

*The  
Sigma Tau Delta  
Review*

**Journal of Critical Writing  
Sigma Tau Delta  
International English Honor Society  
Volume 7, 2010**

Editor of Publications:  
Karlyn Crowley

Associate Editors:  
Jody Kolter  
Kristen Susienka

Production Editor:  
Sam VanStraten

St. Norbert College  
De Pere, Wisconsin

# Honor Members of Sigma Tau Delta

|                  |                         |                      |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Kim Addonizio    | Phillip Jose Farmer     | Kyoko Mori           |
| Edward Albee     | Robert Flynn            | Scott Morris         |
| Julia Alvarez    | Shelby Foote            | Howard Nemerov       |
| Rudolfo A. Anaya | H.E. Francis            | Naomi Shihab Nye     |
| Saul Bellow      | <i>Alexandra Fuller</i> | Sharon Olds          |
| John Berendt     | <i>Neil Gaiman</i>      | Walter J. Ong, S.J.  |
| Robert Bly       | Charles Ghigna          | Suzan-Lori Parks     |
| Vance Bourjaily  | Nikki Giovanni          | Laurence Perrine     |
| Cleanth Brooks   | Donald Hall             | <i>Michael Perry</i> |
| Gwendolyn Brooks | Robert Hass             | David Rakoff         |
| Henri Cole       | Frank Herbert           | Henry Regnery        |
| Billy Collins    | Peter Hessler           | Richard Rodriguez    |
| Pat Conroy       | Andrew Hudgins          | Mark Salzman         |
| Bernard Cooper   | William Bradford Huie   | Stephen Spender      |
| Judith Crist     | E. Nelson James         | William Stafford     |
| Jim Daniels      | X.J. Kennedy            | Lucien Stryk         |
| James Dickey     | Jamaica Kincaid         | Amy Tan              |
| Mark Doty        | Ted Kooser              | Sarah Vowell         |
| Ellen Douglas    | Valerie Martin          | Eudora Welty         |
| Richard Eberhart | David McCullough        | Jessamyn West        |
| Katja Esson      | Erin McGraw             |                      |
| Mari Evans       | Marion Montgomery       |                      |

*New Honor Members in italics*

## Delta Award Recipients

|                |                 |               |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Richard Cloyed | E. Nelson James | Isabel Sparks |
| Elaine Hughes  | Elva Bell McLin | Sue Yost      |

Copyright © 2010 by Sigma Tau Delta

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Sigma Tau Delta, Inc., the International English Honor Society, William C. Johnson, Executive Director, Department of English, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2863, U.S.A.

*The Sigma Tau Delta Review* is published annually in April with the continuing generous assistance of Northern Illinois University (DeKalb, IL) and St. Norbert College (De Pere, WI). Publication is limited to members of Sigma Tau Delta. Members are entitled to a one-year subscription upon payment of the initial fee. The subsequent annual subscription rate is ten dollars (U.S.).

Sigma Tau Delta is a member of the Association of College Honor Societies.

2009–2010 Writing Awards  
for *The Sigma Tau Delta Review* and  
*The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*

---

**Frederic Fadner Critical Essay Award**

Kathleen Hynes

“Mad Dog: An Emergent Language of Equality  
in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*”

**Eleanor B. North Poetry Award**

Kathryn Andersen

“Helicopter Seeds: Sonnet 1933”

**Herbert Hughes Short Fiction Award**

Jesse Snavlin

“grave-digger”

**Elizabeth Holtze Creative Non-fiction Award**

Meg Kelly

“One of Three: The Only Me”

**Judson Q. Owen Award for Best Piece Overall**

Jesse Snavlin

“grave-digger”

---

Judge for Writing Awards

---

**MAGGIE DIETZ** currently teaches in the creative writing program at Boston University and is assistant poetry editor for the online magazine *Slate*. Her book of poems *Perennial Fall* (University of Chicago, 2006) won the 2007 Jane Kenyon Award for Outstanding Book of Poetry. For many years she directed the Favorite Poem Project, Robert Pinsky’s special undertaking during his tenure as U.S. Poet Laureate, and is coeditor of three anthologies related to the project: *Americans’ Favorite Poems* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), *Poems to Read* (Norton, 2002) and, most recently, *An Invitation to Poetry* (Norton, 2004), for which Dietz co-authored the classroom guide. Her awards include the Grolier Poetry Prize, the George Bennett Fellowship at Phillips Exeter Academy, as well as fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, and the NH State Council on the Arts. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Agni*, *Harvard Review*, and *Salmagundi*.

# Contents

*The Sigma Tau Delta Review, Volume 7, 2010*

## Essays

---

- Mad Dog: An Emergent Language of Equality in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* *Award Winner* 6  
Kathleen Hynes
- Triangulating Difference: Elision in Male-Male-Female Triangles 16  
Timothy Bruno
- “Stop mixin’ up mah doings wid mah looks”:  
Exploring Surrogacy, Sex, and Separation  
in Janie Crawford’s Early Self-Image 30  
Ashley Byrd-Pharr
- (Mis)shaping History: Milton’s Nationalist Rhetoric  
in *Observations Upon the Articles of Peace* 41  
Jennifer Doyle-Corn
- The Mirror above the Bar: Self-Reflection  
and Social-Inspection in Hemingway’s  
“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” 51  
Kenneth Marrott
- “Ye Hearers, Take It of Worth”:  
Participatory Mimesis in *Everyman* 58  
Matthew Miller
- “Changes” in the “Country of the Mind”:  
Seamus Heaney’s Revision of William Wordsworth’s  
“Tintern Abbey” 68  
Trenton Olsen

- An Essential Distortion: The Form and Style  
of *The Sound and the Fury* 78  
Dylan Phillips
- A Play of Opposites in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” 86  
Rachel Pietka
- The Divine Rake: God’s Seduction of  
Theodore Wieland in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* 96  
Jenna Prince
- The Transcendence of Class Ideologies in  
James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* 106  
Sueanna Smith
- Edna Pontellier’s Strip Tease of Essentiality:  
An Examination of the Metaphorical Role of  
Clothing in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* 116  
Deidre Stuffer

# Mad Dog: An Emergent Language of Equality in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

| Kathleen Hynes

*Kathleen Hynes is a recent graduate from the College of New Jersey, where she received a B.A. in English and a concentration in Classical Studies. She is an editorial assistant at the magazine First for Women and plans to pursue an M.F.A. in Creative Writing.*

---

Published in 1937, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* entered the Modernist conversation at its pre-World War II apex. Once-vague inklings from the movement's late nineteenth-century inception were now full-fledged issues of gender, sexuality, and race—issues that experimental works boldly reworked, retested, and recast in a continuous, collaborative restructuring of Victorian precepts. Hurston's *Their Eyes* draws on its Modernist forebearers, considers the movement's canonical issues, and builds on previous revelations to present wholly new discoveries about the nature of gender, sexuality, and race. This paper seeks to reveal the revolutionary ideas embedded in the novel's recasting of feminine-masculine dynamics by focusing specifically on Hurston's treatment of gender.

Amidst the thrashing wind and pouring rain of Chapter 18's hurricane, a cow frantically attempts to stay afloat in rushing river water while supporting a wild dog on its back. In a scene overwhelmed by nature's furious power, this odd pairing can easily be attributed to the Dionysian chaos, and can quickly be dismissed as a random, inconsequential coupling. However, this union of dog and cow symbolically prefigures the union of masculine and feminine that *Their Eyes* ultimately achieves. By removing speech from its traditional, male-dominated sphere and relocating it in a world that permits non-hegemonic communication between the genders, the novel succeeds in demolishing Victorian gender-dualisms. As Daniel Joseph Singal explains, Victorians insisted on dividing the sexes into "separate spheres" (10), while Modernists

worked “to reconnect,” “to integrate once more the human and the animal, the civilized and savage,” and “to heal the sharp divisions” carved by nineteenth-century society between men and women (12). In Hurston’s novel, the dams that strain to contain pent-up notions of equality and gender interchange are broken; the floodwaters herald a new egalitarianism.

Contrary to Mary Helen Washington’s assertion that Janie Crawford fails as a hero (106), I assert that Janie succeeds; her “disturbing” silences (103) are symptoms of an (as yet) unrealized autonomy, an autonomy achieved through a gradual maturation of her character. This development is manifested in Janie’s oral *retelling*, through a voice which Henry Louis Gates, Jr. identifies as the “speakerly text” (165). As a Modernist hero, it is appropriate that Janie “must constantly create and re-create an identity based upon [her] ongoing experience in the world” (Singal 15) and that she must “never fully arrive” at complete integration (14) of her feminine traits and Tea Cake’s masculine ones. Rather, she ultimately inhabits a world in which language is neither exclusively masculine nor exclusively feminine but rather a combination of the two. Her world is a crossroads, and the tongue is a dialect that privileges neither gender over the other, permitting a free exchange between both.

Janie is “curiously silent” at two particularly “critical places” (Washington 102) in *Their Eyes*—first after Tea Cake beats her, and then during her trial. If one removes the back-stoop conversation that bookends the novel, these silences *are* troublesome. However, when taken as a whole, the novel’s narrative structure beautifully accounts for these episodes of muteness. Because the novel is formally a retelling, a recounting, a “(re)membering” (Gates 156), Janie and the “speakerly” (165) narrator from whom she “gains her voice” (Holloway 71) control what is spoken and omitted. This means that both silences are acknowledged and consciously included; Janie *deliberately* recounts them for Pheoby. The key to understanding *why* lies not in the silence of past-Janie but in the “speakerly” voice of present-Janie—in what the narrative voice

reveals.

As Karla Holloway observes, “Janie’s self-discovery depends on her learning to manipulate language” (89). Gates’ concept of the “speakerly text” represents precisely the manipulation for which Holloway calls. It permits the presentation of a mature, developed Janie who can tell her own story, an evolved Janie transformed from a once-silent victim into a confident orator. As defined by Gates, the “speakerly text” is “a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition” (165). The narrator appropriates the vernacular, dialect-language spoken by the novel’s characters, resulting in a seamless blend of dialogue and story. Gates praises Hurston for the “resonant and authentic narrative voice” that emerges from this harmonic integration (167). Indeed, when coupled with the novel’s “framing device,” this new voice allows Janie to “recapitulate, control, and narrate her own story of becoming, the key sign of sophisticated understanding of the self” (169). As a Modernist hero, Janie is dynamic, constantly growing, changing, evolving, and becoming; the novel’s structure juxtaposes Janie’s present and former selves, her oral and silent selves, her immature and mature selves—ultimately presenting a holistic vision of Janie as a *constantly developing self*. Hurston’s use of this “free indirect discourse,” Gates says, allows her to represent Janie’s “growth in self-consciousness” (175), her burgeoning awareness of self. This is a particularly Modernist innovation, as it unifies not only character and narrator but also standard English and black vernacular (176).

