby)

Session 1, 12:30 PM-1:50 PM

Searching for Identities in Pop Culture and Contemporary Literature (Fant Library, Gunter Room)

Moderator: Thomas Easterling, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

- "Ok, Boomer: Woke Lessons from *Gunsmoke*"—Todd Bunnell, Mississippi University for Women
- "'Illocutionary Wreck': Locating Re-reconstructions of Black Women's Autobiography in Hip Hop Texts"—Shahara'Tova Dente, Mississippi University for Women
- "Schrödinger's Barbie: The Ambition and Contradictions in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*"—Mikki Galliher, Blue Mountain Christian University
- "Anna Quindlen's *Every Last One*: Silence Is Not Golden & Families Are Never Perfect"—Terrell Tebbetts, Lyon College

Form and Poetics Across the Centuries (Fant Library, Active Learning Classroom)

Moderator: Frank Thurmond, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

- "Multi-Narration and the System of Knowledge in *Amours de Voyage*"—Joseph Newell, Mississippi State University • "Terror and Trauma in the Post-9/11 Poetry of Adrienne Rich"—Lin Knutson, Mississippi Valley State University

- "Jazz Haiku and Blues Haiku by Richard Wright, Sonia Sanchez, and Lenard D. Moore"—John Zheng, Mississippi Valley State University

Creative Writing I (Fant Library, Tiered Classroom)

Moderator: Michelle Stoll, Mississippi University for Women

- "The Boil"—Theo Hummer, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science
- Poems—Matt Moniz, Mississippi University for Women
- "Winter of the Cable Guy's Discontent"—Allen Berry, Calhoun Community College

Session 2, 2:00 PM-3:20 PM

Literary Treasures in University Archives (Fant Library, Gunter Room)

Moderator: Kate Stewart, University of Arkansas at Monticello

- "'Love and everything that goes with it': Challenges and Opportunities in Distant Reading the Smith Papers"—Hillary Richardson, Mississippi University for Women
- "Besmilr Brigham: A Poetics from Mississippi's Uninhabited Country"—C.T. Salazar, Delta State University • "The 'Lost' Samuel Laurence Portrait of George Eliot (1860): The Mystery Solved at MUW" —Thomas C. Richardson, Mississippi University for Women; Emma G.B. Richardson (Ret.), The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

A 21st Century Return to the Ancients, their Myths and Philosophies (Fant Library, Active Learning Classroom)

Moderator: Lin Knutson, Mississippi Valley State University

- "Moving the Chains of Fate: An Analysis of Predestination in *Oedipus the King*"—Shanell Bailey, Mississippi Valley State University
- "American Dragons in Folklore, Literature, and Popular Culture"—Alan Brown, University of West Alabama
- "Unveiling the Pagan Renaissance in the 21st Century: A Cosmic Perspective through the Lens of Michel Onfray"—Payton Brown, Mississippi State University

Creative Writing II (Fant Library, Tiered Classroom)

Moderator: Tawanda Nyahasha, The University of Southern Mississippi

- Excerpt from *Lottie Deno* (novel)—Frank Thurmond, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- Poems from *Tree Fall with Birdsong* and others—Kendall Dunkelberg, Mississippi University for Women

- "Empire of the Empty"—Kellene O'Hara, University of Mississippi

Session 3, 3:30 PM-4:50 PM

Teaching and Textual Analysis in Non-Literature Classrooms (Fant Library, Gunter Room)

Moderator: Craig Albin, Missouri State University at West Plains

- "Flattening the Silos: An Exploration of the 'Many Dimensions' of Using Literature as a Pedagogical Tool in Non-Humanities Classes"—Kevin Cozart, University of Mississippi
- "*Brood*-ing on Anne Bradstreet"—Phillip "Pip" Gordon, University of Mississippi
- "Feminism in Country Music"—Amber King, University of Mississippi

"Lights in the Darkness": How Spanish-speaking culture made and makes sense of the world, using the science, reason and alchemy from prior to the modern, industrial science of the late 19th century and onward (Fant Library, Active Learning Classroom)

Moderator: Thomas C. Richardson, Mississippi University for Women

- "Vampires in the Spotlight: How Benito Gerónimo Feijóo tried to dispel superstition by combining Catholic thought with Enlightenment rationalism"—Rob Harland, Mississippi State University
- "The Vision of the Natural World in Nariño of the Monk Juan de Santa Gertrudis: Between Science and Humanism"—Daniela Coral Patino & Catalina Revelo, Mississippi State University
- "Nature is a Temple: Alchemical Symbolism in *El abra del Yumurí*, a novel by Frederick A. de Armas— Rosa María Stoops, University of Montevallo
- "Of the alchemical aspects (re)presented in the film *Cronos* by Guillermo del Toro"—Janie Covarrubias, William Carey University

Creative Writing III (Fant Library, Tiered Classroom)

Moderator: Theo Hummer, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

- "Seasonal Haiku and Death Haiku"—John Han, Missouri Baptist University
- "I Can Turn Water into Juice"—Tawanda Nyahasha, The University of Southern Mississippi
    - Reading from Play Script—Thomas Easterling, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

5:15 PM

MPA Happy Hour* @
Munson and Brothers Trading Post
301 2nd Ave N, Columbus, MS 39701

*15% off food and beverage with your MPA name tag

Saturday, March 2, 2024

9:00 AM Registration Opens—Coffee and Continental Breakfast Available (Fant Library Lobby)

Session 4, 9:15 AM-10:35 AM

Southern Gothic and Beyond (Fant Library, Gunter Room)
Moderator: Ted Atkinson, Mississippi State University

- "Pain and Artistic Expression in the Southern Gothic"—Madeline Bonds, Mississippi State University
- "Kristeva's Theory of Abjection as it Relates to Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily' and Cable's 'Jean-Ah Poquelin'"—Olivia Lumpkin, Mississippi State University
- "Healing Found in Confrontation: Intergenerational and Collective Haunting in Sing, Unburied, Sing"— Hailey Reeder, Mississippi State University
- "Boundaries of Place in the Southern Gothic from the House of Usher to Jordan's End"—Erin Quinn, Mississippi State University

Empowering Student Identities in Language and Literature Pedagogy (Fant Library, Active Learning Classroom) Moderator: Shahara'Tova Dente, Mississippi University for Women • "Exploring the Positive Impact of French Anglicism and Slang in Teaching French as a Foreign Language:
An Action-Oriented Approach to Culturalizing the Target Language and Empowering Social Actors in
Language Pedagogy"—Anna Essel & Joel Asmah, Mississippi State University

- "Silencing Voice, Silencing Narrative, Silencing Expression … Silencing (Erasing) Existence"—Helen Crump, Jackson State University
- "Current Practices to Modify the French Language to be More Inclusive of Gender Variability"—Lori Pierce, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

Creative Writing IV (Fant Library, Tiered Classroom)

Moderator: Kendall Dunkelberg, Mississippi University for Women

- "The Viennese Fiddler"—Jeffrey Condran, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- Excerpt from *The Divining Rod* (novel)—Bill Hays, University of Mississippi
- "Ali"—Margaret Mary Henry, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

Session 5, 10:45 AM–12:05 PM

Fiction from the Ozarks and the Greater South (Fant Library, Gunter Room)

Moderator: Mikki Galliher, Blue Mountain Christian University

- "'Ancient Tunes': Trespasses and Invasions in *The Outlaw Album*"—Craig Albin, Missouri State University at West Plains
- "Mystery Elements in Harold Bell Wright's Ozarks Novels"—John Han, Missouri Baptist University
- "What We Learn About Ourselves in Southern Literature"—Kate Stewart, University of Arkansas at Monticello
- "'He can know his heart, but he don't want to': Unpacking The McCarthy Code Hero"—Allen Berry, Calhoun Community College

Revolution, Religion, and Family in World Literature (Fant Library, Active Learning Classroom)

Moderator: Rob Harland, Mississippi State University

- "Lizardi's Monumental Construction: A Portrayal of the Struggle for Liberation in *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816)"—Reyna Vergara, Mississippi University for Women
- "What is a Family?: A cosmogonic study of *L'Amas Ardent* by Yamen Manai"—Gladys Kainyah, Mississippi State University • "Disempowering Disguise in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina: or Love in a Maze"*—Nancy Kerns, Blue Mountain Christian University

Creative Writing V (Fant Library, Tiered Classroom)

Moderator: John Han, Missouri Baptist University

- Ekphrastic Poems—John Zheng, Mississippi Valley State University
- "Still Waters"—Julie Liddell Whitehead, Independent Scholar
- "Fig Leaves"—Kylie Wagoner, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Lunch and MPA Business Meeting
featuring readings by MSMS Students

Shackleford Auditorium
12:15 PM-1:15 PM

Session 6, 1:30 PM-2:50 PM

Marked Bodies: Slow Death in Biopolitical Times (Fant Library, Gunter Room)
Moderator: Andrea Spain, Mississippi State University

- "The Hamann-Todd & the Heights of Academic Freedom: A Dissection of the Necropolitical Lives & Deaths of Medical Institutional Bodies"—Aleisha Reynolds, Mississippi State University
- "Caught in the Radiant Demise: Lauren Beukes' *The Shining Girls* and the Dialpainters of New Jersey"— Mahera Nilanti, Mississippi State University
- "Post-World War II Predicaments of Necropolitical Power: Its Continuous Impact on Korea in PostJapanese Annexation"—Sakira Crawford, Mississippi State University
- "Slow Death: Parchman and Racial Violence in Jesmyn Ward's Sing, Unburied, Sing"—Hailey Reeder, Mississippi State University

Fostering Inclusive Language Pedagogical Environments: Navigating Language Learning Anxiety, Building a Positive Classroom Culture, and Motivating Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (Fant Library, Active Learning Classroom)
Moderator: Self-Moderated/Team Presentation

- Gladys Kainyah, Mississippi State University
- Joel Asmah, Mississippi State University
- Jessica Li Zhi Biao, Mississippi State University
- Justina Eshun, Mississippi State University

Creative Writing VI (Fant Library, Tiered Classroom)
Moderator: Bill Hays, University of Mississippi

- "Thy Going Out and Thy Coming In"—Kathy Pitts, Jackson State University
- "Conversation Starters with Death: Using Poetry to Approach and Unmask Mortality"—Michelle Stoll, Mississippi University for Women
- "Water Works" and other poems—Thomas B. Richardson, The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

Questions about publishing in *POMPA*?
Contact Lorie Watkins Massey (lwatkins@wmcarey.edu)

See you next year!

Critical Essays

“He can know his heart, but he don’t want to”: Unpacking The McCarthy Code Hero

By Allen Berry

Scholars have spoken at length of the Hemingway Code Hero and the qualities that define his protagonists stating, “Hemingway defined the Code Hero as a ‘man who lives correctly, following the ideals of honor, courage and endurance in a world that is sometimes chaotic, often stressful, and always painful’” (Mehmood). Cormac McCarthy’s heroes can be similarly defined and codified by a set of common traits. Identifying the McCarthy Code hero does come with something of an inherent disadvantage. Ernest Hemingway, whose protagonists’ often reflected the celebrated author’s own colorful life experiences; in contrast, Cormac McCarthy was largely reclusive. In fact, over the course of his career the author gave very few interviews, including one to television personality Oprah Winfrey. Much of his private life was guarded from the eyes of the public, so any association between the author and his code heroes would at best be conjecture. However, there does exist a set of criteria common to all of his protagonists that establishes what defines the McCarthy Code Hero. To achieve that end, we will draw from the novels of *the Border Trilogy*, *No Country for Old Men*, *The Road*, and McCarthy’s final novel, *The Passenger*.

The McCarthy Hero is Capable

In the first of McCarthy's Border Trilogy novels, *All the Pretty Horses*, readers are introduced to John Grady Cole, a sixteen-year-old boy who finds himself dispossessed of his dreams of the cowboy life by the forces of modernity. After his mother sells his grandfather's ranch to the oil interests, he sets out for Mexico to attempt to fulfill a half-formed dream of becoming a cowboy. Pursuant to this goal, he finds himself working on a horse ranch where he proves himself through his skill breaking horses for the Hacendado, Senior Rocha. The American cowboy draws the most spirited horses from the remuda and along with his riding partner Rawlins, breaks the horses quite skillfully. As the narrator explains,

> By midmorning eight of the horses stood tied and the other eight were wilder than deer, scattering along the fence and bunching and running in a rising sea of dust as the day warmed, coming to reckon slowly with the remorselessness of this rendering of their fluid selves into that condition of separate and helpless paralysis which seemed among them like a creeping plague…When they went to the bunkhouse for dinner the vaqueros seemed to treat them with a certain deference but whether it was the deference accorded the accomplished or that accorded to mental defectives they were unsure. (McCarthy, ATPH 104-105)

This demonstration of skill endears John Grady and Rawlins to the Hacendado, and in John Grady's case, to the Hacendado's daughter as well.

Contrast John Grady with the unnamed father from *The Road*, who is traveling the post-apocalyptic landscape of America. His sole mandate is preserving the life of his young son. The father's skills as forager and craftsman save father and son from sharing the fate of the remainder of humanity time and time again. In one instance, after losing

their lighter in an escape from cannibals, the man improvises a flint and steel, "He took a piece of flint from his pocket and got the pair of pliers and struck the flint against the serrated jaw…. He raked sparks into the dish and it bloomed into flame with a low whoosh" (McCarthy, *The Road* 144). On another occasion, the man carves dummy rounds for their revolver, to hide the fact that they have only one live cartridge remaining to dispatch any marauders they may encounter on the road. Common to McCarthy's heroes is a set of skills that earns them a modicum of respect and also permits them to survive the harsh world they are set against. Likewise, *The Passenger's* Bobby Western is a jack of all trades: physicist, race car driver, and finally salvage diver. Finding himself dispossessed of all that he owns, he ekes out a subsistence living from the resources of the land, earning what money he can from skinning animals that he either traps or finds along the roadway.

The McCarthy hero is a man who is and must be capable above all else. This capability is his stock and trade; his survival is incumbent upon his ability to adapt and overcome no matter where he finds himself, no matter the difficulty because in the end there is no rescue save for that which he performs himself. Whether these skills are in the arena of personal combat or in the subduing of the natural world, he is a man whose skills alone allow him and those under his care to survive.

The Code Hero is a Broken Protector

Among McCarthy's defining characteristics are his protagonists' roles as broken, oft times failed, protectors. Whether they save their charges or lose them forever, the heroes are permanently damaged, traumatized, or destroyed in the aftermath of their endeavors. Perhaps the most unlikely code hero is *No Country for Old Men's* Sherrif Ed Tom Bell, who finds himself caught up in the shocking events stemming from a botched

cartel meeting near the border of Mexico. Ed Tom is the last of a family line of Texas sheriffs, who quickly realizes that the species of violence he is dealing with is far beyond that which he has ever faced before. Early on in the novel, the careworn and world-weary Sheriff Bell states, "Mostly I suppose I just try and figure out what might be headed this way. Not that I've done all that great a job headin it off. It keeps getting harder" (McCarthy, *No Country* 40). Encountering the violence of the Cartels and the peculiar species of evil embodied in the novel's antagonist Anton Chigurh, he finds himself outclassed; unable to combat the horrors that he faces. This eventually drives him to retire from law enforcement. In the concluding chapter, Bell recounts a dream of his father on horseback and carrying a fire into the darkness. What Bell envisions is not simply the end of his career, but the end of the West as he knows it, and with it, the values he espouses.

This is reminiscent of the protagonists of *The Border Trilogy*, each in his turn laboring under the burden of guilt over the ones they could not protect. In Billy Parham's case, it is his brother Boyd, lost in Mexico, only recovered in death; the best Billy can do is returning his brother's bones to Texas for burial in his home country. This failure will later resurrect itself in his fraternal relationship with *All the Pretty Horses'* protagonist John Grady Cole, their paths intersecting in the trilogy's third novel. John Grady, whose protective efforts fare little better, first losing his riding companion Blevins to the vengeful Mexican Captain and failing to save Rawlins from near mortal wounding in Saltillo Prison. The best he can do is to place Rawlins on a bus back to Texas after their release and reclaim their horses by force from the Mexican Captain, having lost his position at the ranch, his love interest Alejandra, and very nearly his life.

Ultimately, it is this drive to protect and the accompanying failure which shapes the code heroes, leading to their eventual destruction. In the closing chapters of the third

Border Trilogy novel, *Cities of the Plains*, John Grady, confronts the alcahuete, Eduardo who murdered his beloved Magdalena, an epileptic prostitute whom he sought to rescue from her pimp. The best John Grady manages is to avenge her death and in doing so is himself mortally wounded. Billy Parham's search for his surrogate brother ends in an alleyway near the brothel where he finds John Grady barely alive. Despite his promise to get him back home to Texas, John Grady dies in the alley. His passing echoes the death of Billy Parham's brother Boyd, Billy is once again unable to protect the one closest to him. While John Grady's failure to save Magdalena ends in death, Billy Parham's ends in self-imposed exile. In the aftermath of the John Grady's passing, he leaves Mac's ranch without saying goodbye, the narrator stating,

> He rode out in the dark long before daylight and he rode the sun up and he rode it down again. In the oncoming years a terrible drought struck West Texas. He moved on. There was no work in that country anywhere. Pasture gates stood open and sand drifted in the roads and after a few years it was rare to see stock of any kind and he rode on. Days of the world. Years of the world. Till he was old. (McCarthy, *Cities* 264)

The hero's destruction is the inevitable result of his attempt to preserve those he loves, whether the cost is mortality or exile, the hero's only recompense is separation.

However, failure is not always requisite in the breaking of the protective McCarthy Code Hero. The unnamed father in McCarthy's Post Apocalyptic novel, *The Road* is a formidable protector of his young son. The father's brokenness issues from his shattered physical condition. Though there is no explanation of exactly what ails the father, the ubiquitous ash that permeates the landscape of the road, coupled with the man's constant cough and bloody sputum, suggest a fatal ailment; perhaps tuberculosis or lung cancer. He

is a man with no purpose other than his mission. After their first encounter with "the bad guys" he tells the boy, "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you" (McCarthy, *The Road* 80). This mission is what permits the father to continue even beyond the limits of what should be humanly possible.

The McCarthy code hero is defined by his internal mandate to protect at all costs, even his own peril, and it is a mandate that will leave those that it does not kill broken in some irreparable way. From the Western protagonists of the Border Trilogy to *The Road*'s nameless father, the McCarthy Code hero is a damaged knight errant whose code of chivalry is and must be his undoing.

He has a tentative, adversarial, relationship with God

It has been posited by critics that the Modernists killed God. As such, the absence of a deity leaves a gaping emptiness that pervades much of Modernist literature. As Mehmood states, "The Code Hero believes in nothing. Along with this, there is no after life" ("The Hemingway Code"). Hemingway's heroes rejected God outright, fearful only of the certainty of non-existence at the conclusion of a life spent in pursuit of achieving something meaningful. The McCarthy code hero breaks from the postmodern sensibilities, and accepts the possibility of God's existence. However, the McCarthy hero is not a man of faith in the orthodox sense. At best he is distrustful of God and at worst, as in the case of the protagonist of McCarthy's last novel, in direct opposition to Him. Early on in *The Passenger* Bobby Western's comrade, the felonious intellectual John Sheddan, says of him, "After all, I am an enemy of society while HE is one of God." (McCarthy *The Passenger* 29). This as a result of his troubled relationship with his late sister and the anger he carries toward both God and his own internal moral code which kept them from acting on their

forbidden love. Common in McCarthy's body of work, protagonists regard the Creator with an often times untenable faith, but a clear certainty of His existence.

The protagonists of the Border Trilogy illustrate contrasting examples of the hero's relationship with God. John Grady Cole, speaks of God in an intimate conversation with his lover Magdalena. She asks him about his beliefs and "after a while he said that he believed in God even if he was doubtful of men's claims to know God's mind. But that a God who was unable to forgive was no God at all" (*Cities* 206). It is a question he will ponder again at the end of his young life. After his final confrontation with the Eduardo. Weakened and bleeding, John Grady offers a short, terse, prayer "Help me, he said. If you think I'm worth it. Amen" (McCarthy, *Cities* 257). When Billy Parham finds him wounded and hiding in the alley, John Grady tells him,

> You know we talked about where people go when they die. I just believe you go someplace and I seen her layin there and I thought maybe she wouldnt go to heaven because, you know, I thought she wouldn't and I thought about God forgivin people and I thought if I could ask God to forgive me for killin that son of a bitch because you and me both know I aint sorry for it and I reckon this sounds ignorant but I didnt want to be forgiven if she wasnt. I didnt want to do nothin or be nothin that she wasnt like going to heaven or anything like that. (McCarthy *Cities* 258-259)

While John Grady demonstrates none of the external trappings of faith, there remains a quiet belief in God. A God who regards the affairs and the world of men with at best an economic measure of benevolence while leaving His justice in the hands of men both young and old, each exacting a terrible price for its administration.

A stark contrast to John Grady's faith is the harder, more embittered creed of the trilogy's other protagonist, Billy Parham. In the second book of McCarthy's Border Trilogy, the adolescent Billy, abroad in Mexico seeking his family's stolen horses, is advised by an older man that,

> Men do not turn from God so easily. Not so easily. Deep in each man is the knowledge that something knows of his existence. Something knows, and cannot be fled nor hid from. To imagine otherwise is to imagine the unspeakable. It was never that this man ceased to believe in God. No. It was rather that he came to believe terrible things of him. (McCarthy, *The Crossing* 148).

This sentiment comes to a terrible realization in the final novel of the trilogy, when Billy leaves John Grady momentarily to fetch water and returns only to find his friend deceased. Billy's resentful antipathy toward the Creator is reflected in his harsh benediction as "he called out to the broken day against them all and he called out to God to see what was before his eyes. Look at this, he called. Do you see? Do you see?" (*Cities* 260-261). Billy Parhams echoes the words of the old man from his youth. His own tenuous relationship with God reflected as Billy rages against Him for His inaction, for His refusal to save his surrogate brother, believing not in God's absence, but His indifference. Billy Parham's view of God in *The Border Trilogy* is the same as that of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell thirty years later in the Texas of *No Country for Old Men.* Sheriff Bell in a conversation with his Uncle Ellis posits that he believes God incapable of stopping the evil that pervades the Texas landscape.

Yet not all of McCarthy's heroes bear such certainty regarding the existence of God. Bobby Western, is conversing with his grandmother when she inquires of him, "Do

you believe in God, Bobby?" to which he replies, "I don't know, Granellen. You asked me that before. I told you. I don't know anything. The best I can say is that I think he and I have pretty much the same opinions. On my better days anyway" (McCarthy, *The Passenger* 180). Bobby, having glanced at the universe through the lens of Physics and failing to glimpse God, experiences a sea-change in his cynical agnosticism. This change is brought about solely by the inequity of a world where his sister, his greatest and only love, is denied him by the laws of society and of God. The final lines of the novel reflect this change, stating, "He knew that on the day of his death he would see her face and he could hope to carry that beauty into the darkness with him, the last pagan on earth, singing softly upon his pallet in an unknown tongue" (McCarthy *The Passenger* 383). What Billy Parham believed is echoed in the thoughts of Bobby Western, and this terrible certainty of God's cruelty leaves him no alternative but to deny the Creator outright.

The Hero is Pursued

In the aftermath of the Second World War, with the dawning of the nuclear age, there was a sense of cultural paranoia that infused post-modern literature. In *All the Pretty Horses*, in the last meeting, John Grady's father states, "People don't feel safe no more. We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We don't know what's goin to show up here come daylight. We don't even know what color they'll be" (McCarthy ATPH 26). The nagging sense of some sinister force, on the periphery seeking our ruin, haunts McCarthy's cowboys as well as his unfortunate Physicist, Bobby Western. The McCarthy Code hero is always at some point a man on the run, pursued by forces bent on his destruction.

In some cases, the pursuit is explicit, as with the case of John Grady Cole and Billy Parham, on the one hand pursued by the Jefe's men, on the other by Federales. Or No Country for Old Men's Louellen Moss, who finds himself chased first by Cartel enforcers and then later by the enigmatic hitman, Anton Chigurh. McCarthy's cowboys are pursued, often unjustly, caught up in either the pursuit of what was rightfully theirs by claim, or implicated in the crimes of another.

Billy Parham and his brother Boyd seek only to recover their father's stolen horses, and having secured them, find themselves pursued by vaqueros whose employer ignores the documents that prove the horses' ownership. John Grady and Rawlins run afoul of Mexican villagers while attempting to help their riding partner Blevins recover his lost Bay, a horse whose provenance is at best questionable.

Perhaps the most unjustly pursued is Bobby Western, who upon returning from a salvage operation to the mysterious wreck of a private jet, suddenly finds himself at odds with unnamed government agencies. These dark suited minions continue to hector Western, their unwanted visits seeming to bear some vague relationship to his father's World War II era work on the atomic bomb. Western, finds his bank accounts frozen, his safe deposit box sealed, and his Maserati and passport seized by the Internal Revenue Service. Western is given little to no explanation as to why he is being pursued. He seeks the assistance of a private investigator named Kline. In the following exchange Kline advises him,

> The unpleasant truth is that if someone is trying to kill you there is not a whole you can do about it. Your only real safety would be in disappearing. And even with that there are no guarantees.
>
> I've thought about that. It seems like something of a last resort.

It is. The last resort save one.

Yes.

The wicked flee though no one pursues. It's Bobby, right?

Yes.

What is it that you've done?

I wish I knew….

Since you don't know what they want with you it's hard to know what sort of effort they might put into looking for you.

But if they want to find you they will.

Oh yes. (McCarthy, *The Passenger* 220-221)

Like the McCarthy's other heroes, Western finds himself hunted, and with no alternative but to run. In keeping with the spirit most postmodern texts, the overwhelming sense of paranoia saturates Bobby Western's narrative. He is uncertain of who or what is chasing him, only that it is a malevolent force that seeks his destruction. In the same discussion with Kline, quoting John Grady from All the Pretty Horses, Western states "As a friend of mine once said: I would rather make a good run than a bad stand" (Passenger 221). He is left with little choice but to flee. In his flight, Western is pursued both by his government and the memories and the guilt he bears over family and friends that he has lost.

The Code Hero is Haunted

In each of the novels we have discussed, the hero finds himself haunted by the specters of his past. These visions come to the hero in dreams or in the waking recollections of their failed endeavors. *The Passenger's* Bobby Western is twice haunted; first by the memory of his dead sister, Alicia. The nightmare and its horrifying events —a vision of their non-existent deformed progeny presented to him by some spectral

obstetrician— the result of his troubled mind's efforts to reconcile the fact that he never acted upon his love for his sister. This is evidenced by Western's questions about the child's viability, the presence of a soul, and what must be done. Later in the novel, after he has received word of his friend, the scofflaw Long John Sheddan's passing, he is visited by Sheddan's ghost. In their final meeting by ghost light in a closed theater, Sheddan takes Western to task about his treatment of him in life. He complains,

> You called me Beelzebubba.
>
> I called you what?
>
> Beelzebubba. You don't remember .
>
> I remember. You were not amused.
>
> No. A fake God and you shrug your shoulders. But a fake Satan can only be laughable. And there's the implied bumpkinhood…. I've little to lay at your door, Squire, but I wasn't treated well. All in all. A bit late for complaints I suppose. To some extent you wrote me off as a parlor intellectual. (McCarthy, *The Passenger* 376).

However, this is incongruous with Sheddan's own assessment of Western as indicated by his final letter to Bobby in which he states that in their 20-year association, Bobby never criticized him. The last conversation is not Sheddan's opinion of Western, but merely a manifestation of the guilt he carries over his old friend. This is further borne out by the ghost's explanation of how a theater can never be dark, due to the ghost light which is perpetually lit. In the case of Bobby Western, this is yet another pallet in the rather large freight of guilt that he carries for those whom he could not save. This same guilt, a product of Western's tormented mind, manifests in the appearance of the Thalidomide Kid, the self-identified fragment of his sister Alicia's psyche. The Kid haunted Alicia's unoccupied

hours with his cadre of vaudeville acts she referred to has the "horts." Just as Sheddan does, the Kid leaves Western without any solid answers and without comfort; he simply recedes down the beach after goading Western into an emotional breakdown.

In similar fashion, the protagonists of the Border Trilogy are haunted by the specters of loss and failure which alternately torment and comfort them, in some cases, driving them to continue on their ill-defined quests. In Saltillo prison in Mexico, John Grady is visited by the ghost of his lost companion Blevins. In his troubled sleep, "He'd dreamt of him one night Saltillo and Blevins came to sit beside him and they talked of what it was like to be dead and Blevins said that it like nothing at all and he believed him" (McCarthy, *ATPH* 225). The foundation of this haunting is the hero's supreme loneliness. This loneliness is born of an insurmountable personal loss, either familial or romantic, that forever alters the course of the hero's journey. This loneliness defines the hero, in that he is alone even in the company of his cohorts. They may share his company, even a measure intimacy, but they will never bridge the distance between themselves and the hero.

The McCarthy hero exists in a state of near perpetual solitude, even in the company of others. He is a man set apart, but the loneliness that defines him is not of his own making, nor is it his desire. As a result, he is a haunted man. This haunting is of his own creation and is best explained in a passage from *The Road*. In the Man's last conversation with his wife in after the tragedy that burned the world, she tells him of her plans for self-destruction. Dismissing all of his objections, she tells him,

> The one thing I can tell you is you won't survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far. A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your

> body. As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart. (McCarthy, *The Road* 59)

This ghost she speaks of is the companion that drives the hero onward, otherwise he would succumb to the destructive forces that continually stalk him. McCarthy's heroes differ from Hemingway's modernist counterparts in that their loneliness is filled with ghosts rather than the vast nothingness that Hemingway dreaded.

The McCarthy hero, is indeed haunted, but he is haunted by phantoms of his own creation. In the post-modern world McCarthy's heroes occupy, God is at best a rumor and at worst an enigmatic and miserly father, capriciously doling out his favors with no distinguishable pattern. In the yawning isolation of such a universe, the McCarthy Code Hero must assemble his own companions because he has no peer, none who could follow him on his quest as they are either unequal to the task or torn away from him by fate. In the absence of other allies, the hero crafts those who will not leave him as a bulwark against the cruelty of their respective worlds.

Final Thoughts

The McCarthy Hero much like his Hemingway predecessor is a codified hero. Mehmood argues of Hemingway's work, "The Code Hero measures himself by how well he handles the difficult situations that life throws at him. In the end the Code Hero will lose because we are all mortal, but the true measure is how a person faces death" ("The Hemingway Code"). While McCarthy's protagonists' focus is less concerned with death and how they face it. They are not aggrieved at the prospect of death, being possessed of some vague understanding of an afterlife, whatever form it may take. The McCarthy hero is well aware of his impending doom, likely at the hands of the vague and sinister forces that pursue him. However, they do not pursue their inevitable end because they do not

face it alone, accompanied as they are by the spectral companions of the associates they have lost. These same associates who will be awaiting them on the other side of the veil. Unlike Hemingway's protagonists, it is not an honorable death after some meaningful achievement that drives the McCarthy hero. The hero makes a good run, overtaken in the act of tenaciously surviving the running battles with the forces that seek his destruction. In the end it is the good run over the bad stand that defines the McCarthy hero. His failures compounded, he is ultimately destroyed, or exiled; this destruction is as codified in the hero's make up as his DNA.

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begin.”

Post-World War II Predicaments of Necropolitical Power: Its Continuous Impact on Korea in Post-Japanese Annexation

By Sakira Crawford

Abstract: Achille Mbembe's paper, *Necropolitics*, investigates the question of race as it pertains to Michel Foucault's biopolitics. Mbembe's paper highlights the concept sovereignty and their presumed divine right to kill for the benefit of the living. This paper will refer to the works in relation to Mbembe's including Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* where he examines the overall concept of biopolitics and Lauren Berlant's *Slow Death*, in which she discusses the "steady deterioration" of a whole population via sovereign power. This paper will analyze Mbembe's *Necropolitics* and its relation to the geographical site of Korea—specifically the Japanese annexation's continuous impact on Korea's educational system. Given the extensive research of necropolitics within the Western hemisphere, this paper's purpose is to investigate necropolitics in a non-Western context; specifically, within the Japanese annexation of Korea during the second World War. The research question of this paper is how the necropolitics at play in the annexation continues to affect Korea's education system today, and whether Korea has been freed from Japan's positioning of Korea as a "fundamental enemy" given Japan's sociopolitical power decline post-World War II.