While past-Janie is silent after Tea Cake beats her, present-Janie is talking clearly through the mouthpiece of speakerly narrative. Ostensibly, the narrative dimension of her voice merely communicates an “explanation” of Tea Cake’s motivations: he whipped Janie to assert his “possession” of her, to relieve “that awful fear inside him,” and to “show he was boss” (140). However, when read *not* as a recounting of the past but as a dimension of present-Janie’s story-telling voice, the lines, “No brutal beating at all. He

just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (140) take on a markedly ironic tone. Janie was “just slapped . . . around a bit” —*just . . . a bit*. These words, though a shared project of Janie and speakerly narrator, emerge from a *dimension* of Janie’s voice—for that is what the “speakerly text” ultimately is: Janie’s manipulation of language and formal literary elements in service of this self-discovery and self-realization. Present-Janie, speakerly-Janie, acknowledges in these lines her past silence and celebrates her newfound ability to speak. One “hears” in the ironic lines *just . . . a bit* Janie’s disapproval of Tea Cake’s abusive, illogical outburst.

Cynthia Bond remarks that during Janie’s courtroom appearance, “It is precisely her voice that is on trial,” as the trial “marks a significant turn in Janie’s establishment of a vocal identity” (212). Bond explains that Janie “has moved beyond an admiration of performative language for its own sake . . . to a privileging of language as a means to communicate truth” (213). Janie swears the court’s oath to “speak the truth” (178), but the swearing-in is redundant. Janie *already* feels that convincing the court of her innocence, of her love for Tea Cake, of his wild illness, and of her instinctual self-preservation, is her most important battle yet. “Lying thoughts”—misunderstanding, ineffective communication, untruth—are all more threatening to Janie than death itself (178). Speakerly-Janie’s present telling of the event reveals that “she didn’t plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed” (178). It is not difficult to imagine momentarily that the entire novel is Janie’s testimony—her attempt to *speak the truth*. Nowhere in the novel does she plead; she just tells, and concludes, indeed hushed, wrapped in her fish-net horizon.

The need to locate language outside of the patriarchal sphere is partly due to what Margaret Homans describes as a “tendency” of the dominant discourse “to make women complicitous in producing their own silence” (191). Without the decidedly *un*-patriarchal mechanism of free indirect discourse, the speakerly-revelations—in fact, the very existence of Janie’s present-self—would be impossible.

Crucial juxtaposition of the developed, mature, and evolved Janie with her silent self trapped inside the patriarchal language of the past would be *absent* from the text. Free, indirect discourse thus permits Janie a way out of the patriarchal prose that silences her, that indeed makes her complicit in her own silence.

Homans identifies two possible responses to the task of accurately representing “women’s experiences” in literature: (1) language is a “male construct whose operation depends on women’s silence and absence,” and (2) language is separate from experience, so women “can be in control of language rather than controlled by it” (186). The first response suggests that women require “alternate forms capable of accommodating” them, new systems of language in which to represent their unique female difference (187). The second response indicates a belief that language *can* represent female experience despite its highly patriarchal quality. At once, Hurston’s novel aligns itself with both philosophies and with neither philosophy. While Janie harnesses the power of free indirect discourse to re-speak her once complicitous silence, she also discovers a new language that is neither masculine nor feminine but instead an equal pairing of the two—a non-hegemonic construction capable of representing both male and female experience.

A useful comparison in approach can be found in Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*, which undoes “patriarchal” methods of signifying and substitutes “in diverse stylistic modes, a rich, complex, open-ended, antipatriarchal syntactical and semantic polysemy” (185). Stein identifies with both the first and second of Homans’ responses, concluding that the current system of language *does* exclude the female by privileging patriarchal tropes and deciding to manipulate the current system to create a new “antipatriarchal” prose. A passage from “Melanctha,” the second of the three lives, demonstrates: “You certainly Melanctha, you ain’t got down deep loyal feeling, true inside you, and when you ain’t just that moment quick with feeling, then you certainly ain’t ever got anything more there to keep you” (113). The surprising syntax and repetition break

the mold of patriarchal prose and allow Stein to explore a language that is wholly new, wholly feminine.

Janie's first (chronologically) spoken words following her beating *command silence*: "Ole Massa is doin' *His* work now. Us oughta keep quiet" (150). While in itself a fascinating role reversal—Janie is the silencer, not the silenced—this admonition more importantly anticipates the coming hurricane, a storm of Biblical proportions which violently rends, reorders, and reconfigures the novel's way of speaking by introducing animals and a new "language." Human silence thus takes on new significance as patriarchal ways of speaking are replaced by a less hegemonic system—a system outside of familiar, knowable speech patterns, and thus one that privileges neither gender.

The disorder created by Chapter 18's turbulent storm is impossible to catalogue; flooded streets, floating homes, uprooted families, and lost possessions collide (inevitably) with ambassadors of the natural world—frightened animals, broken trees, unchecked lake waters, and dangerous winds. A certain democracy is introduced to the chaos, as everyone on the "fill" is a victim of the elements that assaults old and young survivors alike (155). No one is excluded. The dead man on a hammock surrounded by dangerous animals proves that "[n]othing [seeks] a conquest over the other" (156). This democratic leveling of all living creatures is an important prelude to the new, unifying male-female language soon to be introduced. The storm's fluid floodwater combines and mixes everything in its path—live and dead, black and white, human and animal, male and female—everything, even "things that [don't] belong in water." Nothing is capable of separation. Even the tin roof which swings "back and forth like a mighty ax" cannot split and divide its victim, who easily escapes into the "Modernist" waters of refuge—waters concerned with mixture, combination, and upheaval—not dualistic divisions.

In her essay "Modernism and gender," Marianne DeKoven traces the intersecting agendas of the modernist and feminist

movements, particularly the way concepts and concerns of the feminine, especially the “repressed maternal feminine unconscious of Western culture,” erupt and “emerg[e] into representation” in “modernist forms” (179). Indeed, as surely as “Modernism had mothers as well as fathers” (175), it had foundations in the feminine as well as the masculine. DeKoven describes Virginia Woolf’s project of re-associating Modernism with femininity, of aligning the “subversiveness of modernist form” with the female unconscious (187), of connecting the “defining formal features of Modernism” to the complex “feminine attributes of language, linked to its embeddedness in the maternal unconscious” (180). DeKoven summarily argues that “an empowered femininity governs the most radical modernist elements of the text” (180), and so the importance of voice in *Their Eyes* grows from Janie’s need to assert her female identity through a new hybrid language.

Returning to the dog-riding-cow, it is important to note that the cow is referred to as female (“A massive built dog was sitting on her shoulders” 157), and the dog as male (“He wanted to plunge in after her but dreaded the water” 157). Interpreting this image as a metaphor for the gender and language issues currently under analysis, it is possible to ascribe the mute-cow to the female and the “growling” dog to the male realms of language (157). It is not mere *absence* of recognizable language that distinguishes characteristically feminine discourse from masculine, but rather the *what* and *how* of the spoken. The rabid tongue, while anti-patriarchal in its encouragement of nonsensical sounds—growling, barking, lashing—contains an ultra-masculine aggression, a macho-violence and strength which stands on, presides over, and precludes the cow’s ability “speak” at all. When the cow feels threatened, she does not verbalize her fears but rather “thrash[es] a moment in terror” (157), an activity not of the mouth but of the body. In this allegory, the dog represents the heavy burden of patriarchal language that women must contend with before discovering voice. The cow, finally “relieved of a great weight” (157) lands on shore alongside Janie, free

of its growling-dog baggage.

After the storm, Tea Cake and Janie grow closer as equals, each expressing his/her reliance on the other. Just as Janie tells Tea Cake, “he’d tore me tuh pieces, if it wuzn’t fuh you, honey” (159), Tea Cake tells Janie, “Tried tuh choke me tuh death. Hadn’t been fuh *you* Ah’d be dead” (166). The “if it hadn’t been for you” construction binds the couple through mutual need and support. However, as DeKoven observes, Tea Cake cannot “kill that very strong patriarchal dog” before it bites him. While he is “as close as any male character in this novel to being the ‘New Man’ suitable for the New Woman,” (192), Tea Cake does not completely eradicate the tradition of patriarchal discourse from his tongue. Indeed, he eventually begins to speak with the wild, illogical aggression of the rabid dog that infected him, speech that does not fully participate in the non-hegemonic “dialect” the novel strives toward.

Homans explains through various examples that what ultimately expresses the “woman-identified self is of necessity nonrepresentational”—guttural expressions of sorrow, “howl[s]” (192), not of the traditional, patriarchal register. The howl “collaps[es] word and referent” (194), denies the utility of accepted systems of signifiers and signified. Tea Cake’s “fits of gagging and choking” (168) indicate a failed attempt at communicating in the non-hegemonic realm of antipatriarchal language; although his throaty grunts are certainly nonrepresentational, their source is illness, not emotion—they are involuntary rabies-speak. However, his crying (171) certainly *is* rooted in emotion, *is* a reaction against the disease, and *is* the first indication that Tea Cake and Janie can communicate in a language which does not privilege signifiers and signified, referents, and other patriarchal elements. When it is clear to Janie that “Tea Cake [is] gone” (172), when he returns to the “blank ferocity” of the mad dog, the “snarl[ing]” and “gurgle[ing]” (173), Janie must kill him. Modernism sees death as “the only lasting closure” (Singal 15), and as a Modernist hero Janie must kill Tea Cake to end his painful “stasis” (14), his lack of dynamic growth.

Once Janie sees that Tea Cake is gone and that “something else” is “looking out of his face” (172), she must end his suffering as an individual trapped by the tightening grip of rabid madness—an individual no longer capable of growth.