The primary text of examination will be Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* in which he highlights the concept sovereignty and the presumed divine right to kill for the benefit of the living. In this article, Mbembe analyzes Foucault's theory of biopolitics and the sociopolitical power of a sovereignty to determine who has the right to live. Necropolitics is a specific branch of biopolitics that focuses on the fictionalized notion of the enemy, an enemy that is always racialized, to benefit what Mbembe terms as the "demos." The demos are the population protected and understood as the "people" of the sovereign state, whereas the racialized other is reduced to being the "living dead." Mbembe writes that the state "exercises [their] sovereignty [by] exercising control over mortality and [in defining] life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (12). This suggests that sovereignty enhances their sociopolitical power through exercising the assumed right over the living dead's deaths in the name of demos life. Mbembe's work addresses various instances of necropolitics—such as the Nazi state and Palestinian occupation, both in which a geographical area was dominated and occupied for the benefit of "the living," enabling the demos to thrive. However, Mbembe does not address examples of necropolitics pertaining to the Eastern hemisphere. Thus, the point interest for this paper is to illustrate how necropolitics functioned during Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 to 1945 and the continued impact to Korea's educational system, even beyond World War II.

In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe addresses political power and how having that power relates to the determination of the lives of the public. In Mbembe's seminal paper published in 2003, he suggests that the "ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die" (11). Thus, to "exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (Mbembe 12). This theory is born from the concept of biopower by Foucault, which suggests that those who have power also claim to have control over who has the right to continue living. Politics within biopower is "twofold: a project of autonomy and the achieving of agreement among a collectivity through communication and recognition" (Foucault 13). This then brings along a majority agreement of who is deemed the political and social enemy. Foucault claims that the function of racism in biopolitics is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state," making it acceptable to kill people (17). Mbembe's theory of necropolitics is Foucauldian by nature and relies on the themes of biopolitical power and Foucault's work can be recognized as background context of Mbembe's theory of necropolitics. Necropolitics is a particular sector of biopolitics, where biopolitics focuses on the power over life, necropolitics focuses on those same politics, but from a racialized standpoint. Viewing the themes of necropolitics alongside biopolitics will aid in understanding the roles of such politics during the Japanese annexation of Korea. The utilization of power over life for the survival of the living was a prime ideological assumption of Japan, as their goal in annexing Korea was to claim dominion over the peoples and the geographical region for increased political power within East Asia. There is a control and sociopolitical power that distinguishes people into subgroups, or races, that

make it easier to distinguish between, according to Foucault, "the ones, and the others" (Foucault 17), in this case the Japanese and the Koreans. Race, writes Foucault is the "ever present shadow in Western political thought and practice, especially when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples" (Foucault 17). These racial distinctions create a divide between those with divine right, known as the ones, and those on the line between life and death, known as the others. Power "refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy" (Foucault 16). Through this, the "others" are targeted as the fundamental enemy and the one that either can be on demands to be killed for the "security" of life for the ones. Mbembe addresses the example of the Nazi state, claiming that the demos "made the management, protection, and cultivation of life coextensive with the sovereign right to kill" through the "theme of the political enemy, in organizing the war against its adversaries and, at the same time, exposing its own citizens to war" (17). The other is seen as a "moral threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen [the one's] potential to life and security" to which "that sovereignty consists of the will and the capacity to kill in order to live" (Mbembe 18). Mbembe mentions "colonial occupation" and defines it as "a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area" (25). In colonial occupation, he writes the "colonial state derives its fundamental claim of sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative of history and identity. This narrative itself underpinned by the idea that the state has a divine right to exist; the narrative competes with another for the same sacred space" (Mbembe 27). In the case of Japan, they achieved this by utilizing military force—having both Japanese and involuntary Koreans serve to limit Korean citizens in their right to many resources. The ones and the others are

both fighting to live and to have divine right over a geographical area. Colonial occupation "is not only akin to control, surveillance, and separation" but it is "also tantamount to seclusion" (Mbembe 28). Through means of colonial occupation, the ones get control over the racialized others which leads to their separation as well as their seclusion from interaction with the ones. There is no distinction between "the external and the internal enemy," suggesting that "entire populations are the target of the sovereign" (Mbembe 30). This places mass populations under the "[subjectivity] to conditions of life" where they are given the status of "living dead" (Mbembe 40). The others are thus placed on a tightrope between life and death where death can approach them at any second.

Toyokichi Iyenaga's paper, "Japan's Annexation of Korea," gives a detailed description of Japan's annexation of Korea from before the annexation commenced to after that annexation ended. Iyenaga states that one of Japan's motives behind their decision to annex Korea was in order to "insure [its] own national safety"—suggesting that Korea was basically "a spear pointed at [Japan's] heart" (201). The Japanese felt a growing threat of Korea's independence in the East Asian sphere and felt they needed to annex Korea to prevent their own national insecurity. Japanese culture seeped its way into Korean ways of living, one method being by signing the Anglo-Japanese treaty in 1905 which gave Japan rights to manage the Korean government (Iyenaga 202). Japan started to take over Korea gradually, by preventing foreign government interference and placing Japanese government officials in what is now Korea's modern-day capital, Seoul. This quickly turns into the brutal annexation process of Korea, where the Japanese government reformed Korean government, educational systems, and resources available to the Korean citizens for the worse. As it pertains to education, Iyenaga states that there was "no regular system of public

education" in Korea until recently; claiming the methods of teaching "was still worse" compared to that of China (208). This effect of education in Korea is due to the Japanese annexation. The Korean education system follows the same structure of "that adopted in Japan" and educational authorities "wisely planned not to destroy" the "old educational structures" in the assumption that it could be gradually replaced with something that could "serve as models to Koreans" (Iyenaga 209). The Japanese took control of the Korean education system internally and externally. Not only were there effects on who got to teach the classrooms, but there was an influence on the *types* of schools available and the material that was taught. At the time of the annexation, Koreans were inhibited from speaking Korean and were culturally assimilated in their education to learn the Japanese language. Iyenaga then goes to claim that the "centuries of misrule in Korea" have created a massive gap between "intellectual and moral qualities of Koreans and Japanese" which would only be resolved through "agencies of time and history" (Iyenaga 220). This signified only a portion of the ongoing impact of Japan's annexation of Korea, and the irreversible damage of such.

One of Japan's tactics to exercise sovereignty was by monitoring and restricting not just the quality of life for Koreans, but the quantity of Koreans living. Jin-kyung Park's article does an analysis of the 'population problem' that the Japanese deemed over the Korean geographical area, and the means the Japanese government used to "solve" that problem. Park claims that regarding the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese empire thought that "management of *jinkō mondai* ["population problem'] was equated with the fate of the empire" (4). Park goes to explain that the Japanese empire kept tabs on the Korean population because their "national productivity was contingent on the size of the national

population"—meaning the "population growth rate" was "considered" and "calculated in relation to the [Japanese] empire at large" (6). The Japanese wanted to manage, and decrease, the large populations of other East Asian countries to maintain the security of their own people. The Japanese empire figured the solution to the population issue was to expand overseas. Tōgō suggested that "[constructing towns] in overseas territories and transplanting the surplus population there [would] ensure the happiness of the Japanese people" (Park 8); with one of those geographical areas for Japanese dispersion being the Korean Peninsula. The Japanese empire did not take into consideration the happiness of the neighboring East Asian countries. They merely focused on the survival of their own people and the enhancements that could be made to their own lives at the expense of those countries. Foucault even touches on population control by stating that the power over life is executed via "disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population," which Park highlights in her paper (Foucault 139). Foucault claims that the body is used as a disciplinary device to maintain and to eliminate life. In Lauren Berlant's *Slow Death*, she discusses the political, sovereign, effect on society. She suggests that slow death is "the physical wearing out of a population" and that the "deterioration" of these peoples is a "defining condition of their experience and historical existence" (754). Berlant takes on Mbembe's and Foucault's ideas of sovereignty to argue a new definition: stating "sovereign agency under a regime of sovereignty and under a regime of biopower" is essentially "a distinction between individual life and collective living on" (756). Berlant's idea of sovereign power is that it affects not only individuals, but the masses and their well-being systematically. All these sources can be tied into the cultural assimilation that took place in geographical Korea. During the annexation period, Korean peoples were forced into

cultural assimilation—especially on the educational level. Not only were the Japanese migrating to Korea and reconstructing the region to fit their needs, but they also lowered the quality of life for the Korean habitants by committing acts such as requiring Koreans to change their names to Japanese ones, as well as prohibiting use of Korean language and culture to reinforce Japanese language and customs.

In Jason De Leon's chapter "Necroviolence," he discusses how violence was used in the desert between Mexico and the U.S. to get rid of the dead through misplacement. De Leon does this by comparing the process of slaughtering a pig to border enforcement, claiming that these enforcements "set the stage for scavenging animals to come into close and (from a human perspective) violent contact with the bodies of hundreds of fallen border crossers a year" (64). De Leon states that he would kill the pigs because they were of no use for his research, connecting his experience with the pigs to how the U.S. government treats migrating peoples: "the federal government holds the problematic view that migrants are *bare life*, or individuals whose deaths are of little consequence" (64). De Leon uses this metaphor of the pig to highlight issues of U.S. border control and its purpose of keeping certain groups of people out of the United States. Given the post-World War II state of Koreas, there is a current divide that is now North and South Korea—which is a result of the Japanese annexation of Korea. In De Leon's Necropolitics section, he states that the U.S.-Mexico border acts as a "space of exception where human and constitutional rights are suspended in the name of security" (68). This directly reflects the border between current North and South Korea. The two Koreas separated after the Japanese annexation due to their differing approaches to government and a border was created to prevent Koreans from either side crossing into the next country. At this border, people are shot and killed if they

attempt to escape North Korea and are captured and detained if found trying to enter from South Korea. This ties in well with Mbembe's *Necropolitics* as Mbembe talks about how race is the "shadow in Western political thought" that there is an "inhumanity of […] foreign peoples" (Mbembe 17). Mbembe emphasizes this idea of animality and how those who aren't human beings, or a true "subject", are "*savage life*" and therefore "is just another form of *animal life*" (24).

Mbembe's work focuses more on the Western examples of necropolitics, such as Nazi Germany and the plantations, yet limits his examination of necropolitical examples to only the Western hemisphere. Yu Gwansun's experience as an activist from 1919 to 1920 during Japan's annexation is a great example to draw on the necropolitics at play in a non-Western context. She was only a girl in her teens when she faced adversity in the latter portion of the annexation period. She is known for her resilience against the Japanese government and her undying loyalty to Korea, as she "helped organize more protests" with one of them expanding to "2,000 demonstrators from four neighboring towns" ("Yu Gwan-sun – Korea's Joan of Arc"). She refused to cooperate with Japanese officials, continued to sing songs of Korean freedom, and waved the Korean flag to show her desire for Korean independence—all of which were activities that Koreans were banned from doing during this period. His main idea is how sovereign power exercises "right to decide life and death" (135). Through this assumed right, the sovereign power eliminates those who is a threat to its own existence for the sake of survival. In this case, Yu Gwansun was taken by the Japanese and accused of her rebellion against the Japanese regime. Yet, even after Yu Gwansun got arrested, her passion for Korean independence did not fade away. The police offered a lighter sentence to her only "if she would admit guilt and cooperate" ("Yu Gwnan-

sun – Korea's Joan of Arc"). To this, Yu Gwansun stood in trail and claimed the Japanese had no right to judge guilt given their invasion of Korea. Power is "a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself […] in order to suppress it" (Foucault 135-136), we see how the suppression of Yu Gwansun's choice to speak against the Japanese led to her extended sentence and brutal treatment in prison. Unfortunately, she died in the prison just days before she was set to be released due to being tortured in prison; just days before she could see the impact that she has made on Korean society with her own eyes. The ones in power exercise that power via deduction of the racialized other to bring themselves to a higher sociopolitical positioning. Deduction in this sense works to "incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize" those under the power (Foucault 136). The Koreans who were imprisoned with Yu Gwansun were left to starve, and even die, reflecting Mbembe's point that such detainment is the very exercise of sovereignty and demonstrates necropolictial power. There were even a few Koreans who supported the Japanese regime and accepted the execution of the Japanese language, as well as served the Japanese government to further strengthen the regime and continuation of power over Korea. Regardless of the choice of some to side with the Japanese, they were still equally as much potential to be an enemy as everyone else. Some of these Korean soldiers were killed by Japanese soldiers for their change of heart, some for their spy-like tendencies in secretly aiding the Koreans, and some merely because they were of Korean race—even if they were devoutly loyal to the Japanese. According to Foucault, the power in "[exposing] a whole population to death" is equivalent to "the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence"—suggesting that a whole group must die for the "name of life necessity" (137). The Japanese accomplished this by using cooperative Koreans to further enhance their

assimilation procedures—commanding the obeying Koreans to regulate those who retaliate, and reporting to the Japanese if any Koreans showed signs of rebellion (i.e.: speaking Korean or participating in Korean traditions.) The Japanese government used necropolitics in an attempt to commit genocide against the Korean race for the sake of higher power for their own, and to preserve the right of living for the Japanese. Koreans were perceived as a moral threat to the Japanese, and the Japanese believed that only the erasure of Koreans, their fundamental enemy, would strengthen their quality of living. Japan's annexation of Korea is a perfect example of necropolitics, because the Japanese claimed a right to kill through many reasonings, one being the fact that Koreans were a race different from their own, and that Koreans stood in their way of ultimate sociopolitical power over the desired geographical area, to which the Koreans had to die.

Mbembe's theory of necropolitics can be applied to geographical locations beyond the Western hemisphere, with one of those sites being Korea. Korea was affected, and is still impacted, by the necropolitical power executed by the Japanese during World War II. In particular, the Japanese annexation played a major role in the shift of the Korean educational system. Korean citizens were assimilated into forceful discouragement from participating in Korean traditions and from speaking their native tongue. The education system at this time taught only Japanese language and customs, as well as maintained control over Korean students via reinforcement of the Japanese ideology for a strengthened Japanese empire. Mbembe's *Necropolitics,* along with the other mentioned works, aids in this investigation into how Korea's educational system has been impacted by the Japanese annexation, and how it continues to affect Korea in the modern day. More research would need to be conducted to answer the question of whether Japan's sociopolitical sovereignty

over Korea has truly decreased and freed Koreans from the "living dead" status. Nevertheless, modern day Koreans have continued to keep Yu Gwansun's legacy alive by teaching about her impact and the history of the annexation as part of history curriculum in schools, but also by honoring her resistance on March 1st each year—which marks the observation of their Independence Movement Day. On this day, various activities such as reading the Declaration of Independence in Seoul and raising the national flag in homes and institutions are held to remind the youth and the world of what the nation has overcame and continue to overcome.

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Mystery Elements in Harold Bell Wright's Ozarks Novels

By John J. Han

Introduction

As a bestselling Ozarks writer whose second novel, *The Shepherd of the Hills* (1907), alone sold more than two million copies, Harold Bell Wright still commands a sizable audience, especially among Christians and Ozarkers. In addition to the serious themes of morality, sin and redemption, Christian service, and the restorative power of nature, his fiction contains mystery elements, often making his stories suspenseful and thrilling.

As a critically overlooked author, Wright has received little attention from scholars except for Phillip Howerton, Carroll F. Burcham, Erin A. Smith, and a handful of others. Most critical comments tend to focus on Wright's connection with Branson, his moral messages, and the beauty of the Ozark Mountains portrayed in his novels. This paper investigates an area rarely discussed in Harold Bell Wright studies: his Ozarks novels as morality-driven thrillers somewhat akin to John Grisham's novels.[1]

Specifically, this paper will focus on several common elements of crime fiction[2] in three of Wright's Ozarks novels: *That Printer of Udell's* (1903), *The Shepherd of the Hills*, and *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent* (1914). We will examine some of the usual literary devices, such as a "story hook," an atmospheric setting, a crime, a villain, and a satisfying ending in each story, all of which are common in fictional stories marked by suspense and mystery.

Chasing the Bad Guy: *That Printer of Udell's*

In *That Printer of Udell's*, his first novel, the main plot follows the story of the title character's poverty and hunger, his spiritual growth under the mentorship of the Rev. James Cameron, his lay ministry, and his departure for Washington, D.C., where a promising future as a politician awaits him. At the beginning of the novel, he appears as a tramp from Kansas City, where he was a printer. As he enters Boyd City, modeled after the then-mining town of Pittsburg, Kansas, he is encouraged by the prospect of finding some Christians who would help him find employment. However, he is not welcomed at a local church, and no one is willing to help him until a non-Christian named George Udell, who is known among Christians, as "the so-called infidel" (Wright, *That Printer* 278), gives him a job. Resisting their initial doubts about churches as social institutions, the two men become Christians and practice one of Christ's two key commands: love your neighbor as yourself.