It is only in his afterlife that Tea Cake and Janie finally discover the democratic language of song that unifies them, that permits communication on a level wholly above the patriarchal system of language. Once Janie “commence[s] to sing a sobbing sigh out of ever corner . . . to sing, . . . sob and sigh, singing and sobbing” (183), Tea Cake dances into the landscape, where “the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees” (183). It is not a sick-growling then but an emotional singing/sighing that permits a spiritual interchange between the couple. Holloway observes that “the language of this novel sings” (89), and indeed the free indirect discourse harmoniously joins with the couple’s new “language.”

Singal writes that Modernist writers depict experience as “a continuous flux of sensation and recollection” (11), and assign “concepts” to “a continuum or spectrum rather than . . . tightly demarcated categories” (14). In the final scene of *Their Eyes*, gender is certainly in flux. Janie and Tea Cake communicate through sighs and song, not through signifiers and signified. The “seeds” remind Janie of Tea Cake “more than anything else because he was always planting things,” a highly masculine association, while Janie herself retreats into her exclusively feminized world, though she wears overalls and Tea Cake “pranc[es]” (183). As DeKoven observes, *Their Eyes* “refuses, in its modernist complexity—its undecidable ambivalence toward radical egalitarian change—to choose black conclusively over white, or female over male” (191). Rather, the two antipatriarchal threads of voice—Janie’s speakerly narration, her undoing of past silence; and the couple’s song-language, emerging from the tragedy of rabies and the symbolic prefiguring of dog-on-cow—create a continuum, a continuous flux, along which development, exchange, and growth are always possible, true to

Modernism's tenets.

---

Works Cited

- Bond, Cynthia. "Language, Speech, and Difference in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." Gates and Appiah 204-217. New York: Amistad P, 1993. Print.
- DeKoven, Marianne. "Modernism and gender." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and K.A. Appiah, eds. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad P, 1993. Print.
- . "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Hurston and the Speakerly Text." Gates and Appiah 154-203. New York: Amistad P, 1993. Print.
- Holloway, Karla. "The Emergent Voice: The Word within Its Texts." Gates and Appiah 67-75. New York: Amistad P, 1993. Print.
- Homans, Margaret. "'Her Very Own Howl': The Ambiguities of Representation in Recent Women's Fiction." *Signs* 9.2 (Winter 1983): 186-205. Print.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. New York: Harper & Row, 1990. Print.
- Singal, Daniel Joseph. "Towards a Definition of American Modernism." *American Quarterly* 39 (1987): 7-15. Print.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Three Lives and Q.E.D.* Ed. Marianne DeKoven. New York: Norton, 2006. Print.
- Washington, Mary Helen. "'I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands': Emergent Female Hero." Gates and Appiah 98-109. New York: Amistad P, 1993. Print.

# Triangulating Difference: Elision in Male-Male-Female Triangles

| Timothy Bruno

*Timothy Bruno is an English major at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. His research interests focus on issues of power and identity in literature.*

---

Feminist scholars have attentively mapped triangular relationships among women and men, noting the ways in which dominant ideologies of sexuality and gender marginalize non-dominant identities. Gayle Rubin, Adrienne Rich, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, among others, have explored the ways in which women are manipulated by men as means to affect the male-male relationship. To argue for the existence of these triangles or to simply delineate their operation in a text would hardly be novel; instead, I intend to examine triangular relationships in three primary texts by drawing an analogy between the manipulation of women by men and the act of *elision*. I suggest that in the same way that elision obscures a syllable within a word (Cuddon 255), female actors in triangular relationships are used by men to obscure differences between themselves, including ideological conflict, racial or class differences, or, as per Sedgwick, homosocial desire (Sedgwick 1-2). Given the interstitial nature of identity, how do the competing privileges and oppressions of the black male subject complicate this triangular relationship? In what ways do black men benefit and suffer from their positions, and in what ways are women affected? Imagine the triangle inverted and reverted, with either one or two points dominating. To explore the political implications of male-male-female erotic triangles, I intend to analyze three texts that articulate the complexities in depicting black masculinity in the twentieth century: Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Each notably depicts black masculinity through the relationships with women and other, sometimes white, men maintained by black male protagonists. In each, a male-male-female erotic triangle can

be discerned: in Himes, white women are manipulated to elide the complicity of white liberals in black oppression, and the guilt that follows; in Ellison, to elide one man's political manipulation of another, and of an entire community; and in Morrison, depicting the only all black triangle of the three texts, women are used to elide the sometimes strained homoerotic bond between two black male characters.

A caveat lector: It would be reductive to suggest that sinister male characters scheme to choreograph women's actions; likewise, it would be chauvinistic to portray the female actors in these triangles as victims without agency. Male characters act with varying degrees of awareness, often out of ignorance rather than intentional malevolence (in male-dominant ways, nonetheless). Moreover, the female characters are portrayed as uniquely strong and sexually empowered women who specifically demonstrate their own agency. To reduce the complexity of these characters in critical analysis would amount to a failed vivisection, leaving the patients lifeless upon the surgeon's table. I hope to observe one feature of these triangular relationships while remembering the complexity that gives these texts life.

Before analyzing each one, however, it is necessary to construct a useful theoretical lens through which to observe. Male-male-female erotic triangles will be the object of scrutiny; reciprocal, partly sexual relationships among a female party and two male parties (Sedgwick 25). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her book *Between Men* calls such a triangle a "graphic schema" (21). This suggests that the triangular relationship does not reside precisely in the fluid relations among the female and male actors but is rather a conceptual tool for organizing them for characterization. By examining a local triangle, the global field of social relations is observable. What reveals itself under such scrutiny? *Between Men* deals specifically with male-male-female triangles in English Literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1), but Sedgwick's premises are applicable toward the purposes of this paper in its analysis of twentieth-century

African-American fiction. Regarding erotic triangles, she suggests that “the bond that links either of the rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved” (21). It is a “homosocial” bond—designating any relationship between men, conventionally sexual or not—and is a uniquely meaning-laden side of the triangle (1-2). Sedgwick goes on to note that “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). The male-male-female triangle, then, is a uniquely fruitful way to microcosmically organize social relationships in order to delineate gender and sex oppression and privilege. In the same way that the patriarchal structure dominates women for its own benefit, so too do the male actors of the triangle dominate the female actor to benefit their relationship with one another; the local instance of the global system. Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, and Adrienne Rich, all theorize that men manipulate women, often in terms of exchange. Rubin describes the “exchange of women” as “an acute but condensed apprehension of certain aspects of the social relations of sex and gender,” and is not necessarily a literal institution so much as “a shorthand expression for the social relations of a kinship system specifying that men have certain rights in their female kin and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin” (87-88). The very real exchange of woman occurs even today, perhaps most obviously in prostitution (Rubin 97). Rich expands upon this point in her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” declaring that:

Characteristics of male power include *the power of men to use (women) as objects in male transactions*—[use of women as ‘gifts’; bride price; pimping; arranged marriage; use of women as entertainers to facilitate male deals—e.g., wife-hostess, cocktail waitress required to dress for male sexual titillation, call girls, ‘bunnies,’ geisha, *kisaeng*, prostitutes, secretaries]. (Rich 1766-1767)

Returning to Sedgwick, she discusses “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (Sedgwick 25-26). In the texts to be examined, the gift-exchange of women does not always take literal form but always exists in an implicit presumption by two male parties to manipulate a woman to affect the male-male relationship.

Understanding the male-male side of the triangle as reflective of systemic male dominance and recognizing the female position as potentially manipulated by the male actors to fortify their own positions or relationship to one another (and, by implication, fortifying male-dominance as an institution) are the two legs upon which the elision metaphor stands. In the male-male-female triangle, the women can be *used* (perhaps exchanged or bestowed, perhaps made into a focal point for action or discussion) between the two men in order to obscure a difference that threatens to divide the male-male partnership.

In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, that partnership is between Bob Jones, the narrator and protagonist, and Don. Both are leadermen at a California dry-dock during the military buildup following Pearl Harbor (Himes 3), but Bob is the only black leaderman in a highly segregated workplace. Don, for his part, establishes himself as sympathetic to Bob, even progressive, possibly leftist. In an episode where Bob’s directions cause a mistake in a project, he reflects on Don:

Donald shook his head noncommittally; he was a nice guy and he didn’t want to say I was wrong. I’d often wondered if he was a Communist. He had a round moonface, pleasant but unsmiling, and that sharp speculative look behind rimless spectacles that some Communists have. (22)

Kelly, a supervisor, uses the occasion as an excuse to launch into a racist tirade, and Don unobtrusively leaves, presumably out of disagreement (23). When Bob is denied a tacker by the other (white) leadermen, he turns to Don (26), who tells him that he can

“have” Madge, a white woman tacker (27). When Don jokes about Kelly, Bob politely laughs “to show him it was funny” (26). Theirs is a partnership, a relationship of reciprocal favors: Don tries to cover for Bob and gives him the workers he needs—both revealing sympathy for Bob’s marginal position at work—while Bob interacts patiently and amiably. It is a relationship of mutual respect, and for Don, his loyalty to Bob may be a personal expression of his Communist beliefs.

Don pulls Madge firmly into a triangular orbit. She already had relationships with both Don and Bob: as Don’s co-worker, and for Bob “she was the big peroxide blonde [he had] run into on the third deck earlier” (27), who “deliberately put on a frightened, wide-eyed look and backed away from [him] as if she was scared stiff, as if she was naked as a virgin and [he] was King Kong” (19). Now, however, the three are firmly bound in a male-male-female triangle.

Recalling Rubin, Rich, and Sedgwick, Don gives Madge to Bob, saying, “You can have her till dinner-time, anyway” (27)—apparently to strengthen his relationship with Bob or to strengthen the notion in Bob’s mind that he is a potential white ally and resource. The exchange, however, goes awry: Madge’s racism comes to the fore, as she tells Bob, “I ain’t gonna work with no nigger” (27). The epithet wounds Bob’s pride, his refusal to demean himself and pander to whites. He explodes, “Screw you then, you cracker bitch” (27). News of the incident rapidly reaches MacDougal, “the department superintendent,” who demotes Bob to mechanic (Himes 28-30). Since using Madge was Don’s idea, his alliance with Bob as a progressive white is potentially jeopardized, at least in Don’s own eyes. Whether justified or not, Don sees himself as culpable, feels guilty, and worries over Bob’s reaction and the effect it will have on their relationship: “Don put his hand to his chin, worried at his lip with his index finger, then headed [Bob] off. ‘I’m sorry about it, Bob. Now don’t get down on me,’ he said. ‘I told Mac I’d let you have her; I told him how it was’” (117); “I want you to believe me, Bob, I had no idea she’d give you any trouble. If you want me to I’ll

go with you to Mac and—” (118). Bob cuts off his offer, but Don is anxious to repair the slight.