A subplot in this thriller involves a mountain outlaw named Jim Whitley. Wright's main characters tend to be either good or evil, and Whitley appears as purely evil and unredeemable in this work. He has "an evil smile" (220), is angry and vengeful, and extorts people. He lusts after Amy Goodrich, a young woman who is fed up with her self-righteous Christian parents and flees from home. He follows her on the train, locates her, and schemes to make her his wife. Having no one to protect her in another state, she initially agrees to marry him, but his shady character makes her change her mind. With curses, he leaves her. Having run out of money, Amy is close to becoming a prostitute in Cleveland, Ohio.

Back in the Ozarks, Whitley goes into hiding in Arkansas where he hires a local mountaineer named Jack to evade detection by the authorities and the locals. Whitley pays Jake a significant amount of money for his help and reveals his desire to eliminate Dick Falkner, whom he perceives as a threat. Unfortunately for Whitley, Jack used to be Dick's father's good friend. The situation escalates into a dramatic confrontation between Whitley and Jake as Whitley attempts to overpower Jake to fulfill his murderous intentions toward Dick. However, Jake's superior strength and skill prevail, leading to a fatal outcome for Whitley. As Whitley lies dying, he attempts to convey a message, but he succumbs to his injuries before he can complete his plea. Before he dies, Whitley manages to tell Jack that Amy remains untainted as a young woman:

"You—have—killed—me—" Whitley gasped.

"I reckon that's about hit, mister."

"Tell—Falkner—I—lied—Amy—is—innocent—and tell—"[3]

But the sentence was never finished. (241)

Perhaps, as a moralist, the author could not let her fall into sin. Incidentally, the murder occurs inside the house where Dick was born, which may seem too coincidental. The author seems to expect his readers to focus on the moral of the story instead of the plausibility of the scene.

The hero in this work is Dick Falkner, who tries his best to protect Amy from her hypocritical, judgmental father. He pledges to "fix" the villain (226), making readers follow the story to learn whether—and how—the good guy will defeat the bad guy. When Amy

disappears, Dick uses his own money to hire a detective who appears in the last two pages of Chapter 17. Thereafter, the detective stops pursuing the case: "Gradually the interest on the part of the citizens subsided, and the detective returned to other mysteries demanding his attention" (181).[4] Then, like a medieval knight rescuing a damsel in distress, he rescues her and brings her back home.

In a plot twist, Adam Goodrich—Amy's hypocritical father—accuses Dick of having enticed her. Dick rebukes his ingratitude, telling him that he merely saved his daughter:

"You have said quite enough," continued Dick, calmly, "and you are going to listen to me now. […] You would not have listened to me then, nor believed me, had I told you what I knew. But the time has come when you *shall* listen, and be forced to know that I speak the truth."

Adam sat as though fascinated. Once he attempted to answer, but a quick "Silence, sir, you *shall* hear me," kept him still, while Dick detailed the whole story, omitting nothing from the evening when he had rescued Amy from her drunken escort, to the day he had said good-bye in the Ozark Mountains. When he had finished, Adam sat silent for a moment. (293; italics in original)

Dick and Amy—a masculine, upright man and a charmingly beautiful woman, respectively—end up marrying. As a snobbish man, Adam is reluctant to permit his daughter to marry a "miserable vagabond" (176) like Dick. However, Dick has proven himself to be a man of integrity, and Amy chooses him despite her father's disapproval. In this regard, *That Printer of Udell's* can be classified as a crime novel with a touch of romance.

The Villain's Father Meets the Victim's Father: *The Shepherd of the Hills*

The most famous novel by Wright, *The Shepherd of the Hills* is an Ozark story of sin, redemption, and forgiveness. It tells the story of a Chicago pastor's search for truth in the Ozarks where his wayward son committed the sin of impregnating and then deserting a young woman. She ends up dying during labor, and her father, Old Matt, has pledged vengeance. Old Matt hires the pastor, Dad Howitt, as a shepherd, and the two become friends. As a learned, culturally refined man, Dad Howitt soon becomes a mentor to the mountain folks, especially Sammy Lane, who later marries Young Matt. After discovering Dad Howitt's identity, Old Matt forgives him, and the story ends on a happy note.

From the beginning, the story is shrouded in mystery. First, a stranger appears in the Ozarks: "It was corn-planting time, when the stranger followed the Old Trail into the Mutton Hollow neighborhood" (Wright, *Shepherd* 21). The words "stranger" and "strange" are used more than 100 times in the story, and the locals are curious about his background and the reason for his arrival in the Ozark Mountains. The word "queer," which meant *strange* in the author's time, appears ten times in the narrative.

Somewhat like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the initial setting of the story feels eerie as illustrated by a scene in Chapter 1: "The stranger, looking, thought he saw a form, weird and ghost-like in the mist, flitting from tree to tree, but, even as he looked, it vanished among the hundreds of fantastic shapes in the gray forest" (23).[5] Some chapters later, the movement turns out to be that of Dad Howitt's grandson—Pete, the intellectually

challenged child born of Old Matt's now-deceased daughter. It would be easy to "fancy the child some wandering spirit of the woods and hills" (39).

When Dad Howitt meets Pete, who is now fifteen years old, for the first time, he quickly recognizes him as his grandson. The boy is "the perfect image" of his son, Howard (38). The author resolves the mystery for the reader through conversations. In Chapter 5, for instance, Dad Howitt asks Pete who he is, who his father is, and who his mother is:

> A sudden thought came to Mr. Howitt. "Who is your father, my boy?"
>
> Instantly the brightness vanished; again the words were a puzzled moan; "I ain't got no father, Mister; I ain't me; nobody can't have no father, can he?"
>
> […]
>
> Aloud, he asked, "Has Pete a mother, too?"
>
> The youth nodded toward the big pine that grew to one side of the group, and, lowering his voice, replied, "That's Pete's mother."
>
> Mr. Howitt pointed to the grave; "You mean she sleeps there?" (38-39)

In this manner, Dad Howitt and readers learn about what happened to Pete's parents.

In the rest of the story, Wright adds suspense and thrills by depicting Old Matt's possible response to the revelation that Dad Howitt is the father of the young man responsible for his only daughter's death. At the end of Chapter 40, for instance, Dad Howitt realizes it is time to confess his son's transgression against Old Matt's daughter. He

begins by stating the gravity of what the mountaineer is about to hear: "I expect to live here [in Mutton Hollow] until the end if you will let me. But I fear you will not want me to stay when you know what I've come to tell you this evening" (174). Old Matt, who reveres Dad Howitt as a scholar and Christian, assures him that nothing he hears will trouble him. Dad Howitt further prepares Old Matt—and his wife Molly—for the dreadful truth: "'Not even if it should be the grave under the pine yonder?' asked the other in a low voice" (175). The mere mention of the grave, where his daughter is buried, startles Old Matt. Dad Howitt musters the courage to disclose the truth:

> The old scholar looked away to Dewey Bald for strength. "Mr. Matthews," he said, "you once told me a story. It was here on this porch when I first came to you. It was a sad tale of a great crime. To-night I know the other side of that story. I've come to tell you."
>
> At the strange words, Aunt Mollie's face turned as white as her apron. Old Matt grasped the arms of his chair, as though he would crush the wood, as he said shortly, "Go on."
>
> At the tone of his voice, the old shepherd's heart sank. (175)

Thus ends Chapter 40, leaving readers in suspense. How will Old Matt respond to the confession? Will he kill him? Will he forgive him? Here the author uses the technique of a cliffhanger, a common element of suspenseful crime thrillers.

Hiding the Runaway Criminal: ***The Re-Creation of Brian Kent***

The Re-Creation of Brian Kent tells the story of the title character's spiritual transformation under the mentorship of Auntie Sue Wakefield, a retired schoolteacher who lives in a "log house by the river" in the Ozark Mountains (Wright, *Re-Creation* 5). As a thirty-year-old bank teller in Chicago, Brian embezzled a large sum of money and then fled with it. Upon arriving in the Ozarks, he intends to commit suicide in the river, but Auntie Sue, who is modeled after the author's virtuous aunt, rescues him. Recognizing the young man's good birth and the possibility of regeneration, she hides the fugitive from law enforcement. She believes Brian can reform himself with her motherly care instead of incarnation. Brian feels remorseful about his past and becomes a better man through hard work and Auntie Sue's good teaching.

The Brian Kent story is more in the mold of detective fiction than *That Printer of Udell's* and *The Shepherd of the Hills*. In Chapter 7, entitled "Officers of the Law," a detective and a sheriff arrive in the Ozarks, question Auntie Sue, and deliberate on the case. Unlike typical detective novels, however, they are easily deceived by Auntie Sue, who has a good reputation in the Elbow Rock neighborhood.

The author adds suspense and thrills to this story through conversations between Auntie Sue and the two law enforcement officers. Early in Chapter 7, she is interviewed by them:

"I see," said the detective. "And may I ask, Miss Wakefield, if any one—any stranger, I mean—has called at the house lately, or if you have seen any one in the vicinity?"

The gentle old lady hesitated.

The officers thought she was searching her memory to be sure before she answered.

Then Auntie Sue said, deliberately: "No, sir; we have not seen a stranger in this vicinity for several weeks. The last one was a mule-buyer, who stopped to ask if he was on the right road to Tom Warden's; and that must have been fully six weeks ago."

The detective looked at Sheriff Knox.

"Well," said the big officer, "I reckon we might as well push along."

The two men arose. (85-86)

Here, Auntie Sue's nervousness and possible reactions from the officers create tension for the reader. However, the tension is replaced by relief as the two men believe her. On the other hand, those who believe that all runaways should be caught may find the scene not to their liking. As an omniscient narrator, the author supports Aunt Sue's deception, and in the remainder of the story, he shows how her motherly love for Brian is "greater than the law" (91).

Brian evades detection, but he continues to be a wanted man. A substantial reward is offered for his capture. Wright creates suspense and thrills surrounding the reward money, making readers wonder whether he will ever be caught, who is going to claim the reward money, whether Brian will be able to pay back the stolen money, and whether Auntie Sue will get in trouble for misleading law enforcement. As it typically happens in Wright's fiction, the story has a happy ending. Homer T. Ward, the president of the

Chicago bank who used to be Auntie Sue's student, generously covers the stolen money, as well as the bounty, for Brian. In the meantime, Brian has become a changed person and, as a "new star in the literary firmament […] destined to rank among those of the first magnitude" (333), makes enough money to pay all his debts to Ward and Auntie Sue. In addition, he has the fortune of marrying Betty Jo, Auntie Sue's beautiful niece and his proficient typist from Cincinnati who becomes his business agent and then managing owner. Ward turns out to be Betty Jo's guardian and her "dearest uncle in the world" (336).

Conclusion

That Printer of Udell's, *The Shepherd of the Hills*, and *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent* are Christian novels more than anything, but they also belong to the genre of crime fiction. Wright considered his fiction writing a form of Christian ministry, so his main goal was to instruct his readers. As he recalls in his autobiography, "When I became convinced that, all things considered, writing was the work I could do best, I undertook that job in exactly the same spirit with which I had undertaken the work of preaching" (219). As a genre novelist, he used suspense and thrills, which are integral to mysteries, to move the main plot forward. As a novelist, he practiced what the Roman lyricist Horace (65 BC-8 BC) aimed to do in his poetry: "delighting the reader while [giving] advice" (Horace 92). As a one-dimensional, genre fiction writer mocked by elitist critics of his day, Wright acknowledged that he was not a literary writer. As a self-taught man with Christian convictions, Wright desired to use his writing talent to reach an audience that would benefit from reading his moralistic yet entertaining stories.

Crime thrillers typically deal with perplexing murder, an investigation by either a law enforcement agency or a private detective, the pursuit of the murderer, and the resolution of the pursuit. In this regard, Wright's three novels are crime texts in a limited sense. No murder constitutes part of the main plot, and no detective follows a crime until the end. In *That Printer of Udell's*, the main plot centers around the spiritual transformation of the title character and his community service. As a model male figure in Wright's fiction, however, Dick Falkner shows his heroics by dramatically rescuing Amy Goodrich from the snares of Jim Whitley, thereby adding suspense and thrills to the main story. In *The Shepherd of the Hills*, Dad Howitt feels guilty about his son's unchristian conduct while feeling apprehensive—and making readers feel apprehensive—about what would happen if Old Matt discovered his identity. Investigators briefly appear in *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent*, but they leave as soon as Aunt Auntie Sue decides to hide the title character.

More than a century has passed since the publication of Wright's first Ozarks novel, *That Printer of Udell's*, and his stories still have dedicated readers. Christians like his spiritual messages and others appreciate how good triumphs over evil in each story. Unlike many other twentieth-century American novels, Wright's stories are pleasant and heartwarming, which appeals to those who are weary of reading nihilistic, depressing stories. Critics and reviewers have discussed the reasons why his novels attract readers. In his preface to *Harold Bell Wright: Storyteller to America* (1986), for instance, Lawrence V. Tagg explains that he "discovered that in addition to being enjoyable reading, [the] social and religious outlook [in Wright's books] struck an increasingly responsive chord in [his] own life and thought" (8). However, exactly why Wright's stories are entertaining has yet to be fully discussed.

Approaching them as crime novels can be a starting point for discussing Wright as a genre novelist.

Notes

[1] Grisham, a popular writer of legal thrillers, divides his fiction into two groups: books of "pure entertainment" and those about a "socially redeeming message" (Kaplan para. 4). As a preacher-turned-novelist, Wright does not write for sheer amusement. Like Grisham, however, Wright considers fiction a platform for social messages, such as the restoration of true masculinity and femininity and the moral regeneration of society. Both authors are committed Christians who consider fiction writing as a calling.

[2] The terms *mystery fiction*, *crime fiction*, and *thriller fiction* are interchangeable. In their introduction to *The Crown Crime Companion* (1995), Peter Ginna and Jane Cavolina use *mystery* as an overarching term for various crime-driven novels characterized by suspense and thrills: "We decided to ask the most informed mystery lovers, the members of the Mystery Writers of America, to pick their favorite mysteries. We then asked them to go one step further and choose their favorites in ten categories: classics, suspense, hardboiled/private eye, police procedural, espionage/thriller, criminal, cozy/traditional, historical, humorous, and legal/courtroom" (9).

[3] In the Gutenberg Project version of the novel, the passage, which comes from the ending of Chapter 22, uses the word *pure* instead of *innocent*. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6384/pg6384-images.html.

[4] In this novel, the detective does not solve any mysteries. Harold Bell Wright likely wants to show that Dick Falkner is generous enough to hire a private detective with his own money.

[5] Compare the passage with the following passage from *Dracula*, which exudes a sense of eeriness:

Then a dog began to howl somewhere in a farmhouse far down the road—a long, agonised wailing, as if from fear. The sound was taken up by another dog, and then another and another, till, borne on the wind which now sighed softly through the Pass, a wild howling began, which seemed to come from all over the country, as far as the imagination could grasp it through the gloom of the night. At the first howl the horses began to strain and rear, but the driver spoke to them soothingly, and they quieted down, but shivered and sweated as though after a runaway from sudden fright. Then, far off in the distance, from the mountains on each side of us began a louder and a sharper howling—that of wolves—which affected both the horses and myself in the same way—for I was minded to jump from the calèche and run, whilst they reared again and plunged madly, so that the driver had to use all his great strength to keep them from bolting. (10-11)

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Kristeva's Theory of Abjection as it Relates to "A Rose for Emily" and "Jean-Ah Poquelin"

By Olivia Lumpkin

Both William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" and George Washington Cable's "Jean-Ah Poquelin" chronicle socially exiled protagonists that bear association to the grotesque and vile, thus dividing themselves from their communities. Each short story respectively brings into inquiry the relationship between what is perceived to be grotesque and the society it exists in, as well as the public sphere's interactions with such matters.