Red came up in [Don’s] face in slow waves, but he didn’t pull away from it. ‘Some stinker,’ he said. ‘What she needs is a good going over by someone.’ I knew he wanted to say by some coloured fellow but just couldn’t bring himself to say it. Instead he got redder and said, ‘it’d take some of the stinking prejudice out of her.’ He hesitated a moment, then said, ‘She hasn’t got a phone,’ digging out a little black address book. ‘But I’ll give you her address.’ (118)

In this second exchange, Don bestows Madge sexually as reparation. But it is more than a repair: eventually taking Don’s offer, Bob’s conflict with Madge obscures any culpability or guilt that Don had in initiating their (Bob’s and Madge’s) relationship with the first exchange. The next time Bob and Don meet, the topic of conversation is Madge as a sex object rather than Don’s feelings of guilt and complicity in Bob’s demotion (157). Focus in the triangle shifts from the male-male relationship of Bob and Don to the male-female relationship of Bob and Madge. The moment initiating Bob’s demotion—Don’s offer of Madge as a tacker to Bob—is forgotten, obscured, dropped out of the relationship and in its wake the male positions in the triangle potentially are able to move closer because of the elision.

Don’s misdirection is the *modus operandi* for other characters. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* depicts a male-male-female triangle in which the act of obscuration becomes literal. Moreover, the positions of the triangle become somewhat more complex, and multiple triangles operate. The novel’s black protagonist has moved up from the South to Harlem, where he works as an orator and community organizer for the mostly white Brotherhood, Ellison’s thinly veiled allusion to the Communist Party of the 1950s. The *Invisible Man*’s meteoric rise is briefly halted, however, when the Brotherhood’s committee sends him “to lecture downtown on the Woman Question” (Ellison 406). The *Invisible Man*’s incredulity and humiliation reveal the

Brotherhood's chauvinism regarding women's issues (407). Here, Brother Jack is assigning both the Invisible Man and women in the abstract, each to the other (406). It is another act of bestowal and manipulation, suggestive not only of the movement's male-dominance but also its white supremacy. In this instance a triangle is established among the Invisible Man, the Brotherhood (particularly Brother Jack as its most visible representative), and women in general, with the white male Brotherhood at its top, controlling both of the other parties. This triangle, however, gives way to another. While lecturing on "the Woman Question," the Invisible Man is approached by a woman—"she appeared, the kind of woman who glows" (409). The glowing woman induces the Invisible Man to return to her apartment, where she reveals to him her fetish for the "primitive," before the Invisible Man allows "the biological" to overcome "the ideological" (413 and 416). The Invisible Man is awoken as the glowing woman talks with "a man who had spoken like an indifferent husband but who yet seemed to recall to me some important member of the Brotherhood" (419). The man's identity is never pursued, but it is implied that theirs is an open marriage. Here, the Brotherhood-husband permits the sexual liaison between the glowing woman—his wife—and the Invisible Man.

The significant and poignant Sybil episode is similar—the Invisible Man attempts a sexual encounter with the wife of a prominent member of the Brotherhood—only now he seeks and initiates the encounter in order to "help [the Brotherhood] go merrily to hell" (511), to bring down the organization he formerly identified with: "It called for a woman. A wife, a girl friend, or secretary of one of the leaders, who would be willing to talk freely" (512). Now it is the Invisible Man attempting to manipulate the female position in the triangle in order to revise the male-male relationship. Sybil, however, is hardly being taken easy advantage of. The Invisible Man must fulfill "the little dramas which she had dreamed up around the figures of Joe Louis and Paul Robeson," must "sing 'Old Man River,'" must play "Brother Taboo-with-

whom-all-things-are-possible" (516-517). Sybil's fetishization of the Invisible Man's black male body results in a humorous aborted rape scene. Though their one-night stand proves everything but sexual, a triangle among the Invisible Man, the absent Brother "Georgie porgie" (524), and Sybil is established. Though only implied through the absent Brother George, and as the Invisible Man's intended target, it appears that the Brotherhood's dominance is being subverted.

These three triangles, however, are incidental. It dawns on the Invisible Man that Brother Jack and the committee have been manipulating events behind the scenes. While in the midst of the Harlem riot, the Invisible Man understands:

Could this be the answer, could this be what the committee had planned, the answer to why they'd surrendered (the Brotherhood's) influence to Ras? . . . It was not suicide, but murder. The committee had planned (the riot). And I had helped, had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. (553)

Since at least the receipt of the anonymous letter before the Invisible Man's dismissal for "the Woman Question" (385), Jack and the higher members of the Brotherhood have choreographed events. While the preceding triangular relationships remain nonetheless accurate, it becomes clear that one triangle determines them all, that of the Brotherhood—the Invisible Man—women at large, with the Brotherhood implicitly using women to elide the true nature of its relationship with the Invisible Man: one of political manipulation, using the narrator to help incite a "race riot" in Harlem. The organization "Keep(s) [the Invisible Man] Running" (33) toward a series of distractions, beginning with the assignment to "the Woman Question" and involving several sexual liaisons, to prevent the protagonist from seeing the black community sacrificed for political ends.

The homosocial relationship in the dominating male-male-female triangle in Ellison is highly negative, even overtly abusive

and malevolent. More ambivalent is the homosocial bond in the triangle encompassing Milkman, Guitar, and women—with Hagar in particular—in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Elision in *Invisible Man* serves to create the appearance of *closeness*, or to actually bring the male positions closer for manipulation; elision in *Song of Solomon* functions to create an appearance of *distance*.

Lifelong friends Macon “Milkman” Dead III and Guitar Bains were always partly mismatched: Milkman, the son of black bourgeoisie landlord Macon Dead II, travels with the poorer Guitar without belonging in the places to which they travel. Milkman is driven out of Feather’s bar for being his father’s son (Morrison 57); in Tommy’s Barbershop, he observes “crisscrossed conversations” that involve Guitar without being a part of them himself (80). Their class separates them. As they grow older their relationship appears to strain further. Frustrated with Milkman’s middle-class indolence, Guitar tells him, “You’re not a serious person” (105), following Guitar’s revelation to Milkman about his involvement in the revolutionary Seven Days, Milkman, scornful, says, “none of that shit is going to change how I live or how any other Negro lives. What you’re doing is crazy” (160). Inspired by class consciousness, each is convinced the other is misguided, and the pair grows increasingly alienated.

Women, however, provide a convenient medium over which to close the widening gap. Following the arguments over Milkman’s apathy and Guitar’s violent radicalism, their relationship appears to organize itself around Hagar, Milkman’s cousin and onetime lover. Her unrequited love and attempts to kill Milkman provide pretense for him to spend time at Guitar’s home (113). Moreover, Guitar’s frustration with his friend is relegated by concern for Milkman’s safety (117). Most importantly, Hagar provides a pretext simply to have a close relationship. While, “[t]hey had not seen much of each other since that argument,” the attempts on Milkman’s life mean that “their friendship had been tested in more immediate ways. The last six months had been dangerous for Milkman, and Guitar had

come to his aid over and over again” (114). Though Guitar appears repulsed by “the whole business,” apparently in disagreement with Milkman’s handling of his cousin, Hagar nonetheless proves to be an area for the two men to relate without evoking politics (305). Before Milkman’s departure, women provide the same common ground:

[B]lack women, they want your whole self. Love, they call it, and understanding. ‘Why don’t you *understand* me?’ What they mean is, Don’t love anything on earth except me. They say, ‘Be responsible,’ but what they mean is, Don’t go anywhere I ain’t. . . . They won’t even let you risk your own life, man, your *own* life—unless it’s over them. (222-223)

Women are used to elide the political, class conflict wedging itself between Milkman and Guitar, replacing it with camaraderie and concern. The male pair uses women as a way to relate to one another again. Like the exchange of Madge between Don and Bob, these acts of manipulation are only partly successful and cannot resolve the differences between Milkman and Guitar.

Paradoxically, if the bond between Milkman and Guitar is interpreted as homoerotic, these same shared moments over women elide the sexual tension between the two men, obscuring it, or misdirecting its energy. The two are clearly bound from the novel’s beginning, with Guitar present at the moment Ruth Foster enters labor (7). Their intimacy is further established when, “at twelve [Milkman] met the boy who not only could liberate him, but could take him to the woman who had as much to do with his future as she had his past” (36). Morrison describes their fated lives in language evocative of star-crossed lovers; as they age, it takes on the appearance of a heterosexual male bond. At the novel’s end, however, Guitar kills Pilate, the only woman left literally between the two men (336). Heartbroken, yet seemingly free and with no women to mediate the relationship, Milkman gives himself wholly to Guitar, shouting, “You want my life? . . . You need it? Here,” before the two literally end in the other’s arms (337).

These are only tentative conclusions at best. Himes, Ellison, and Morrison depict male-male-female triangles as being complex enough to remain ambiguous. Each is comprised of multiple and shifting outcomes, motivations, oppressions, manipulators, beneficiaries, and victims. In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, although Madge is transacted between Bob and Don, she nonetheless negotiates her position in the triangle to attain power over not only Bob but also the white men in the drydock. Later, by invoking rape (Himes 180), Madge mobilizes “the whole structure of American thought” against Bob (187). Ellison’s depiction of the triangle contains perhaps more ambiguity, for each participant in the novel’s several triangular relationships achieves a degree of agency. The glowing woman and Sybil (if only half-realized) both actualize their sexual desires, effectively owning their sexual identities. The Milkman-Guitar-Hagar triangle in *Song of Solomon*, though implicated in Hagar’s abuse and death, produces good as well. Within a story partly about his movement toward adulthood, Milkman’s experience with Hagar contributes toward a mature understanding of his relationships with other women, symbolized by Hagar’s hair that he now carries (Morrison 334).