In this paper, I intend to apply a psychoanalytic reading to comparatively evaluate the public sphere's response to that which is perceived as grotesque in both Faulkner's and Cable's works as outlined in Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection; Kristeva's ideas, presented in the book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), concerning the human response to the Other, the abject, will serve as the basis of my subsequent criticism. This particular reading examines the relationship between what is perceived to be a threat to the social order and the societies in which they exist in, as well as what constitutes acting as the "abject." My argument applies Kristeva's theory of abjection to the public spheres in both Faulkner's and Cable's narratives, and contends that the public's response to what is understood to be grotesque aligns with Kristeva's assertions; it is through the Othering and exclusion of said Other that fear is utilized as a vehicle through which identity is substantiated.

To exist in a status of being abject is to be to the highest possible degree of vile, unclean, or beyond contempt. It is productive, then, to express the notion of abject in more tangible terms; a decomposing cadaver, premeditated murder, perversion, and decay are all facets that occupy the title of abject (Pentony 2). The Oxford English Dictionary defines abject as "Of a person, an action, a situation, etc.: of low repute; despicable, wretched; self-abasing, servile, obsequious" (OED def. 2.a.). Kristeva's theory of abjection is best understood as the notion that there is an object that exists as vile, downcast, and unworthy, that corrupts what we understand to be an established social order and thus elicits a response from humanity; we experience abjection when we are presented with an object that poses a "threat because our identity system and conception of order has been disrupted," (Pentony 4). Yet, as Kristeva's theory points out, we are both horrified and captivated by the abject; our bodies physically revolt from that which is abject, yet it simultaneously engulfs us. Of this phenomenon, Kristeva writes, "A *jouissance,* then, in which the subject is engulfed but in which the Other, in turn, prevents it from sinking by rendering it repugnant" (132); jouissance is synonymous with a feeling ecstasy or immense pleasure. To present the theory in a more concise manner, Kristeva's theory of abjection is that humanity is disgusted as a response to the abject because of the implications that is actively disrupting and disregarding societal order and established identity. Therefore, humanity excludes it as the Other, because of its opposition to the self.

Of the scholarship surrounding southern gothic literature as a genre, there is much commentary revolving around feminist readings of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" in particular. Renée R. Curry's work asserts that Faulkner's language "subordinates Emily, ostensibly the subject of the tale, and to elevate the town as the truer subject" (392). Curry's

research discusses the implications of Faulkner's stylistic syntactic choices as a reflection of his personal stance towards "patriarchal societal structures," (393) and presents Emily as a dually present yet absent figure in a narrative that is seemingly about her life. The act of Othering Emily as it relates to a feminist criticism is of great interest to critics, and their research serves to further validate Emily's exclusion. Other critics read both "A Rose for Emily" and "Jean-Ah Poquelin" through the lens of psychoanalytic criticism; Edward Stone argues that both narratives serve as a commentary on the patterns of human behavior. Stone's essay parallels both Cable's "Jean-Ah Poquelin" and Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" as being "'common view[s] of the human condition'" (Stone, 433); both Faulkner's and Cable's short stories are reflections on humanity's response to that which is perceived as being vile. There is initial horror, but simultaneously something compelling about it, a quality so horrific that one cannot look away.

Both "Jean-Ah Poquelin" and Miss Emily are "othered" by society because of their status of being vile; each character bears a unique tie to the idea of the undead, a tie that horrifies the societies in which they exist and thus exile them to the realm of Other. One single distinguishing factor of the abject is its opposition to oneself. Kristeva claims that "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*" (Kristeva 1). In the opening paragraphs of "A Rose for Emily", Miss Emily Grierson is immediately established as being in opposition to the town as she is monetarily obstinate and receives particular treatment regarding her financial responsibility to society. Though Emily's family was once prominent and esteemed, thus meriting a "free pass" of sorts in relation to taxpaying, "When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction" (Faulkner 2). There is a

feudal-esque sort of relationship that is framed between Emily and the town; she is refusing to pay her taxes because of some antiquated arrangement made in her family's prime. Emily's refusal to maintain and act in cooperation with the expected societal laws are what, in part, establish her as being abject. Kristeva observes that the abject "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). Emily's unyielding to the legal system is the basis of her exclusion from society, and subsequent Othering. Stone affirms Emily's exclusion in noting that "Faulkner […] impassively maintains his (and our) distance, sympathizing with and reproving in turn Emily and her adversary, the Town" (Stone 438). There exists a tension that Faulkner sets up between Emily and the public sphere of the town, similar to that opposition Cable frames in "Jean-Ah Poquelin" between Poquelin and the public sphere of that narrative.

The opposition depicted in the society in which Poquelin exists is derived more directly from a place of the abject as it relates to the notion of vile and decay. The town, informed by gossip alone, has conjured up an illusion of Poquelin as the murderer of his own brother; Cable writes, "A dark suspicion fell upon the old slave-trader […] and the name of Jean Marie Poquelin became a symbol of witchery, devilish crime, and hideous nursery fictions" (3). The town has excluded Poquelin as a dangerous and abject Other, an elusive figure that has violated the order of rule and law. Thus, as a result of his stained reputation, "The man and his house were alike shunned. The snipe and duck hunters forsook the marsh, and the wood-cutters abandoned the canal" (Cable 3). There is a conscious desire in humanity to completely disassociate from that which is perceived to be vile and despicable. Kristeva's theory contends that "Abjection […] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles," (4). It is the emphasis on the word scheming

that is significant in relation to Poquelin's alienation; to scheme is to devise a plan with "sinister motive" (OED def. 1). The public sphere reacts so violently to Poquelin because the crime they accused him of had to involve thought and planning; to be abject is to masquerade the truth, or to veil the vile as veracity. Poquelin's assumed immorality barred him from being a participant in the public sphere that actively excludes him. Kristeva goes on to write, "Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject" (4). Poquelin's societally assigned identity as murderer disrupts the already accepted convention that one is to abide by the law. Thus, as a result of Poquelin's presumed disregard of the law, he is excluded from the group identity of society, and exiled to his own realm of Otherness.

It is also worth mentioning the significance of the physical homes of both Emily and Poquelin as they mirror the metaphorical decay of their respective owners, and serve to contribute to the Othering of such characters. The homes the characters occupy disrupt society's cohesive identity, thus providing grounds for societal exclusion. Stone considers the significance of the dilapidating homes featured in both Faulkner's and Cable's works, noting that each story includes "'a decaying mansion in which the protagonist, shut away from the world, grows into something monstrous'" (Stone 433). The "dying home" trope acts a vehicle for characterizing the protagonists themselves as also being riddled with the aroma of death. Of Emily's house, Faulkner writes, "only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps- an eyesore among eyesores," (Faulkner 2). The home, once decorated with "cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies," (Faulkner 119) is now settled into a state of disarray and deterioration. Not unlike the state of her home, Miss Emily was also once a prominent

figure in her town, but is presently defiled and weathered by time. She is described as looking "bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue" (Faulkner, 3). The reference to motionless water insinuates a motionless body, devoid of breath and of life. Emily's constant associations with the decayed and lifeless are what confirm her status of being abject, as she is like a living corpse. The use of the adjective "pallid" means to be "pale, especially from illness," (OED def. 1) which can be paralleled to the eternal and incurable illness of death; there is in Emily an inescapable aroma of death.

Comparable to the state of Emily's home, Poquelin's home is equally devoid of life. Similarly, Jean-Ah Poquelin's home is described in the opening lines of the story as being made of "of heavy cypress, lifted up on pillars, grim, solid, and spiritless" (Cable 1). Cable continues, "Its dark, weather-beaten roof and sides were hoisted up above the jungly plain in a distracted way, like a gigantic ammunition-wagon stuck in the mud and abandoned by some retreating army" (Cable, 3). Ammunition wagons, also referred to as caissons, were vehicles utilized amid the peak of the Civil War to transport not only cannon balls and ammunition, but the deceased bodies of fallen soldiers as well (North Carolina Troopers Association 2). Not only is Poquelin himself acting as the wagon, abandoned and left behind by his retreating community, but he bears a strong resemblance to the wagon in its relation to boarding the deceased; Poquelin's home is thought to shelter the apparition of his undead brother, similar to how an ammunition wagon would hold deceased bodies.

Kristeva notes that the duality of the abject is that it is able to simultaneously repel humanity while also drawing them in to the point in which "meaning collapses" (126); this facet of abjection theory is demonstrated in Faulkner's narrative in which the society that Othered Emily was the same society that flocked to her home out of selfish exploitation of

her death. Faulkner writes, "When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral […] the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house" (Faulkner 2). There appears to be an irresistible allure to the abject in knowing that its danger has been averted.

There is similar phenomenon that occurs in the story of Poquelin after his death; the townspeople attend his funeral in an effort to satisfy the desire of proving the legitimacy of their punishment, that Poquelin did indeed deserve to be socially exiled. Even in death, there still exists that "engulfing" (Kristeva, 126) allure to examine the abject; though the townspeople were disgusted by what they thought to be Poquelin's crime, there still existed an obsession to see the apparition of the assumedly dead brother. Little White, the Secretary of the Board, acts upon a selfish desire to visit Poquelin's decaying home, saying "'I tell you frankly,' he privately said to the President, 'I go into this purely for reasons of my own,'" (Cable 8). In the same way, subsequent to Poquelin's death, the townspeople that had socially massacred the old man were wide-eyed and curious as they attended his funeral. The funeral scene in the text bears much significance as it serves to both establish a second abject character, as well as strengthen Poquelin's status as abject because of his connection to his "undead" brother. Cable writes, "all stood still again staring one way; for there, behind the bier, with eyes cast down and labored step, walked the living remains–all that was left–of little Jacques Poquelin, the long-hidden brother–a leper, as white as snow. Dumb with horror, the cringing crowd gazed upon the walking death. They watched, in silent awe" (15). The term "walking death" is especially important in discussing the abject as it exists as a paradox of sorts. The danger in "walking death" is that it is abnormal, disturbing, and completely against natural law. Kristeva says, "The corpse, seen without

God and outside of science, is the upmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (4). The idea of death taking on some kind of mobility is what is truly horrific in the eyes of these fictional communities. It is not death by itself that is abject; death is a natural and inevitable process. Yet, it is when death defies the laws that are accepted and acknowledged to be true that it becomes abject, as well as the beings associated with such an unnatural phenomenon. Kristeva goes on to say, "It [the corpse] is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us," (Kristeva 4). The tension between experiencing something that is uncomfortably unfamiliar yet has the capacity to be actively oppressive is both repulsive and overtaking; it is in that tension in which the abject subsists. It is this repulsive yet overtaking sensation that plagues the community of "Jean-Ah Poquelin" in which they are both horrified and awestruck. Kristeva says, "One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are fascinated victims if not docile and consenting" (Kristeva 132). Though completely sickened by the sight of "walking death," there is a submissiveness inherent in the community's obsession with witnessing the undead brother; they cannot help but be captivated by that which they detest.

Though the abject is in direct opposition with established order, both Faulkner and Cable's narrative feature the abject as it is used to foster group identity. In both stories, fear of the abject functions to unite groups of people against what is labeled as abject, as well as solidifies an identity for the community. To reiterate Kristeva's research, is it not a lack of cleanliness or even health, but rather it is what neglects and corrupts order, law, and identity (Kristeva, 4). In Cable's narrative, the masses' response to the abject is to riot against it, electing to form a mob and communally "shivaree" (Cable 11) Poquelin. Because Poquelin

has subverted the community's version of order, as a means of defense, the community forms a new identity that is rooted in fear, in which they are in opposition of Poquelin. Kristeva writes, "does fear not hide an aggression, a violence that returns to its source, its sign having been inverted? What was there in the beginning: want, deprivation, original fear," (Kristeva 38). The society in Cable's narrative acts upon this exact theory; their response to fear is violence. There is an urge to confront the fear with aggression in an effort to kill it. Whether or not the mob wanted to actually kill Poquelin is unclear, but there was still a desire to metaphorically kill the source of fear; the mob wanted to rip the veil of mystery off what their own gossip had shrouded for so long. Cable writes, "Two or three hundred men and boys pass the place at a rapid walk straight down the broad, new street, toward the hated house of ghosts […] a full hundred move forward at a run, doubling their devilish howling and banging," (Cable 15). The anti-Poquelin identity that forms is attracting members at an astonishing rate, and what is more surprising is the grip shared fear has on each of them. Upon several of the mob laying eyes on Poquelin's leprosy ridden brother, the mob "recoils; there is a hush of all clangor, and all at once, with a cry of mingled fright and horror from every throat, the whole throng rushes back, dropping everything" (Cable 15). Cable continues to say that the fear struck mob did not stop running from what they had witnessed until they had exited the jungle, ironically noting that there was "not one in ten has seen the cause of the stampede, and not one of the tenth is certain what it was" (Cable 15). The shared fear of the undead that surrounded Poquelin was enough to form an entire mob of townspeople whose alliance was so strong that the overwhelming majority need not have proof of what to fear, but acted because the person next to them did; fear in Cable's narrative acts as a glue in forming new communities.

The communal opposition in a "Rose for Emily" is communicated much differently than in "Jean-Ah Poquelin", and is most heavily recognized through the use of first-person narration and followed by action on behalf of the townspeople. The use of the word "we" throughout the text is inherently exclusive and deliberately encompasses an entire community aside from Emily; there is an established "we" versus "her" mindset that perpetuates the Othering of Emily. Faulkner writes, "we believed that she was fallen" (5). The townspeople treat Emily as if she exists on a lower level than they do, as if she is in some manner dangerous. In their treatment of Emily, she appears to be almost like an otherworldly figure. Faulkner writes, "We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background," (4). The community denies Emily to exist in their present reality, and rather deals with her as a type of vague figure in the background of said reality.

Kristeva's theory of abjection is a relevant analysis in relation to both Faulkner and Cable's narratives because it deals directly with the process of othering and society's subsequent reaction to what is then Othered. Though admittedly dated, the theory still holds merit in its claims about the human condition, as verified in the texts.

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Anna Quindlen's *Every Last One*: (Not) Having It All

By Terrell L. Tebbetts

As a long-time, Pulitzer-winning *New York Times* columnist, Anna Quindlen is one of our best and most prolific public intellectuals. Readers can thus expect her to take on social issues in her fiction. In *Black and Blue* she tackled domestic violence, and in *Still Life with Bread Crumbs* she extended her depiction of that subject to psychological violence. In *Blessings* she brought homophobia and its results to the fore, in *Miller's Valley* environmental depredation, and in *Object Lessons* ethnic divisions and patriarchal authority. In *Every Last One* she turns from patriarchy to feminism. The tragedy that strikes the Latham family in this novel certainly results from any number of small causes which, in the novel's "butterfly effect" (213), create the perfect storm of tragedy. One of those causes is faulty communication, noticeable in the family both before and after the tragedy. Behind the faulty communication lies the novel's principal concern: the Latham family's faulty communication stems from the influence of "have it all" feminism on the central character and narrator, Mary Beth Latham, who seems to expect to have both—the perfect career and the perfect family "promised" by a widespread *misreading* of late twentieth-century feminist thought derived from the title but not the substance of Helen Gurley Brown's *Having It All.*

Faulty Communication before the Tragedy

Some of the family's faulty communication seems perfectly normal. The Latham teens, for example, do not communicate very openly with their parents. Mary Beth and her daughter Ruby, for example, repeatedly fail to communicate. When Mary Beth sees Ruby ignoring her instructions, she observes that "so much of our lives together consists of . . . saying things we know will be ignored yet continuing to say them" (7). As if to illustrate, when Ruby does tell Mary Beth that she is thinking of breaking up with her boyfriend Kiernan, she follows that immediately by telling Mary Beth that she doesn't "want to talk about it" (18), leaving Mary Beth to observe that "Ruby will not discuss Kiernan with me" (26). Parent-to-child communication sometimes works the same way: when Ruby was just a child, Mary Beth said nothing when Ruby stopped wearing her tutu every day even though she was pleased, fearing Ruby would put it back on if she spoke (126). Ruby's friends Sarah and Rachel behave similarly, having failed to alert Mary Beth about Ruby's previous anorexia (42).

If teen girls do not communicate with adults, teen boys may be even worse. Mary Beth's friend Olivia laments that her boys and Alex are "so astonishingly male. Not a word about anything" (23). Mary Beth has to confess that most of what she knows about her kids comes from eavesdropping on their backseat conversations with each other as she chauffeurs them about (25), as well as from other parents' reports on what her kids said at their houses (44). All this seems like normal faulty communication between generations.

Perhaps seeing such faulty communication as normal, Mary Beth takes steps to remedy it. In the past she got counseling for Ruby once she discovered her anorexia, and "the woman . . . helped Ruby start eating again," advising Mary Beth and Glen that Ruby's

"sense of autonomy" was at the root of her eating disorder (103). In the present time of the novel, Mary Beth has asked Max "if he world talk to someone about how he was feeling" after hearing from Max's school that he was a "student of concern" (107). When Max agrees, she and Glen work with his counselor, Dr. Vagelos, after Max told him that he "wanted me to talk to you" (110). In the cases of both of her children, Mary Beth tacitly acknowledges her inability to communicate directly by communicating through third parties.

Other faulty communication may not seem so normal and remains unremediated. Mary Beth and her friends often stay on the surface in their communication. Mary Beth observes that the "quickest way to lose a friend is to suggest that she is a bad mother" (33), so she stays quiet about others' parenting patterns, especially with Rachel's mom Sandy, whom she has some concern about. Even with old friend and confidante Nancy, Mary Beth has an "unspoken agreement not to talk about our husbands" (46). Noticeably, Mary Beth's communication with her husband Glen goes along at the same surface level. She tells Glen not to feed Ginger table scraps, but he does so regardless, time after time (8). She confesses that she and Glen repeat words like "the kids are okay" in order to "show we are interested in the same things" (83), but they do not talk about deeper matters like her loneliness: "Then where would we be?" she asks herself (85). She acknowledges that they have "conversations in which no one actually speaks" (152).

With her lack of any truly intimate communication with either friend or spouse, it is no surprise that Mary Beth has a long history of failed communication. She lost her father at a young age and grew up under a school-teacher mother who was very short on communication. She remembers her mother in the past as being "silent and hard" (71),

never speaking words of love or grief, as if "clothing and feeding were the same thing as loving" (32). She hears her mother in the present insisting on such silence, being exasperated that her stepdaughter has told her she needs to be more "emotive" (123), exclaiming, "Why do I have to verbalize my feelings? Especially if I suspect that she won't like my feelings?" (124). Mary Beth's mother has been her role-model for keeping silent.

Miscommunication after the Tragedy

If this issue arises in the novel before the tragedy, it becomes pertinent to the tragedy itself afterwards, entering into confessions, accusations, and feelings of guilt.

First, of course, the lack of communication continues and intensifies after the murders. Alex "doesn't want to talk about it," according to his friend Ben (169). And Mary Beth accepts that, for she does "not say" what she wonders, "What does it feel like, to be you, to have them all gone?" as she drives Alex home "in silence" after picking him up from school, "the night fill[ing] the car" (195). At home with him, she has only "what passes for conversation" (217). But then Alex does "decide to go to the therapist" and talk through his grief (231), a decision that will lead to long-delayed communication between him and his mother.

Mary Beth, however, is not seeking a therapist to open up to; instead she is all the more tightly uncommunicative, not wanting others to think she is "crazy" (168). She "arrange[s]" herself for Alex's return from school, masking herself with a "smile" (168). She's the same with her old friend Alice, keeping her "face arranged" (199), insisting she "can't" talk and has to preserve the version of herself she has "designed for public consumption" (201). She's the same with the general public, being sure to have "arranged

my face" before speaking with them (192). She seems like a modern female Prufrock, traumatized into preparing both a face and words to meet the faces she meets. Feeling "sentenced to grieve alone" (186), she hears Olivia confirm that all her friends seem to have taken a "vow of silence" about the tragedy (189), a vow undoubtedly arising from Mary Beth's own silence.

When Mary Beth finally hears Nancy speak the truth about her brief affair with Kiernan's father Kevin, silence begins to break down. At first, she indirectly denies Nancy's truth and insists that Nancy doesn't know whether she did or did not have an affair because "we're all icebergs" with ninety percent "under the surface" and never communicated (213). Yet Nancy has pierced the silence: Mary Beth confesses that "what has been a whisper" is now "screaming"—that through an unintended and unacknowledged butterfly effect of a fling she did not initiate, she bears some responsibility for what happened to her family (215), the fling being one element, at least, in the break-up of the marriage of Kiernan's parents Kevin and Deborah. But she does not yet open to others, though perhaps recognizing her need to do so in her sad remembrance of the "thick cloud of silence" between herself and her mother.

That possible recognition notwithstanding, Mary Beth continues to wear her mask for a while. She gives Nancy a "false" smile (237), confesses she is "showing one face to the world and living a different life within" (240), uses her false "friendly mother voice" on Alex's friends (263), and admits that she and another mother "lie to each other pleasantly" as they watch their sons' soccer game (272). But perhaps she begins to see the futility of such masking, such falsity, when Deborah, always ready to speak and act on what she feels, rams her car at the market: at least she calls Deborah and speaks directly and forcefully, flatly

telling her never to "come near me again" (275). Yet if she had fully come to sense the futility of the silence and false communication, she still has not taken it to heart when she tells Alex's girlfriend Elizabeth that she should lie about having seen Alex make a great play on the soccer field, encouraging her to wear a mask that pleases others, as "dubious" as that advice sounds to Elizabeth (278).

Finally, in Dr. Vagelos's office, Mary Beth and Alex start communicating. Alex blurts that the tragedy was his "fault" because he knew "Kiernan was living in the garage" but didn't tell Mary Beth and Glen, crying "if we had told you . . ." (280-81). Assured that the murders were not his fault, he then turns away from his own failure to communicate and brings out Mary Beth's, demanding, "How come you never cry? . . . You never even say their names" (282). With that, Mary Beth finally communicates her grief, "cry[ing] for a long time" there in the office and admitting that she and Alex "haven't talked about any of this" (283). Dr. Vagelos counsels that they've tried to grieve alone "trying to be strong" for each other but that they need to grieve "together" (283), communicating and sharing their grief in order to recover from it.

Though this failure to communicate over the years seems to have contributed to this family's tragedy, it is by no means the "cause" of the tragedy. It's one element marking the family's life that contributed its butterfly effect. Other elements abound, among them Kevin's philandering that caught Mary Beth off guard and sucked her into a fling, Ruby's insistent independence that made her think she could handle Kiernan's stalking without adult intervention, and Mary Beth's mother's guarded silence that left the young Mary Beth feeling alone and the mature Mary Beth determined to be the opposite kind of mother, though the silence she keeps is very different from her mother's.

The Root of Faulty Communication

This cause, Mary Beth's childhood relationship with her mother, in fact, seems to couple with and explain Mary Beth's failure to communicate. She is not simply risk-aversive, "tilted toward safety and security," as Maggie Scarf puts it (par. 1). That would simply amount to avoiding threats. Mary Beth is after something, not just trying to avoid something. As if modeling her life on the title if not the substance of Helen Gurley Brown's 1982 *Having It All*, she wants to have her career as a landscaper and at the same time to "subvert" herself to motherhood and make herself "central" to her children's lives (59, 60). Her career does not seem to be an issue in the novel. But her practice of motherhood does. Glen has even suggested that she is "overinvolved" in their children's lives (65). She clearly loves having her children's friends at their home, especially Rachel and Kiernan, who she senses are seeking the happy homes they do not have with their own mothers. As Erika Schickel puts it, "Mary Beth is a multi-tasking, mood-reading, carpooling, landscaping, square-meal-cooking dynamo. She plants bulbs in the fall, trims other people's Christmas trees and makes time for marital sex, all the while beating back waves of maternal guilt crested with encroaching midlife despair" (par. 4). Thus, as Ruby has noted, Mary Beth spends a lot of time "trying to make everyone happy" (146). One price of trying to make everyone happy, Ruby warns, is to make "nobody happy" (146).

Ruby is right, of course. Such effort is doomed because making everyone happy requires not seeing and responding to situations that could arouse unhappiness, glossing over trouble and pretending it is not there. That is exactly Mary Beth's *modus operandi*, and as Nancy Robertson observes, it blinds her "to the real danger lurking outside" (par. 7). With her husband, for example, Mary Beth remains silent when Glen says he does not

"want the Donahues here anymore" (212), her husband's indirect acknowledgement that he has learned of her infidelity, probably from Deborah; to ask why and open a conversation would risk breaking up her marriage as the Donahues' had broken up, ending her role as supermom. With Kiernan, she confesses to herself that "I knew all about it, and I had done nothing" (209): as one example, though Mary Beth told Kiernan that he could not live in their garage, she ignored signs that he was there anyway—the repeated signs of his presence in the house, Ginger's sniffing and whining "at the garage door" (138), and the shadowy figure she glimpses across the street. If she were to acknowledge that he was there, she would have to report him as truant to the schools and as a stalker to the police and go to court for an order of protection, the huge hoorah showing the world that all was not perfect in supermom's household. What Olivia says after the tragedy seems to point to one of the conditions that led to the tragedy: it was "easier, or at least simpler, not to talk about" troubles that could disrupt the supermom image (188). The irony, of course, is that though silence is easy and simple, it is also destructive, for following the path of silence, this woman who sees herself as a supermom starts as a "self-congratulatory" woman who seems to have it all but loses her perfectly "happy family," those words becoming the murderer's last words to the world, scrawled in red across the Latham family photos spelling out a tragic "The End" to the path Mary Beth had taken.

Mary Beth has a hard time leaving behind her sense of perfection after the tragedy. She uses a series of falsities—her false smile, her false face, her false voice, her lies—to hide her grief and guilt from the world and thus to maintain her pre-tragedy image of perfect control, now over herself if no longer over a career and a perfect five-member family. Until she finally weeps with Alex in Dr. Vagelos' office, she still labors under her

misapprehension that having it all requires perfection, that the world must take her as perfect and believe that the "butterfly effects" that destroyed her perfect family came exclusively from outside the family.

Early Signs in the Career

Mary Beth's willful silence, her blindness, and her inaction show up early in the novel's subplot. So does a "tragedy" that foreshadows the family tragedy just ahead. Mary Beth knows that the Mexican laborers supervised by her landscape foreman Rickie have hard lives that she could do something about, but she does nothing. She acknowledges that the cinderblock motel where they live "could not look more cheerless if it were a prison" (78), and she "has no idea how they handle groceries and laundry" (78). She admits that "the wages we pay them shame me" (38). She confesses that she feels like "a terrible person" (80), yet she does not raise the wages or insist that Rickie find more humane housing. Instead, when Rickie insists that these men "live better here" than back in Mexico, she simply decides "to believe it" (38), blinding herself to what she has clearly seen and thus absolving herself from action. Her husband Glen abets her believing, assuring her that "you need the hands. And they need the cash. It's mutually advantageous" (78). She keeps quiet and lets matters develop as they will.

What develops is the landscaping "tragedy" foreshadowing the looming family tragedy. *Every last one* of the plantings at a new home, "twenty thousand dollars' worth of plantings in all," disappear one night, a few cast aside but most hauled off, stolen (37-38). Mary Beth responds as she does in dealing with family issues: she wants to pretend that no theft took place, telling Rickie to replant immediately and make the place "look like nothing

happened" (39). She wants her business to be as perfect as she pretends her family is. When Nancy later tells her that the thief was Luis, one of her underpaid workers, and asks if she is "going to tell the police" (81), she can only think about her need to protect the business: "I envision having my remaining workers questioned, having them vanish and leaving all my jobs undone" (81). So no, even legally Mary Beth will continue pretending a worker had not stolen from her business. Her business must continue functioning perfectly.

Is Baking Cookies the Answer?

The novel does not go so far as to dismiss the notion that a woman can "have it all," as if it were a fictional version of Jennifer Sazlai's *NYT Magazine* essay blasting the notion as a "delusional" and "pernicious" absurdity, especially so given that the title of Brown's book "wasn't her idea. She detested it" (10). No, *Every Last One* questions only the notion that a woman can have both a *perfect* career and a *perfect* family. Though it critiques Mary Beth's blindness, silence, and inaction in her career, it does not suggest that Mary Beth's having a career contributed to the butterfly effect leading to the tragedy. Though it has Mary Beth giving up landscaping after the tragedy, it never suggests that she will not return to it once Alex has matured and left home. No, the novel lays no blame on Mary Beth's career, *per se*. Nor does it suggest that Mary Beth's motherhood, *per se*, is to blame for the tragedy. It reserves its blame for Mary Beth's determination to see her motherhood, family life, and career as *perfect*, a determination that blinds her to what she should see, deafens her to what she should hear, silences her when she should speak, paralyzes her when she should act, and causes her to live with falsities and project them into the community. Perhaps being truer to reality, seeing what she would not like to see, hearing what is not quite spoken, and

saying what needs to be said is what Mary Beth is "trying" to do as the novel ends: "I am trying," she asserts no less than seven times (298-99). Despite Schickel's complaint that Mary Beth remains "essentially unchanged" in those final pages, she has certainly been taking chances on making Alex unhappy, grounding him when he comes home drunk and setting rules for when he has Elizabeth over (266, 270). Maybe she is content with being just a good mother in a functional family rather than a supermom in a perfect family. Maybe she will act on the inequities she spots when she re-opens her business And that will require communication this erstwhile supermom in a supposedly perfect family and perfect business had shunned.

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Creative Works

A Gathering of Haiku and Senryu

By John J. Han

Haiku

coming of spring
in the snow
circular holes

snow all over the map March Madness

overcast
atop the pole
a lone crow

mountain drive
the wolf moon over
silent woods

Ozark trail
our silhouettes against
an orange hill

mountaintop
cloud shadows deepen
the valley

sunrise
snow's contours
on bare branches

flying through the rain...
startled by sunlight
beyond clouds

sad news today
she unveils a tattoo
of an anchor

standing on the cliff
the same flow
of the same river

beaches reopen
a rainbow around
the sun

the rock
split in half
a small pine nestled

pandemic solitude
my neighbor's cat
wags her tail

hard labor
for meager livelihood
woodpeckers

waves rolling
in and away
a guitar's sound

boogie-woogie
a woodcock's double steps
across the road

cockatiel's flapping wings
cat's curious glances

water splashes...
a carp slips from
the heron's beak

a lioness carries
her cub in the mouth
Mother's Day

taichi
a willow sways
gently

taichi
holding stones in her
empty hands

pushing the waves
with stretched hands

taichi

breathing in
and out…
the world stills

twilight
the gathering of
first fireflies

leading us
on the trail…
a butterfly

autumn dream the stillness of her deathbed

going away to college…
a cicada sheds
its old self

fading memory
a squirrel can't find
his nuts

late autumn trail
sunlight loosens
its grip

winter seashore
the lingering
footprints

ice-clad berries
new suet
on the windowsill

windowsill seeds
a goldfinch's
beady eyes

snow on snow
sharing a cheeseburger
with squirrels

all family members
at the dinner table

winter dream

snowfall…
melting grudges against
an old bully

winter seclusion
the deep voice
of an owl

snowy branch
the sudden turn
of an owl's head

winter dinner
a deer peers through
the window

winter sunset
orange sky turns
rose red

in full bloom
under a straw roof
winter peony

winter wind
crickets lingering
in my mind

settled snow
in the backyard
ten cardinals

midwinter
dream after dream
after dream

sitting by the river
that will someday
carry my ashes

post-Christmas
a recycling truck
treads slowly

eating
a whole bagel
winter squirrel

snow-covered lawns
hard to see which one
was greener

snowy yard
brown patches
concealed

snowy trail
the innocent eyes
of the fawn

untrodden path
snow gathers
on deer antlers

dwindling rice
a northern cardinal
pecks the snow

midwinter sun
a robin's rare trip
from the woods

winter solstice
multiple dreams
every night

barely melt snow—
my wife's plea for me
to mow the lawn

midwinter
refilling bird feeders
yet again

driving through
a desert town
snowflake neon signs

marked by visits
to a bird feed store

retirement

new year
senior friends discuss
new meds

after the funeral
the many supplements
he left

the ultimate ending winter berries

Senryu

finding a grammar mistake
in *Star* magazine
yippee!

ladybugs lesson
the teacher's
polka dot shirt

peeping out the windows
a moving truck
in the neighborhood

football field
a possum faster than
our running back

banning ChatGPT in class
but I admire what
AI can do

a poem accepted
rewarding myself with
chicken pizza

a week in Japan
streets free from
lost coins

foreign street—
my chance encounter with
a famous actor

reappearing in a dream…
my ex-boss with
a loud mouth

frazzled
from head to toe
plane landing

no to dessert
but taking multiple
sugar packets

long-lost friend
we seem to use two
different tongues

childhood friend
after fifty years we have
little to talk about

social security checks
morticians advise
getting them sooner

long-lost friend
gray hair,
still sophomoric

Medicare workshop
two people
doze off

adult children
busy getting ahead
I turn to birds

more grandkid photos
he thinks my smile
means applause

death date calculator

will I really die
in eight years?

near death
he worries about saying
bad things

I Can Turn Water Into Juice

By Tawanda Nyahasha

Murungudunhu Murungudunhu

Fake white man. Fake white man

I knew it was coming the moment I saw a group of kids ahead of us. I did what I always do: pretend I didn't hear them. To be fair, this one didn't sting as much; I had heard it numerous times before. The let's-insult-albinos club wasn't terribly creative. They kept recycling the same material. Lazy bastards. That doesn't mean it didn't hurt me sometimes, but I always did what I was told, ignore the insults. "They can't hurt you if you don't let them." Bullshit.