Even among such ambiguity, each author offers a purposeful image of the male-male-female triangle. Himes uses his triangle to explore the overwhelming extent of racism and the volatility of cross-racial and cross-gender dynamics, suggesting that black men occupy particularly dangerous positions in such relationships. For Ellison the triangle is a potential well of revelation, although the novel’s women still function, like Sybil, as catalysts for the male character’s realization. Like the rest of the novel, the triangular relationship is an opportunity for misseeing or seeing and for the creation of identity through action. The Invisible Man’s intentionally manipulative, accidentally empathetic relationship with Sybil allows him to clarify the value of Rinehart’s approach to life, while offering an opportunity to create his own identity: “I decided again to end the farce. Such games were for Rinehart, not me” (Ellison 523). The

triangle is also a source of revelation for Morrison, though perhaps through the damage it does. During his stay in Shalimar, Milkman recognizes that, “He had used [Hagar]—her love, her craziness—and most of all he had used her skulking, bitter vengeance . . . [u]sed her imminent arrival and feeble attempt at murder as an exercise of his will against hers” (Morrison 301). Awakening to his abuse of Hagar, Milkman awakens to his abuse of all women, validating Lena’s experience of his black male privilege, “[h]is hog’s gut” (301).

Some commonalities can, however, be discerned. Himes, Ellison, and Morrison each depict triangles as sites of meaningful albeit potentially dangerous or damaging social interaction. They are places of lived relationships and the stage upon which ideologies are enacted. In a sense, here is where racism and sexism occur, where the social world enacts itself in microcosm. Moreover, they are sites of discovery—of self, of the social world, and of one’s place within it. They are catalysts for knowledge: for Himes, for knowledge of racism’s hitherto only guessed at depth; for Ellison, knowledge of individual identity; for Morrison, knowledge of ancestral tradition and status as a gendered subject within the black community. To that end, the male-male-female triangle serves an experiential, revelatory function as well as an oppressive one.

Earlier I suggested that the triangle is a useful way to conceptualize the dynamics of power between male and female actors in terms of male-dominance. Inspired by Rubin, Rich, and Sedgwick, I demonstrated how men manipulate women in specific instances in specific texts in order to affect—usually to strengthen through the elision of differences—male-male relationships. The question, then, must be: What other models for dynamics of power are possible? The triangular model by its nature suggests a hierarchy of positions; though each position may benefit—even sometimes collectively benefit—the triangle may always be inverted and reverted, placing one or two parties in an inferior position. Such a model is only useful for its accuracy in describing relationships, and such a hierarchical model only accurately describes relationships in a highly

stratified social context. What would a non-hierarchical, egalitarian model for describing relationships look like, and what social changes would be necessary to make such a model accurate? What must happen so that, to usefully describe systems of relations, one must imagine a circle?

---

### Works Cited

- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Cuddon, J.A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. New York: Penguin, 1998. Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage International, 1995. Print.
- Fraiman, Susan. "Geometries of Race and Gender: Eve Sedgwick, Spike Lee, Charlayne Hunter-Gault." *Feminist Studies* 20.1 (1994): 67-84. JSTOR. Web. 11 November 2008.
- Himes, Chester. *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Vintage International, 2004. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001. 1759-1780. Print.
- Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination: A Socialist-Feminist Reader*. Ed. Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990. 74-113. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. Print.

Wiegman, Robyn. *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print.

## “‘Stop mixin’ up mah doings wid mah looks’”: Exploring Surrogacy, Sex, and Separation in Janie Crawford’s Early Self-Image

| Ashley Byrd-Pharr

*Ashley Byrd-Pharr is a member of the Alpha Zeta Chi Chapter and pursuing an M.A. in English at the University of Central Arkansas. She has served as the editorial assistant for Slant: A Journal of Poetry for the past two years and has also worked on her university’s yearbook, Scroll. Ashley presented this paper in April 2008 at the Alpha Chi National College Honor Society National Convention, where her presentation was honored with the Ellen Millsaps Prize in American Literature.*

---

Fundamental to Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the progress of Hurston’s protagonist and central narrator Janie Crawford “from puberty to womanhood” as the author’s “model of black female development” (Meese 45). Black women are often viewed as being in the lowest position in society because black women are not only dominated by white men and white women but also by black men. Hurston’s novel is occupied with Janie’s struggle to identify and embrace her black female Self, as she unhappily attempts to understand this image through her relations with others who subjugate and sublimate her identity through various attitudes and behaviors. In her article “The Tapestry of Living: A Journey of Self-discovery in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” scholar Janice L. Knudsen sympathizes with Janie’s attempts, arguing that “[i]n later stages of life, each human needs a selfobject,” or one who mirrors the other’s Self, in order “to develop into a mature, cohesive self” (216). But this mirroring behavior must begin in infancy.

Though the novel focuses on each of the protagonist’s three marriages, Janie does not become a “model” for black women because she survives these relationships; rather, Janie is born a representative and representation of marginalized black women through Hurston’s depiction of her insubstantial family life and unstable childhood. Janie’s recognition of her Self as a black

person occurs at the age of six when she views a photograph and discovers she is “colored;” within a few short years, the black child becomes sexually awakened to her womanhood by identifying with a blooming pear tree (Hurston 9-10). Both experiences are products of Janie’s childhood in which she is abandoned by her parents—affected especially by the absence of her mother—and raised by surrogates, her grandmother Nanny and the white family Nanny served. These early incidents combine to create Janie’s sense of difference, or otherness, as a black woman within a world of whites and men.

Like Heinz Kohut, the father of self-psychology, Jacques Lacan argues that children begin with a false sense of self identity which he calls the “mirror stage,” in which a child’s identification is formed “through the child’s original symbiotic relationship with the mother” (Rivkin and Ryan 393). This unification begins with the physical union of the pregnancy and continues with the mother’s mirroring attention to her infant after birth. Knudsen writes that “mirroring takes place when the parent (or caregiver) looks into the infant’s face and laughs in response to the infant’s laugh, smiles in response . . . coos in response . . . and so on” (215-6). This primary mother-child union must exist for the child’s eventual experience of separation to occur from the maternal figure and from others. This separation is necessary for the formation of a child’s sense of autonomy; if the union is thwarted or arrested, the child’s separation and his or her development is, too. Unquestionably Janie has been deprived of this early union.

When telling her life story to her best friend Pheoby Watson, Janie explains, “Ah ain’t never seen mah papa. And Ah didn’t know ‘im if Ah did. Mah mama neither. She was gone from round dere long before Ah was big enough to know” (Hurston 8). Though lucky to have caretakers in her life (that is, her grandmother and the white Washburn family for which Nanny works), Janie is distressed by the absence of her parents as the children torment her at school:

‘Den they’d tell me not to be takin’ on over mah looks ‘cause they mama told ‘em ‘bout de hound dawgs huntin’ mah papa all night long. ‘Bout Mr. Washburn and de sheriff puttin’ de bloodhounds on de trail tuh ketch mah papa for whut he done to mah mama. Dey didn’t tell about how he wuz seen tryin’ tuh git in touch wid mah mama later on so he could marry her. Naw, dey didn’t talk dat part of it atall. Dey made it sound real bad so as tuh crumple mah feathers. None of ‘em didn’t even remember whut his name wuz, but dey all knowed de bloodhound part by heart.’ (9-10)

In this passage, Hurston first acknowledges Janie’s obsession with her appearance by mentioning how she is “‘takin’ on over her looks.” Without the presence and physicality of her parents with which to compare her own appearance, Janie struggles to identify her physical Self (9). Though her grandmother Nanny is black and they live with a white family, paralleling the races of her parents, Janie cannot logically reconcile the two figures because they are not the parents who conceived and created *her* image.

The search for familial roots also arises with Janie’s reference to the bloodhounds used to hunt her father after “‘whut he done to” her mother Leafy (9-10). The reader learns later from Nanny how Janie’s mother was raped. Nanny describes how “‘mah baby” “‘come crawlin’ in on her hands and knees” like a helpless child after the rape and simultaneous theft of her innocence (19). In this moment when Leafy regresses, she solidifies Janie’s unfortunate future of misdirection and arrests her own child’s development. Nanny describes how Leafy “[c]ouldn’t stay here and nowhere else;” as her Self had been abused and diminished, she had to search for a new Self and left her mother—that is, Nanny (19). Without a stable and secure mother, Janie is doomed to repeat the pattern of insecurity within her Self.

Nanny describes how she knows Leafy is alive somewhere because she “‘know[s] it by mah [Nanny’s] feelings” (19). With Nanny’s statement, Hurston further emphasizes her belief in

the importance of the mother-daughter bond. This emphasis on familial connections is also seen in Janie's description of the hunt for her father; the use of "bloodhounds [my emphasis]" stresses the importance of blood relations over surrogate ones. "Blood" also bears the connotation of genetic identity, including race. Janie's mother is of *mixed* color, like Janie, and her father is a *white* man. Living with her *black* grandmother, Janie struggles to identify with the darkness of her relative's skin. The author also implies the narrator's wish for marriage between her parents. For example, Janie says, "Dey didn't tell about how he was seen tryin' to get in touch wid mah mama later on so he could marry her" (8)

However, Janie's parents never married—thus, Leafy's identity was never re-established. Janie says, "Mah grandma raised me. Mah grandma and de white folks she worked wid" (8). In this part of her story, Janie discusses how her grandmother has been thrust into a maternal position upon her daughter's disappearance. Janie never experienced a full union with the mother who bore her, and as she cannot have complete symbiosis with her grandmother (that is, the initial bond of pregnancy in which Janie is carried by Nanny's womb), she can never recover that initial sense of wholeness within herself.

But Janie's identity confusion is compounded by the fact that her grandmother's white boss, "Mis' Washburn," treats the young girl like one of her own grandchildren (8). This woman dresses Janie in the same manner as her grandchildren, which "wuz betterin whut de rest uh de colored chillun had" (9). Simultaneously, Janie is raised to a superior position through her clothing among the school children because she is associated with a white family, and she is lowered beneath the position of the Washburn family because her clothes are ultimately the grandchildren's cast-offs. Yet Janie has lighter skin and comes to associate herself with this white identity. Janie describes how "Nanny used to ketch us in our devilment and lick every youngun on de place and Mis' Washburn did the same" (8). Mis' Washburn becomes another surrogate mother. Janie also

expresses why she does not call her grandmother “Grandma;” upon observing her white surrogate siblings—Mis’ Washburn’s grandchildren—she imitates them, calling her Nanny, as if her grandmother was her black mammy, too.