Fidzo looked back at the kids, "Why do you always gotta pretend like you don't hear them? We can easily run up on these kids and give them a beat down."

"Sure, we can, but look over there; their parents are watching. You beat down their kid; they are gonna get involved."

I didn't tell him the whole truth. I didn't want to trade the kids' insults for their mothers. Theirs hurt more; I knew from years of experience. I would be trading "fake white man" with "son of a witch," "the possessed one," and "the bringer of misfortune." No thanks, I will take "fake white man," please, and thank you.

Fidzo wasn't deterred. "Come on man, we can certainly outrun those fat women in their long skirts."

I knew he was serious, "Let it go man."

He was disappointed. This was our last football match together since I was going off to boarding school at the start of the term. He thought a beatdown to kids would be a good send-off. He also never understood why I always turned the other cheek. It made me look weak, he would say. It annoyed me sometimes, but he meant well. Plus, that was Fidzo in a nutshell; he lived for trouble, thrived in it. Everyone in our neighborhood knew that about him. He made a hell of an impression when they moved.

We didn't like them very much at first, and it was all because of Fidzo, the loudest and most vulgar kid who ever graced our street. Not that every kid in my town was a saint, but our mischief was the typical kid stuff like stealing mangoes from people's yards. I mean, come on, it's not like they were gonna eat them all. We also only stole from trees that were close to the streets. We never encroached on anyone's yard. Although I must admit, the decision was based on easy access rather than principle. Fidzo was different. He did mischief for the sake of doing it; he enjoyed it. Stealing a mango made sense; you had a reward at the end, there was a logic to it. You wanted a mango; you saw a mango, then you got a mango. Fidzo's mischief did not make sense. What does someone get from insulting people? He would post himself in front of his house, and anyone who walked by was at his mercy. You wouldn't think he had it in him by just looking at him. He was a short chubby guy whose cheeks always looked like he was swallowing a mouthful. When he sat on the chair, his feet didn't touch the ground, leaving them dangling in the air. He looked harmless even though he was far from it. There was one time when this old man walked past his house. He immediately went to work,

"Aye yo bold head!"

The old guy hadn't had the pleasure to meet Fidzo yet, so he thought Fidzo was just another kid acting out. As older people typically do, he thought this would be a perfect time to give a lecture. Big mistake; Fidzo was clearly baiting him to say something.

"Now, young man, that is not how-"

"Haa pfutseke wako mudhara iwe…."

Fidzo went on after that, cursing without hesitation. It takes a certain will to throw around curse words in Shona, given how specific they can get. Instead of telling someone fuck you, you are telling them exactly how they are going to get fucked and who will be doing the fucking.

I avoided Fidzo for this very reason. I was scared of him. I was going to be an easy target for him. I also knew he wasn't going to recycle old material. He surely would create his own insults, packed with the right amount of venom that would bring me to tears.

I couldn't avoid him forever. One day it was my turn to pass by his house while he was seated on his throne. I took an inward breath. "Here we go." I wanted to walk fast, but I didn't want to walk too fast. He would see I was running, which would have encouraged him. Maybe he'll just let me pass, I thought to myself. Wishful thinking, he didn't let me pass.

"Yo wassup man."

"Hey man," I answered back.

I tried my best to smile. I didn't want to appear as if I was snubbing him, but I also didn't want to seem overly enthusiastic. I didn't know what would trigger this guy. I was walking on a tightrope.

"You Kev, right?"

"Yeah"

“I’m Phillip, but everyone calls me Fidzo. Nice to finally meet you bro.”

That was it! “Nice to finally meet you bro.” That’s what I got. A couple of seconds earlier, I had been hoping for “fake white man.” I wasn’t expecting this from the king of insults. The next time he saw me, he greeted me as if we had known each other for years,

“My man Kev!”

I returned the enthusiasm, but I wasn’t sure I could trust him yet. What if he was playing the long game? I didn’t know if he took his insulting gig that seriously, but I wasn’t putting it past him. I kept expecting the insult to come, it never did, and eventually, I accepted that Fidzo meant me no harm. Probably the only person who didn’t. Weeks later, our friendship got solidified in the most Fidzo way possible. We got into a fight.

We were playing football, and in the heat of the game, this guy Theo was ripping me for not passing the ball.

“Pass the ball Albino!”

Fidzo got involved, “Hey, watch your mouth Theo!”

“Man shut up. I wasn’t even talking to you!”

That was all Fidzo needed. He rushed to Theo and threw himself at him. Nice tactic: Fidzo being a short guy, couldn’t take Theo one-on-one. He had to tackle him to the ground. Once they were on the ground, Fidzo started throwing punches. Theo’s friend jumped in and tried to pull Fidzo off him.

I wasn’t gonna let them jump him; after all, he had started this fight on my behalf. So, I jumped in straight for Theo’s friend. The whole scuffle lasted for a few seconds. Some adults saw us and ordered us to stop. We claimed victory, and so did they. The spectators said the fight

didn't last long enough for them to have a full verdict. The football game was canceled, but Fidzo was grinning from ear to ear.

"Wooo, that's what I'm talking about man! That's what I'm talking about! I tell you, I didn't know you could scrape like that."

We were best friends now. A friendship solidified in the fields of battle. On top of that, I knew I had an ally. An over-the-top, quick-to-anger ally, an ally that would probably get me into trouble if it meant he would have to fight out of it. I didn't care. He was an ally, the first one I had.

I would like to think I had an influence on him. He slowed down on his insulting, especially to older people. He abandoned his post in front of his house. He didn't have time for that anymore; he played football with me instead. He also had an influence on me. I started getting into more fights because of him, mostly because I felt I had to rescue him. It all started the same, someone would insult me, Fidzo would say something back, they would retaliate, Fidzo would go for the punch, and I would get involved because he was always picking fights where he was outnumbered. He started telling people that I was trained in karate. People believed him. The next thing I knew, some started calling me Karate Kid. I must admit, though, that it felt good to fight back. It felt good for those kids to hesitate to call me names because they didn't want to mess with the Karate kid. Fidzo gave me that.

When it was set in stone that I was going to boarding school, we started spending even more time together. I even invited him to mass one time: big mistake. He had one thing on his mind. He was gonna test the eucharist and see what the whole fuss was about. I thought and hoped he was kidding. I should have known better. I even told him stories my mom told me when I was in primary school about people who received when they were not supposed to.

Apparently, they vomited blood when they got home, and the eucharist was found in the blood intact, even though the guy swore he had chewed it. I didn't believe the stories any longer, but I thought maybe there was a chance that it would scare him off. Again, I should have known better. Fidzo took it as a challenge. He was tired of fighting mere mortals. He was gonna take on Jesus.

When it was time to receive, he waited until I was already in line, then he got up and joined. I was about to kneel and do the prayer we are supposed to do after receiving when I saw him walking back. He winked at me when he brushed past me to take his seat. I was annoyed; I had to switch my prayers from praying for a new pair of shoes to praying for his forgiveness. I would have to wait until next Sunday for the shoes.

He couldn't wait to talk about it after mass.

"It's not all that, to be honest, doesn't even have a taste."

Now he was just rubbing it in Jesus' face. He was calling him tasteless—the balls on this guy.

The biggest difference between Fidzo and me was probably in how we viewed school. Schooling for me was a way out of our little town, a way out of poverty. To Fidzo, schooling was an obligation; it got in the way of fun. I always told him I planned to eventually go to boarding school. His response was always the same,

"Boarding school is for smart kids like you. It ain't for me."

His response always annoyed me. It was a way to shut down the conversation like he did every time we talked about school. Our families' take on school was very different. It was understood between my mom and me, that I could do whatever I wanted, hang with whomever I wanted, as long as I understood that nothing was supposed to make me lose focus on school. If

something made me slack at school, she would take it away no matter how valuable it was to me. It seemed Fidzo had the exact reverse deal. He could do whatever he wanted and hang out with whomever he wanted as long as he understood that school came absolutely last in his priorities. His mom once told him that he had to study with me. He came maybe two times and stopped. It was never enforced. I was also happy he stopped coming. Studying with Fidzo meant doing everything else except studying, and I knew if he kept coming, he would be one of the valuable things my mom would take away from me. The number of times Fidzo's parents let him skip school was crazy to me. I remember one time when I came back from school with some exciting news,

"Yo, did you hear that Mr. Banda tripped and fell today."

His response was, "Who's Mr. Banda?" He skipped school so much that he didn't know the teachers! I gave up after that.

He came to school whenever something fun was going on, like when a magician who claimed to have voodoo powers did a show at our school. When the guy promoted his show at our school assembly, he claimed he could do a lot of stuff. He said he could lift a railway line with his teeth, move things with his mind, and turn water into juice. Not exactly wine but hey, close enough. He was full of crap; he didn't do any of that stuff in the show. He was just another magician with card tricks. He did make a guy shit an egg though. Cool trick! Still, there was no juice. We came to his show thirsty; we left thirsty. Fidzo almost started a riot. When the guy announced this was his last act, Fidzo shouted, "Where is the Juice!" His shout jogged our memories. In a few minutes we were all chanting,

"Where is the juice!"

"Where is the juice!"

Poor guy, he told us that he had forgotten to do it earlier in the show and he couldn't do it now because he was tapped out. He should have taken pointers from Jesus.

It was because of events like that I was going to miss my school, but mostly I was going to miss Fidzo. I was both excited and nervous about the boarding school thing. On one hand, it was a new adventure; on the other, it could be hell for me; maybe I had a lot of albinism teasing waiting for me there. It wasn't the insults that scared me; I grew up with them. It was the notion of having another place ruined for me, another adventure spoiled. That right there is what scared me the most. I didn't tell my mom all of that; I only told her the bit where I was excited. She worried too much about me. She knew the insults I got from other kids; it wouldn't do good to ignite her worries. Plus, she had put in a lot of work for me to attend this school. On top of her regular job as a primary school teacher, she would hold extra lessons with all the kids in the neighborhood. Even that was still not enough, and she had to borrow a lot of money from relatives. It was always the plan that I was to go to boarding school, but when I started secondary school, money was tight. So, I had to go to the underfunded local school. She always promised me I would transfer after my second year. She kept her promise; it was her gift to me, ensuring that I would be able to brush shoulders with the elite who sent their kids to boarding school. She was giving me a ticket to my future. I wanted to show her I was grateful.

Fidzo didn't want to talk about my move. This time it was more than his usual dismissal of school. He didn't want to lose a friend. To him, I downplayed the excitement part. I don't think he was jealous or anything. I didn't want him to think I was excited to leave him behind. So, to him, I only talked about my fears of going to boarding school. He assured me that everything would be okay, that I would have a good time there. I let him assure me I thought it would give him a task to do instead of focusing on the fact that I was leaving. He loved being my

ally; he played that role since we met. I don't think he had anything else. He only had me and his throne of insults; he could go back to it after I left, but I doubted it would give him the satisfaction it did before.

Boarding school turned out to be everything I had hoped it would be. It was the first place I had ever been that people did not mention my albinism. I was just another student. My religion teacher asked me one time after class if I ever thought of joining the debate team. It had never crossed my mind. I spent my entire life avoiding the spotlight because it always brought me trouble; debate seemed like inviting it. He told me I always gave insightful contributions in class and would be a great addition to the team. He didn't know how scary this was for me. His recruitment speech mostly targeted students with a fear of public speaking, but my fear was way deeper. I still decided to give it a shot; I guess his recruitment speech worked on my issue as well. Turns out I was pretty good at it. At my previous school, the teachers always told me I was smart, but I kept it in the classroom. I kept it on the tests, I never participated in class, and extracurricular activities were a no-go. So the debate team thing was new territory. I also made some new friends, friends who were not allies; they were just my friends. It was refreshing.

When I came back after my first term, Fidzo did not waste any time. I was only home for four weeks, and he wanted to make sure we put the time to good use. He told me he was going to tell my temporary replacement on the team that his days with the team were over. I, however, had no interest in reclaiming my spot. I hadn't played football in all the three months I was at school, and I didn't miss it. Going to play football started sounding like "going outside to play," which sounded like a kid thing to me. I told Fidzo I was too busy with holiday assignments. He asked me how long it would take for me to complete them. I told him I had no way of knowing.

“These crazy boarding school teachers think a holiday is just an extension of the school term.”

He was disappointed. I told him I was disappointed too.

“You think I’m happy that some punk has my spot on the team? Tell that guy his days are numbered.”

I lied; I still had no interest in re-taking my spot. I had no more interest in football. Fidzo, on the other hand, was still all football; in fact, football took center stage. He had stopped going to school.

During week two of the school holiday, he came to the house to see me. He was looking for an update. I opened a heavy geography textbook, and the closest notebook at hand was my history notebook. I wanted to look like I was busy with work. It worked. He bought it.

“Geez, they are keeping you busy.”

I let out a sigh, “I know man.”

He was about to leave; he didn’t want to disturb me. I told him to stay.

“I can finish this later. It’s a holiday after all!”

I made it seem like I was sacrificing my work to hang out with him. It made him happy and confirmed that I was still his friend. We sat at our kitchen table; I told him boarding school stories. I picked stories that I knew he would want to hear. I told him about the form four kids who spoke back to their teachers. I told him about the time girls were late coming to breakfast and how the boarding master closed the dining hall doors. He told us to eat everything stating,

“Asipio haapo nemuromo wake.”

I told him how the announcement was met with cheers, the girls’ reaction when they saw nothing but scraps on the tables. He enjoyed that one.

I didn't tell him a lot though. I didn't tell him that I had joined the debate team, that I was pretty good at it. I didn't tell him that I was no longer scared of public speaking. I didn't tell him about my multiple friends at school. I thought it best not to mention I wasn't teased there, that for the first time, I didn't need an ally, and how happy that made me feel.

Week three, I went to a football game with him. I couldn't keep telling him no. I had a bad game, I made a mistake, and we conceded a goal. We lost the game. He was mad; he always hated losing, but it was worse now that football was all he had. He still tried his best not to be angry with me; he wanted me to come back. I told him I was rusty and we joked about how the nerds in boarding school had made me soft.

On our way back, we passed by a group of kids. They immediately started teasing,

"Murungudunhu murungudunhu."

I waved at them, which took them by surprise. They cheered for me as if they had just met a celebrity.

Fidzo looked at me curiously,

"What was that?"

"Thought that should confuse them."

I laughed; he laughed. It was a fake laugh. He still preferred we beat them up.

Empire of the Empty

By Kellene O'Hara

The ground beneath my feet is hollow, ready to cave inward. Ready to sink downward. There's nothing below. When I was a child, I used to think that there were underground empires, a mirrored existence to our own.

As above, so below.

As below, so above.

I press my hand down to the earth and imagine a reflected version of myself pressing up. Twins, our hands would be separated by soil. I dig my nails deep into the dirt. I try to reach her, myself, beneath the ground, but she is buried deep. This woman, I wonder if she breathes dirt like I breathe air, if our differences are only elemental.

If I could push through the dirt, I wonder if I could survive in her realm, if she could survive in mine. The problem with a mirror is that it is not reality. It reflects an echo. In an empire of echoes, of copies and duplicates, there is no telling what would happen if placed in the conditions of the original.

Beneath the soil, I've become an echo.

I press my lips into the dirt. I want to whisper something to her, a secret that could penetrate the rocks and the minerals. What would I tell her, this reflected woman? Would I tell her to stay under the earth? To remain hidden, where she is safe at last? Would I tell her to come into the open air? I want to tell her something. I don't know if words come to her like worms or if sound feels like sod.