Janie describes how she “wuz wid dem white chillun so much,” that she did not discover she was black until she was six years old (8). It is important to note that Janie says she “wuzn’t white,” rather than saying she is black. This is to say that Janie views racial identity in terms of white and non-white, in which a non-white person (or a black person, as Janie is herself) has no identity or does not exist because white is the *only* existence. This diction choice illustrates how an absence of whiteness emphasizes Janie’s sense of otherness and separateness—and her sense of self-loss. Lacan, too, argues that such a “lack . . . defines our being” (Rivkin and Ryan 394). Hurston’s sometime narrator describes how a photographer visited the Washburn’s property and one of the white children asked him to photograph the entire group, including Janie. The grown Janie explains her amazement upon self-discovery:

‘So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn’t nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat’s where Ah wuz s’posed to be, but Ah couldn’t recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, ‘where is me? Ah don’t see me.’ ‘Everybody laughed even Mr. Washburn. Miss Nellie, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, ‘Dat’s you, Alphabet, don’t you know yo’ ownself?’ (Hurston 9)

As Janie was imitating or mirroring those around herself, she came to believe she was white like her surrogate mother, Mis’ Washburn. However, the photograph acts as a mirror, revealing the truth about Janie’s Self—*she is different*. The child names her otherness when she declares, “Aw, aw! Ah’m colored!” and discusses how she thought she “wuz just like de rest” until she saw that photograph of her body (9). Hurston’s text cannot support Knudsen’s claim that Janie

was “a self-confident child” with “no doubts or insecurities” (218). She is, after all, a little girl of six here, crying in horror at the image of her Self. Not only does Janie find she is an Other among the white children, but more importantly, she also takes the first steps in realizing she is an individual separate from *all* others.

The use of language in determining self and relations between self and others is stressed by the fluidity of Janie’s nickname, “Alphabet,” which she received because “so many people had done named [her] different names” (9). The name “Alphabet” also evokes Hurston’s image of Janie’s father as a white schoolteacher who taught her darker mother, through his rape of her, how white men control and manipulate language to assert their power and authority. Language connects one’s self, or “the I to socially elaborated situations” (Lacan 444). Therefore, Janie’s position, marked by a name like “Alphabet,” is muddled. After all, not only has she been named by many, she has simultaneously been defined by many others, though *imperfectly* defined by them. If Janie had known her parents, she would have initially been defined by a close relationship with them, especially her mother. However, because she is abandoned, she must be defined and distorted both by their absences and by her surrogates’ presences.

Because Janie does not witness a marital union, she cultivates a romanticized (mis)understanding of the union of marriage and love. This idealistic view is evidenced in Janie’s obsession with the blossoming pear tree in her *grandmother’s* yard, a symbol of her awakening sexuality (Hurston 10-11) and her experience of an innocent kiss with “shiftless Johnny Taylor” (11-12). Janie’s condemned kiss with Johnny is symbolic of her mother’s rape while the pear tree can be seen as a replacement object for Janie’s mother Leafy. Because Janie, with a body of “glossy leaves and bursting buds,” cannot identify with the aging body of Nanny, she finds solace and response in the mirroring behavior of the pear tree (11).

At this point, Hurston switches from Janie’s indirect discourse to an omniscient third-person point-of-view. Knudsen agrees with

Hurston critic, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., that “the fluctuating narrator signifies Janie’s discovery of self” (218). The detachment Hurston creates parallels Janie’s own attempts to find her Self outside of her Self by “gaz[ing] on a mystery” (Hurston 10). Hurston writes how the tree, like Janie, changed “[f]rom barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom” (10). As an adolescent, Janie begins subconsciously to observe the sexual nature of everything around her, especially when she spends all her time “under that [pear] tree” (10). But Janie feels “a pain remorseless sweet that [leaves] her limp and languid” (11).

Not only does the author detail the main character’s sexual development and sense of gendered self as developed through sexuality, she also ties in Janie’s racial identity. Janie was a “barren brown [stem]” as long as she cultivated her black identity from the time she identified herself as black; however, as a child of mixed color, Janie can “bloom” (10). The adolescent will find that men are attracted to her Caucasian-related traits, such as her fairer skin and lighter hair. Whiteness is associated with purity, or what is deemed good and acceptable, and so Janie can blossom with a “snowy virginity” (10). In this image, Hurston explores how Janie’s sense of race is skewed by the conflicting images of her Self as a child of two races—a mixing that occurred as a result of sexual intercourse.

This pain Janie experiences upon witnessing the tree is connected both to Leafy’s rape and to the vilified first kiss Janie experiences with Johnny Taylor. As the young girl witnesses how “this was a marriage” within her observations of nature’s reproduction, she, too, longs for such a union in order to find her Self in another. After all, she witnesses “[a] personal answer for all other creations *except* herself [my emphasis]” (11). “Nothing on the place nor in her grandmother’s house answered her [Janie],” the omniscient narrator observes (11). After all, she is beginning to separate from Nanny—and thus from Nanny’s house. Then, in the “pollinated air,” Janie is blinded by her romanticized views of love, sex, and marriage and is attracted to the “shiftless Johnny Taylor” (11-12).

Janie's teenage dreams "beglamored his [Johnny's] rags *and her eyes*" (12, emphasis added). This illusion on Janie's part connects with Janie's obsession with images and how she views her Self and others. While this occurs, Hurston also describes how Nanny's dreams (for Janie) are disturbed. Janie has not fully separated her sense of self from Nanny's Self at this time, so Nanny still feels responsible for Janie's actions. Thus she is "brought wide awake," corresponding to Janie's concurrent sexual awakening, and sees Johnny "lacerat[e] *her* Janie with a kiss" (12, emphasis added). Hurston uses possession in naming Janie within Nanny's observation, and through the use of "lacerating," which means to tear or mangle flesh, Hurston relates Janie's innocent kiss to her mother Leafy's rape. Hurston implies "that black bodies bear the material evidence of racial violence," as seen in "Janie's perceived beauty—her long hair and light skin" which "results from an interracial rape" (Clarke 600). This image of violence is also seen in the "pain remorseless sweet that left her [Janie] limp and languid." This moment of pain represents the initial penetration—or *laceration*—during sexual intercourse, especially during a virgin's first sexual experience.

Just as Nanny's image of and dream for Janie is shattered, so is Janie's view of her grandmother while her wishful desire for the pear-tree is destroyed. Hurston scholar Mary Helen Washington feels that Nanny's objection and physical retaliation stymies Janie's growth in a way similar to her mother Leafy's actions (239). Janie is "diffused and melted" while Nanny becomes "part and parcel" (Hurston 12). Janie attempts to recover her childlike Self by dismissing her sexual desires and returning to "inside of the house" (12). This "house," of course, symbolizes Janie's identification with her family, especially Nanny. Nanny, however, names Janie's separation by declaring, "'Janie, youse uh 'oman, now'" (12). With the onset of Janie's adolescence, "the parental figure (Nanny) can no longer function as a selfobject" (Knudsen 219).

Throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston's protagonist Janie must "[ask] inside of herself and out" (21). This questioning is embodied in the chronology Janie (and Hurston) constructs for the benefit of both her friend Pheoby and for the novel's audience. Janie allows her marriages to define her Self for much of her story, but her resignation to the men in her life stems from her early parental relations, or, more accurately, her lack of parents. Knudsen concludes her article by stating that "[m]ale or female, we all need selfobjects to mirror and reaffirm our sense of goodness and self-worth" (229).

Unfortunately for Janie, she never possessed a primary self-object—her mother. As a result, the child had no one with whom to identify her Self as a black female because she found differences in race, gender, class, and age when she did compare herself to her surrogate figures. Like most children, Janie's development and familial separation is painful; however, Janie was born a poor black girl playing in the backyard of a white matriarch. This child incurs emotional and psychological losses physically—Janie's parents abandon her, Janie and her grandmother move away from Mis' Washburn, and Nanny dies at the onset of Janie's adulthood and first marriage. Just as Janie's sense of self develops from the impact of her parents' absences and from the presence of her grandmother as a surrogate, so must her future relationships with Logan Killicks, Joe Starks, and Tea Cake Woods derive from her childhood and past relationships. After examining Janie's childhood and how it affected the formation of her Self, one must question whether Hurston's character is ever able to define her sense of self in the first place and whether she can externally separate her Self from her relationships. Once the impact of Janie's childhood on her sense of self is recognized, Hurston's reader can see that Janie ultimately fails to use these relationships to fill the eternally felt losses of her parents and surrogates from early in her life.

---

 Works Cited

- Clarke, Deborah. "“The porch couldn’t talk for looking”": Voice and Vision in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *African American Review* 35.4 (2001): 599-614. Print.
- Hemenway, Robert E. "9 Crayon Enlargements of Life." *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1977. 218-45. Print.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Harper, 1965. Print
- Johnson, Barbara. "Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Black Literature and Literary Theory*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Methuen, 1984. 205-19. Print.
- Knudsen, Janice L. "The Tapestry of Living: A Journey of Self Discovery in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *CLA Journal* 40.2 (1996). 214-30. Print.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, second ed. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 441-46. Print.
- Lupton, Mary Jane. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Survival of the Female." *Southern Literary Journal* 15 (1982): 45-54. Print.
- Meese, Elizabeth A. "Orality and Textuality in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986. 39-53. Print.
- Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. "Strangers to Ourselves: Psychoanalysis." Part Five Psychoanalysis and Psychology Introduction. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, second ed. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 389-96. Print.

Washington, Mary Helen. "I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands': Zora Neale Hurston's Emergent Female Hero." Part Four Introduction. *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor, 1987. xv-xxxi. Print.