I exhale into the ground. My lungs inflate and deflate. I push all of the air out of my body until there is nothing left inside of me, until I become as empty as the earth.

It wasn't always like this. When we mined everything, when we carved it all, when we dug so deep, when we removed the last, nothing remained.

I want nothing now, at the end of everything. There is nothing left for the earth to give.

I think about the woman below. If I descend, then she must ascend. As above, so below. As below, so above. We will continue to collapse against ourselves, continue to fall in and out, never to become whole. We remain, divided by dirt.

I think about all of this, and more, as the ground swallows me whole.

B)

I think about all of this, and more, as the ground regurgitates me whole.

We remain, connected by dirt. We will continue to hold up ourselves, continue to rise in and out, always to become whole. As below, so above. As above, so below. If I ascend, then she must descend. I think about the woman above.

There is everything left for the earth to give. I want everything now, at the end of nothing.

When we assembled everything, when we sculpted it all, when we built so high, when we added the first, everything endured. It was always like this.

I pull all of the dirt into my body until there is nothing left outside of me. My lungs deflate and inflate, until I become as filled as the earth. I inhale the soil.

I don't know if words come to her like oxygen or if sound feels like lightning. I want to tell her something. Would I tell her to come into the dirt? To remain visible, where she is

safe at last? Would I tell her to stay above the earth? What would I tell her, this reflected woman? I want to whisper something to her, a secret that could penetrate the sun and the sky. I press my lips into the dirt.

Above the soil, I've become an echo.

In an empire of echoes, of copies and duplicates, there is no telling what would happen if placed in the conditions of the original. It reflects an echo. The problem with a mirror is that it is reality. If I could push through the dirt, I wonder if I could survive in her realm, if she could survive in mine.

This woman, I wonder if she breathes air like I breathe dirt, if our differences are only elemental. I try to reach her, myself, above the ground, but she is buried in the atmosphere. I dig my nails deep into the dirt. Twins, our hands would be separated by soil. I press my hand above to the earth and imagine a reflected version of myself pressing down.

As below, so above.

As above, so below.

When I was a child, I used to think there were above ground empires, a mirrored existence to our own. There's nothing above. Ready to float upward. The ceiling above my hands is hollow, ready to explode outward.

Thy Going Out and Thy Coming In

By Kathy Root Pitts

Dedicated to my husband, William Leslie Pitts

"Have you hidden the guns, Jake?" Jake's father's voice seemed distant to him, muffled as though his father spoke through a wall. "Guns? Daddy, we don't own any guns," Jake nestled his face deeper into a stale pillow, blue-striped and gray, with tiny downy chicken feathers blown up from a seam. A camp pillow, musty, and smelling of the outdoors. "When I die, Jake . . ." his voice wandered. A haunt in a doorway; a dead man who, after a quarter century of silence now has something terrible to say to his trusting son. Such are dreams. "JAKE!" The room seemed to have been suddenly heaved upward and dropped. Jake sat forward with the coarse blanket clutched to him and the pillow on the floor. The walls were still standing, but the ceiling seemed lower. Jake was standing now too, with his back deliberately to the wall, searching the quiet room for that sudden and wounded cry—a blast like a gunshot close to his ear.

For a man of forty-three, Jake had a surprisingly boyish appearance, especially when he was frightened. He had only known his daddy for eleven of those years, when his father had returned to his mother, looking beleaguered, and unlike his son later, surprisingly old for a man then of thirty-two. Jake was seven at the time, and—with doubts—had clung to the hope that his father's return was for love of family.

His mother was angry when Cecil came home. Jake saw him approach first, and recognized him as his father. It seemed curious later to the young man that he knew who he was, not realizing that in his unexplored thoughts, Jake had been anticipating this reunion since he was tiny. The father Jake

had known so long ago appeared bent, coming up from the road like a man who has lost a rib, and found no better substitute to shore up his side. "Daddy-*Long*-Legs" Jake's mother called him, with a scorn so poisonous that Jake, who was playing in the yard, looked to his mother a second time, taking his amazed glance away from his father. There was something about his mother that he didn't recognize, almost as if it were she who had returned after years.

Cecil moved from one leg to the other while mother and son stared, and then he glanced around Enid to ask of his son: "Jake, why don't you bring your starving father something to eat? Can you fry me some eggs, in a sandwich, with ketchup?" Cecil spoke of his hunger pitifully, but Enid held no pity in her eyes, and each of the three there in the yard knew that Enid took no joy in Cecil's return. Of this, the boy was certain.

Jake hoped that leaving them alone in the time it would take for him to fry eggs would give his daddy long enough to negotiate a return. While the margarine melted, Jake put his ear to the wall from an angle where he could not be seen, wanting to hear the conversation, but their whispering was impossible to understand, though the rage in his mother's voice rose in bursts. Jake gave up trying to hear and made a fried egg sandwich without ketchup. He looked at the range top for a long moment, holding the jar of ketchup, and finally decided that his mother would think condiments too friendly.

Keeping his mother calm was critical. Enid's fury caused Jake to wonder if he really did want his father back, but this might be the only chance. He shouldn't make a mistake . . . nor push her too far. Jake struggled with a sad pain deep in his gut, but settled finally on just the barest sandwich, and then Cecil must go, but when he came back outside to the step, Jake's daddy reached for the sandwich, and his mother did nothing. She didn't even look at the sandwich. She idled with a broom on the front step. Odd, for a woman who was always so nervous and busy.

The day after Cecil arrived, Jake awoke to the plash of rain just as the sun rose, and it occurred to him, sunny *and* rain? He sniffed for the scent of rain and tugged back the Christmas table-cloth curtain with the poinsettias on a green background, yet he saw no rain. Cupping his ear, he realized that the sound was not general—but rather coming from the east, the front of the little house. It was the porch-side faucet.

Jake pulled on his black, gabardine shorts, made over from an outgrown pair of church slacks, and stepped barefooted into the kitchen. The pine boards were still sticky from a sloshed Dutch oven of shrimp brine that Cecil had made a sad attempt to wipe clean after elbowing it off its burner the night before. Every part of the house still smelled of boiled shrimp. There was also a sweet, chemical smell that the boy couldn't identify coming up from the sink basin.

Jake opened the screened door, off the kitchen and behind the house, as lightly as he ever had, and wiped his gummy toes on the cool Saint Augustine beneath a huge water oak. His mother had a fondness for this shade-loving grass and recalled it from when she was young, how the gardener would mow her father's lawn in the hot months so that, with the attic fan spinning, everything smelled bright and fresh—nothing like rancid shrimp. This transplanted patch of grass, lifted from a two-acre yard, was Enid's "only souvenir of her childhood home," she had recalled often, and she allowed it to grow wild now—unmowed, taking up only four square feet. The back of the house lay in deep shadow and would remain that way until late afternoon.

Jake crept around the side of the house to sneak up, if possible, and spy on his mother. She had behaved so strangely the day before. Even when Cecil tipped the shrimp pot, it was she who boiled over. In a snap, she had risen from her chair: "I CANNOT count on you to be careful with ANYTHING! Not the boy, not the dinner, not EVEN . . . !" She gestured to her chest—as if struck by a sharp pain, and aborted her tirade. Cecil glanced sidways at Jake. Enid gasped quietly and

went to her bedroom much earlier than usual, and unusual too, she had not cleaned the mess, but rather, turned the gas off under the pot where the flame drowned in pink foam. Walking defeatedly, as a criminal to her cell, she retired into her bedroom and slid the lock so that everyone could hear. Cecil was not welcome. It would be after Cecil were snoring on the rug in the front room that Jake heard his mother pass into the kitchen. Jake assumed that she was cleaning the mess—Cecil was in no condition to.

Enid was not in the front yard after all, but Cecil was. Water sputtered from a hose that hung just over his head from a porch beam where an airplane plant had been. The shrimp pot was washed and sitting on the step. This house, set back from the road, had no neighbors to be shocked at the sight of Cecil, naked, wincing under a cold, open-air shower. Cecil turned to rinse the lather from his back.

"Oh my God, what's *THAT?"* Cecil, skinny, and shockingly pale, blue-white under the morning sun, bore along his left side a brilliant red scar, a diagonal five-inch slice that had healed long ago, but was still vivid--and curled in on itself like the muzzle of a snarling dog.

"Ah, you *caught* me. I was out here so's not to wake you," Jake's daddy turned the hose off at the nozzle and draped his lower body in a towel decorated with a house paint advertisement that displayed a cartoon beagle holding from his mouth a yellow paintbrush. Realizing that Jake's eyes still remained on the scar, Cecil hiked the towel up and trapped it under his arm so that it covered the old injury. Wearing the towel this way made it impossible for Cecil to dry the rest of himself, but even though he shivered, he chose to drip as he spoke. "That's nothin' Jake . . . my boy," he paused and seemed to reach back into his memory—

"You mean his store of lies," Enid would sneer later.

"Just a fishin' accident. Don't *never* get in the water 'round a drunk with his hand on the tiller! A friend of mine—*used* to be a friend," Cecil chuckled blankly, "backed his skiff into me when I'z untanglin' a trotline from a branch."

"That must have *hurt!"* Jake reached to pull the towel aside, while Cecil tried to hold it close and glanced away, as if ashamed of his nakedness. "How many stitches?" Jake noticed the long line of puckered red dots along the edges of the injury.

"It happened so fast. I don't remember 'bout stitches. . . . looks like a few." His father did not show off the scar, like some men would, especially to a son, and though Jake wondered at first, he believed that his father was not pretending to be brave, nor nobly trying to spare his son the details. This was neither. Cecil went acutely still. His face grew tight, and he stared at the quiet hose as if carefully counting the drips. Maybe he simply wanted to be alone to finish drying? He bore the face of a tortured man—silent and braced. Maybe he was thinking about the lost friend? Jake looked away from the scar again and suddenly knew that his daddy hurt, not from the scar, but deep-down. Something was more wrong than Jake had imagined, something that his daddy—a man of his own blood—would not share. Jake ran inside and made his father a fried egg sandwich with a lot of ketchup.

Once Cecil was dry and his scar was no longer on display, he became his carefree, jokingly ne'er-do-well self again, only Jake couldn't get it out of his mind that this was a sham—that he did not know his father. Enid had not told him everything, and whatever evidence existed of Cecil's past, Jake guessed, Enid had hidden in her room. No one was ever to go into her room. If Jake needed her, she would come out to him.

Enid's dresser stood stark, uncluttered with the perfume bottles, powders, and photographs

that might fill another woman's vanity. There was a small glass box, painted with a bright green and blue peacock and with gilding that flaked along the hinges. It wasn't like anything else in the house. His mother did not like trinkets. Jake had seen the box from the doorway only. He looked into her room with dusky light on the tired view. Enid was in the far end of the shotgun house frying—burning—squash and onions for supper. Jake *had access,* and though he would have never risked his mother's rage, he felt the need. He stepped inside, listening for her spatula scrapings. His mother had left the door, that was usually locked against husband and curious son, ajar to run grab a towel for holding the hot skillet handle. Enid wouldn't be back to her room for several minutes, Jake was sure.

With tightened chest, Jake stopped his breath and listened for her grumblings, then snuck in. There was a heavy smell of pine cleanser. For the first time in his life, Jake looked directly down on her dresser table. The peacock box was the only object not framed by a pattern of dust. He opened it. There was a note in the box, wadded, and in Cecil's writing: "A boy needs a mother." Jake felt compelled to run, but forced himself to stay. The farther he entered, the more his ears rang with fear. There was a photo, face down, with a corner sticking out from under an unmoved book a little closer to her bed. Jake pulled it out and panicked that he had disturbed the dust. While he was trying to hide the evidence, he turned the photo over and saw a picture of Cecil—many years ago—and a young woman holding an infant. The woman was sitting up in bed, oddly informal for a photograph. This unknown woman looked tired, sick, and much like Enid—but not Enid; Jake was sure. Her mouth smiled, but she suppressed something like sorrow in her eyes. These eyes were farther apart than Jake's mother . . . she was alike, but different. On the back of the photo was a worn eraser mark. The name was still legible—"Esther." Below Cecil's name, in blue ink, was the name in black ink, "Enid." This was also in his father's hand.

Jake put the photograph back and pulled the book forward just enough to hide the moved dust from the front. There was a noise behind him—a face in the doorway, not the lady in the picture, glaring at him. She said nothing, and Jake said nothing. The photograph disappeared the next day. There was blame in the air, but Jake didn't know whom it was for. Cecil stayed for eleven more years, but he never let Jake see him shirtless again.

Cecil vanished shortly after Jake's eighteenth birthday. He left a note saying that he would come back to visit the boy—there was no reference to Enid, nor a forwarding address.

Jake missed Cecil, and a few months after he left, Jake walked out to the patch of woods where he saw his father go often, but was never encouraged to follow. He wanted to feel near him, and exploring a place where Cecil had been drawn to, or more likely escaped to, seemed as close as he might ever be to his father again. Jake crept into a dense growth of sassafras saplings that seemed endless. There were areas that had been trampled, and he followed those. Being in Cecil's footsteps was an odd embrace. After half an hour's following this scanty trail, the young man came out into an open brake of pines, a natural cathedral, Jake fancied, as he followed his more enigmatic trail of thoughts and fantasized what this cathedral might be dedicated to? He wanted so much to understand the secretive mind of his father.

On the ground, behind a decomposing pine log covered in black ants and stink bugs, Jake spotted something metallic. He leaned over the fallen tree, brushing his bangs against a privet-hedge, and discovered concealed there a car radiator. He sniffed around, and was hauled back to the sweet-chemical smell in the sink more than a decade ago, the morning after the night when the shrimp pot was spilled. Jake explored further and found a red brick with dark green moss on one side, that when prodded with his toe, revealed a deep, long, perfect scrape on the flip side. Jake thought of that same morning when he caught his father showering. Through the silky mulch that

dropped away from the log was something else metallic and gold-colored. The tree that fell so long ago gave up a spent bullet.

Jake sat quietly in the brake until late afternoon, holding the bullet in his left hand and the brick in his right, struggling to understand whether knew anything about anything at all.

“Poster Prompt” and Other Poems

By Jianqing Zheng

Poster Prompt

—Pierre Bonnard’s *France Champagne*

Champagne loses
effervescence
if stored improperly

love without drive
goes flat
if its tire deflates

after a French kiss
look ahead
to hit no guardrails

life isn’t always
a romance
like a beautiful poster

and champagne
isn’t a drink
for daily dinner

If so
love goes pop
into bubbles

Praying Tanka

—Albrecht Durer's Praying Hands

God's whisper…
flowing
through bulging veins
of the praying
hands put together

Sharing

—Vladimir Volegov's *Drawing in the Sand*

A little girl in a pink floral dress kneels on the sand to scribble. When her dad leaning in a blue beach chair asks what she's drawing, she chimes, "I'm writing my name." Soon she stands up patting sand off her small hands and urging her dad to look. Bird footprints that are like shorthand.

beach park
waves and sanderlings
playing chase

"How nice, darling!" The man sounds excited like a linguist who's deciphered incomprehensible hieroglyphs. Wiping the sweat off her sunshine face, the man begs, "Can we go home now?" Hand in hand, they walk to the parking lot, the girl's straw hat containing a few colorful shells dangling in her other hand.

bedtime story
the father yawns while reading
"The Singing Shell"

Soul

—Gyoparka Mihaly's *Naked Soul #6*

She reclines into
a beautiful shape—

murmuring rivers
rising peaks
wheezing meteors
pulsating planets

dripping spring rain
burning summer sun
paling autumn moon
hissing winter snow

sizzling passion
beating heart
stretching body
transforming soul—

a white butterfly
fluttering into night

Wild Orchids: An Interpretation

—Earl Linderman's *Wild Orchids*

Swinging
like two cobras
twining

in charming
music,
they hug

into vines
of red grapes
dangling

like bait
on a fishing
hook.

They
unmask
their lust,

each
picking
a grape

to roll
in the mouth
until

it softens
for a bite—
two gourami fish

kiss
and kiss
again.

Valentine's Day

—Pat Hardy's *Still Life with Eggs and Pottery*

Crack two eggs on the brim of a ramekin, add milk, salt and black pepper, and beat them well with a spoon. Heat the skillet, add two spoons of olive oil to let it shimmer, and pour the egg mix in. When it starts to fluff, use a fork to spiral it into a yellow rose blooming on the plate.

fifty years now
our first kiss
still garden-fresh

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