# (Mis)shaping History: Milton's Nationalist Rhetoric in *Observations Upon the Articles of Peace*

| Jennifer Doyle-Corn

*Jennifer Doyle-Corn is a graduate teaching assistant at Western Carolina University and is pursuing her master's degree in English. She plans to pursue a doctorate in the fall, focusing on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century British and Irish literature. In addition to her academic work in The Review, two of her creative pieces have appeared in The Nomad, and she has presented research papers at several conferences.*

---

In his 1644 tract *Areopagitica*, John Milton likens the pursuit of truth to the building of Solomon's temple: "There must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built . . . the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the goodly and the gracefull symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure" (YP 2:555).<sup>1</sup> Truth, for Milton, must be multi-dimensional and inclusive and yet, in *Observations Upon the Articles of Peace*, the first tract he wrote for the newly installed Cromwellian government of England, Milton responds to the ongoing English wars against the Irish in a way that noticeably fails to represent all of the "pieces" of truth—namely, the Irish points of view. Like many of his contemporaries in the new commonwealth government, Milton insists upon a nationalist and Protestant/Puritan-based set of political ethics, and his tract thus presents a discourse of anti-Catholicism and political and religious intolerance.

*Observations Upon the Articles of Peace*, published in May 1649 by order of the Parliament, was Milton's response to the January 1649 treaty between the king's lord lieutenant, James Butler, the Earl of Ormond, and the Confederate Catholics of Ireland. As Elizabeth Sauer points out, "Ireland had long served as a thorn in the side of those English citizens who invoked the example of the uncivilized, rebellious Irish to justify imperialist acts in the kingdom and abroad.

For Milton in particular, Ireland obstructed the establishment of a Protestant, Anglocentric, British nation” (46). Thus the Articles, which promised “ultimate independence for the Irish, subject only to a tenuous loyalty to the English crown” (Hughes 168), threatened English sovereignty and “seemed to Milton like so much pawning of Parliament’s sovereign rights in Ireland to buy support for its enemies” (171). Writing as a representative of the commonwealth, Milton responded to the agreement which, he declared, “[N]o true borne *English-man*, can so much as barely reade . . . without indignation and disdaine” (YP 3:301). Examining *Observations* in conjunction with other contemporary tracts, pamphlets, and publications from the 1640s and early 1650s reveals how Milton’s incendiary, Anglocentric rhetoric contributes to what has proven to be a long-standing biased historical version of the Irish rebellions against the English that began in the early 1640s. *Observations*, perhaps more than any other of Milton’s works, exposes the challenges Milton himself faced in adhering to the philosophical, religious, and political doctrines of toleration and inclusion that he espoused in his better known and more influential tracts about civil and ecclesiastical liberty, such as *Areopagitica* and *The Reason of Church Government*. However, as my comparisons demonstrate, where Milton may have promoted radically new policies and ideas about liberty and toleration in those tracts, in *Observations*, he instead did not veer too far from the standard discourse practices of his day in his efforts to promote nationalism.

*Observations* makes statements that clearly imply an innate sense of English superiority. For example, Milton declares that the Irish are “by their own foregoing demerits and provocations justly made our vassalls” (YP 3:302). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “vassal” as “a humble servant or subordinate,” and thus Milton makes clear that the Irish should be considered a lower class of people, inferior to the English (“Vassal,” def. 2b). This attitude appears again in his response to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Article of Peace, which calls for the repeal of English laws prohibiting Irish farmers “to plow with

horses by the Tayle, and burne oates in the Straw,” traditional Irish practices (YP 3:303). Milton sees their desire to return to such Irish customs as:

anough if nothing else, to declare in them a disposition not onely sottish but indocible and averse from all Civillity and amendment . . . rejecting the ingenuity of all other Nations to improve and waxe more civill by a civilizing Conquest, though all these many yeares better shown and taught, preferre their own absurd and savage Customes before the most convincing evidence of reason and demonstration: a testimony of their true Barbarisme and obdurate wilfulnesse to be expected no lesse in other matters of greatest moment. (YP 3:304)

Milton’s attitude of cultural superiority does not acknowledge the Irish sense of nationalism, but portrays them as barbarians for preferring traditional practices to English methods.

Sauer points out that, “English nationalism emerged in conjunction with a culture of toleration and, paradoxically, a climate of intolerance and imperial ambition,” (46) resulting in what Paul Stevens has labeled “Janus-faced nationalism” (42). In this era, “true liberty was not synonymous with contemporary notions of liberalism but with the freedom to act according to God’s laws” (42). The Catholic Irish, in the eyes of the Protestants, did not act according to God’s laws—“they have shewed themselves susceptible of the most bestial lewdnesse, and consumate impiety,” declares one tract (Waring 42)—and therefore did not deserve freedom. This stance is evident in Milton’s disdain for the second Article, which gave them, “who by their endlessse treasons and revolts have deserv’d to hold no Parliament at all, but to be govern’d by Edicts and Garrisons,” the jurisdiction to repeal Poyning’s Act (YP 3:303). This “law-giving power of their own,” Milton feared, would enable the Irish “to throw off all subjection” to England and thereby threaten the divinely sanctioned English sovereignty in Ireland (YP 3:303). Thus Milton expresses anger that the Irish:

After the merciless and barbarous Massacre of so many thousand *English*, (who had us'd their right and title to that Countrey with such tendernesse and moderation, and might otherwise have secur'd themselvs with ease against their Treachery,) should be now grac'd and rewarded with such freedoms and enlargements, as none of their Ancestors could ever merit by their best obedience, which at best was alwaies treacherous, to be infranchiz'd with full liberty equall to their Conquerors, whom the just revenge of ancient Pyracies, cruell Captivities, and the causlesse infestation of our Coast, had warrantably call'd over. . . . (YP 3:301-02)

According to Milton, not only are the Irish too uncivilized and violent to merit liberty, but they deserved to be conquered in revenge for their past behavior and presence in a land that the English view as their own territory, according to the English assertion that they had a “right and title to that Countrey.” Milton is not alone in this opinion. The dehumanizing language of the phrase “causlesse infestation of our Coast” is closely echoed in the 1650 pamphlet “A Brief Narration” by Thomas Waring: “Whosoever will take the Irish at the right view, will find them a root of such profound sloth, and lethargic supinitie, that they will say, they are meerly a kind of reptilian, things creeping on their bellies, and feeding on the dust of the earth” (41-42).

According to Mary Fenton, in his early works Milton does not participate “in the widespread discourse of atrocity that characterized popular accounts of the Irish Catholic rebellions,” but in *Observations*, he does start to exploit the generalized “virulent anti-Irish sentiment that saturated English culture” in his efforts to “promote the new republican government” (204). For example, Milton declares the Irish “a mixt Rabble, part Papists, part Fugitives, and part Savages, guilty in the highest degree of all these Crimes” (YP 3:315-16). The OED defines a “savage” as “a person living in the lowest state of development or cultivation; an uncivilized, wild

person” (“Savage,” def. B2a). A sampling of contemporary tracts reveals that this was the popular view of the Irish at the time. One tract from 1641, for instance, labels the “Northerne *Irish* Rebels” as “Barbarous and inhumane” (G. S. A2). Another tract, dated nine years later, describes the Irish as “savages,” “horrid and diabolical,” “fouly criminal,” and possessing “exquisite wickedness” (Waring A3-4). It is clear that Milton was certainly not alone in his classification of the Irish Catholics as almost subhuman, as research reveals hundreds of anti-Irish tracts and pamphlets being circulated throughout the decade of the 1640s with similar descriptions (Fenton 211-12).

Further, Milton’s tract degrades not only the Irish culture, but their Catholicism as well. While “papist” technically only means “a Roman Catholic; an advocate of papal supremacy,” it is used by Milton and his contemporaries in a derogatory way (“Papist,” def. A1). The Protestants viewed Catholicism as blasphemous and idolatrous, and as Catherine Canino has observed, while the Irish were long scorned by the English, it was not until after the uprising of 1641 that they were seen “as savage, demonic, and as enemies of God” (17). Canino argues that “Milton’s own writings, both political and personal, indicate that he absorbed and perpetuated the atmosphere of Gaelophobic discourse and that he attributed the diabolic nature of the Irish rebellion to its hellish origin” (18). Milton was not alone in *this* mindset, either. For instance, Thomas Waring calls the rebellion “divellish” (1), and the Protestant minister, Stephen Jerome, describes their behavior as “without pitie or Christianity” (4). While they demonize the Catholics, Milton and his contemporaries champion the Protestants’ mission as divinely sanctioned. “The Declaration of the Lord Governour Cromwel” of 1649, an official government document, states “considering the great mercies, and miracles of victory and deliverances which hath accompanied us even from the hand of our mercifull God, since . . . our first engagement with the common enemy. . . he hath made us to triumph over our enemies” (Cromwell 2). Similarly, Waring’s

treatise reports that the Protestants “have found the hand of God so mightily and visibly assisting them, that they have triumphed over their oppressors, and seen all their own endeavours crowned with success” (A 3-4).

In *Observations*, Milton charges the late King Charles I with selling away the justice due “for the bloud of more then 200000 of his Subjects . . . assassinated and cut in pieces by those *Irish* Barbarians” during the rebellions of the early 1640s (YP 3:308). Yet when he writes *Eikonoklastes* a year after *Observations* in 1650, Milton ups the death toll to 154,000 English Protestants dead at the hands of the Irish rebels in Ulster alone, which, when added to the other three provinces of Ireland, Milton claims “makes up the total summ of that slaughter in all likelihood four times as great” (YP 3:470). Such a large figure is difficult to believe when “in 1641 fewer than 100,000 Protestants inhabited Ireland” (Fenton 213). As Fenton points out, Milton was obtaining his information from reports that were intended to increase anti-Irish/Catholic sentiment, and thus many of these accounts were inaccurate, grossly exaggerated, or completely spurious, so it is difficult to determine what actual facts Milton did or did not know (213). Regardless, it becomes increasingly clear that Milton is not alone in his efforts to promote nationalism by exaggerating accounts of the war with Ireland. Another 1641 tract written by a Protestant minister, for example, blatantly states on the title page that it was “written to excite The *English* Nation” (G. S. title page). And while they may not explicitly state that as their purpose, other contemporary tracts had a similar intention. Take, for instance, the title of a 1641 pamphlet published in London: “Treason in Ireland . . . with a Relation of the crueltie of the *Irish* Rebels used against the *English* Protestants there, killing them, ravishing the women, cutting them to pieces, hanging them by the haire of the head, scalding them, cutting off their heads, and firing their Townes and Homes” (Jerome title page). Another example is Waring’s 1650 treatise, “A Brief Narration of the Plotting, Beginning & Carrying on of that Execrable Rebellion and Butcherie

in Ireland. With the unheard of Devilish-Cruelties and Massacres by the *Irish-Rebels*, exercised upon the Protestants and English there” (title page). The sensationalism is not limited to titles, either. All of these publications go on to give graphic accounts of numerous rebel atrocities—throwing babies in the snow, raping women, forcing people to strip naked before killing them, not allowing corpses to be buried so the birds would eat them, cutting off noses and other extremities, burning churches, etc.—all of which had the purpose of increasing anti-Irish sentiment (G. S. 4-6).

Whatever his role in the inflation of the number of Protestant casualties, Milton contributes to the sensationalism of war accounts when he fails to mention the thousands of people killed by the English during their campaign of reformation and “reduction” in Ireland (Fenton 214). Milton sees the Irish Catholics’ efforts towards nationalism and religious freedom to be anti-Christian and barbaric, yet those efforts were not at all unlike the English’s acts of Protestant reformation, wherein they killed thousands of Irish men, women, and children and destroyed homes, churches, monasteries, and entire villages. Ironically, according to Fenton, “England’s means of resolving the ‘complication of interests’ in Ireland” became “an imitation of the Irish methods that the English had found so barbaric,” a fact which goes unaddressed by Milton and his contemporaries (217).

In the latter half of *Observations*, Milton responds to a statement from the Presbytery at Belfast entitled “Necessary Representation of the present evils, and eminent dangers to Religion, Lawes, and Liberties, arising from the late, and present practises of the Sectarian party in *England*,” which was printed in conjunction with the Articles of Peace. The Ulster Jesuits were not allies of the Catholic Irish, but their compliance with Ormond and their stand against the Parliament in this document made them enemies of the commonwealth and candidates for Milton’s censure. He accuses the Jesuits, by making a political stand, of “breed[ing] continuall disturbance by interposing in the Common Wealth” (YP 3:319). He

adds, “Church Censures are limited to Church matters . . . affaires of State are not for their Medling” (YP 3:318). This seems to be a double standard on Milton’s part; he feels that clergy have no business influencing their parishioners politically because matters of the church and state should be separate, yet Milton himself advocates the Cromwellian government’s politics of Protestant, Puritan religious practice and doctrine. Milton raises a further contradiction when he states:

The Covnant enjoyns us to endeavor the extirpation first of Popery and Prelacy, then of Heresy, Schism, and prophaness, and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound Doctrin and the power of godliness. And this we ceas not to do by all effectuall and proper means: But . . . to extirpat all these things can be no work of the Civil sword, but of the spirituall which is the Word of God. (YP 3:324)

It is not the “Word of God” that the English are relying on when they use deadly military force during their campaign of reformation and reduction in Ireland. “Settlement of the Protestant religion” was, in fact, a priority for both the Royalist party and the commonwealth (Hughes 174), and as I mentioned previously, the Protestants saw their own mission as sanctioned by God. Thus Milton, a Puritan, does not take issue with the English government’s involvement in religion, only with the non-reformed Presbyterians’ involvement in political matters.

Milton’s incendiary, anti-Irish/Catholic discourse in *Observations*, appalling as it strikes us today, was common practice for the time, merely the rhetoric of the hegemony. Of course this is not to excuse or sanction such views or rhetoric, but to point out that Milton’s Anglo-centric rhetoric renders his contribution to history in the form of *Observations* the incomplete truth. I am not suggesting that Milton wrote with the express purpose of distorting history: After all, he was writing in his official role as Oliver Cromwell’s Latin Secretary, not as John Milton the man, or John Milton the poet, or John Milton the free citizen. But regardless of intentionality, he

contributes to the misshaping of history and reveals that he cannot be oversimplistically categorized as a promoter of liberty, as some of his earlier works might suggest. Rather, the whole of Milton's corpus reveals complexity and contradictions: simply put, Milton's notions of liberty are not all-inclusive, but full of exceptions. As contemporary readers, we should not oversimplify our assessment of Milton as he oversimplified the Irish—he would want to be subjected to the same process and standards of truth that, in *Areopagitica*, he prescribes for all writers.

#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup>All references to Milton's prose are from *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven, 1953-82). All quotations are from this edition, and subsequent volume and page references will appear in the text as *YP*.

---

#### Works Cited

- Canino, Catherine. "The Discourse of Hell: *Paradise Lost* and the Irish Rebellion." *Milton Quarterly* 32.1 (1998): 15-23. Print.
- Cromwell, Oliver. "The declaration of Lord Governour Cromwel concerning the citizens of London, York, Lincoln, Gloucester, Bristoll, and all other cities, corporations, and market-towns, within the territories of England, and dominion of Wales. . . ." London, 1649. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 24 Feb. 2009.
- Fenton, Mary C. "Milton's View of Ireland: Reform, Reduction, and Nationalist Policy." *Milton Studies* 44 (2005): 203-29. Print.
- G. S. "A briefe declaration of the barbarous and inhumane dealings of the northerne Irish rebels, and many others in severall counties up-rising against the English, that dwelt both lovingly and securely among them." London, 1641. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 24 Feb. 2009.

- Hughes, Merritt Y. "The Background of the *Observations Upon the Articles of Peace*." *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. Vol. 3. New Haven: Yale UP, 1962. 168-83. Print.
- Jerome, Stephen. "Treason in Ireland for the blowing up of the Kings English forces with a hundred barrells of gun-powder." London, 1641. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 24 Feb. 2009.
- Milton, John. *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. Ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. 8 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1953-82. Print.
- "Papist." Def. A1. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 1989. Web. 25 Feb. 2009.
- Sauer, Elizabeth. "Tolerationism, the Irish Crisis, and Milton's *On the Late Massacre in Piemont*." *Milton Studies* 44 (2005): 40-61. Print.
- "Savage." Def. B2a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 1989. Web. 25 Feb. 2009.
- "Vassal." Def. 2b. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 1989. Web. 25 Feb. 2009.
- Waring, Thomas. "A brief narration of the plotting, beginning & carrying on of that execrable rebellion and butcherie in Ireland." London, 1650. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 24 Feb. 2009.

## The Mirror above the Bar: Self-Reflection and Social-Inspection in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"

| Kenneth Marrott

*Kenneth Marrott is a recent graduate from Dixie State College, where he received a B.A. in English with an emphasis in literature in 2009. He is pursuing an M.A. in English at Weber State University. He is the Student Representative for the Far Western Region of Sigma Tau Delta. Kenneth's critical interests include ecology, American modernism, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the Beat movement.*

---

Ernest Hemingway's short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is the subject of innumerable critical essays that produce an equal number of interpretations. These interpretations range from quasi-biographical ones concerning Hemingway's mythic drinking habits to abstractions on nihilism and fatalistic religiosity as ongoing themes in his work. Such interpretations have addressed many of the story's themes; however, through deconstruction of the idiosyncratic dialogue and Hemingway's use of incremental repetition—primarily of adjectives denoting reflected and refracted light—the structure of the story is revealed as a convergence of the three characters into a single voice relating introspective data. Hemingway, I believe, built a literary "mirror" through which the reader participates in the twin processes of self-reflection and social-inspection.

The keys to this argument are the definitions of the terms self-reflection and social-inspection. First, self-reflection is easily summed up as the process by which an individual examines his or her thoughts and actions typically in a non-auditory fashion. Social-inspection, therefore, is a similar process wherein the individual analyzes the perceived thoughts and actions of others in an often but not always non-auditory fashion. In short, both are internal dialogues between the individual and his or her private thoughts.

Between 1959 and 1961 a debate was carried out between F.P. Kroeger, William Colburn, Otto Reinhert, Edward Stone, and other scholars amid the pages of *College English*. The debate centers on

the story's dialogue—decidedly the largest portion of the text—and Hemingway's "failure" to attribute a speaker to many of the lines. While the debate garnered critical acclaim and reprisal equally, it only served to intensify a search for an answer to a question that would not be posed for another twenty-five years: Roland Barthes' infamous question, "Who is speaking thus?". The quest for these critics was to find the cause for this grave error and how to correct it. Seemingly this approach is a quaint conceit on the tenets of new criticism, which espouse close reading and finding answers within the text itself.

Regardless, Kroeger and Colburn suggest in their essays "The Dialogue in 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'" and "Confusion in 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'" respectively, that there is both an "insoluble problem in the dialogue" (Kroeger 240) and "an irreconcilable conflict between artistic intent and execution" (Colburn 241). In particular they reference two "traps" in the text, one regarding who possesses information about the old man's suicide attempt and the other regarding who possesses information about the old man's age. When read as published pre-1965 these "traps" create confusion as to which of the two waiters is speaking particular lines of dialogue.

Rienhart approaches his argument differently. In "Hemingway's Waiters Once More," he resolves that the confusion is not confusion at all, but that "Hemingway may have broken the convention [to line break and indent new lines of dialogue] in order to suggest a reflective pause between a single speaker's uninterrupted utterance" (Reinhert 418). Reinhert cites the same two "traps" as Kroeger and Colburn and asserts that the "trap" is really that of the reader who does not understand that "the rule [to line break and indent new lines of dialogue] is a useful rule, but it is not sacrosanct" (418). In a later piece the debate will be set aside by the introduction of linguistic nuance.

Edward Stone suggests in his essay "Hemingway's Waiters Yet Once More" that the problem in the dialogue arises not out of

typographical errors but from an attempt to re-create linguistic and conversational idioms of the waiters' native tongue—Spanish. Stone's use of a linguistic argument quieted the debate for some years. But in the years between 1972 and 1975, Mary Hemingway began depositing many manuscripts at the John F. Kennedy library. When the collection was opened to select scholars in 1975 they came flocking to see penciled manuscripts of many of the short stories.

Warren Bennett examined such an early manuscript of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and in his essay from 1977, "The Manuscript and the Dialogue of 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'" he elucidates the changes made by both Hemingway and his publishing house Scribners that has resulted in two different texts. One text, printed until 1965, contains the "traps" mentioned earlier. The post-1965 text contains an adjusted line of dialogue that was changed to make it clear that the "younger waiter possesses the knowledge of the old man's suicide attempt" (Bennett 615).

Though all three of these approaches to the story illustrate that there are, indeed, problems with the dialogue, they do not address a potential, rational reason for the story to be structured in such a way. Reinhert argues that "it is common sense and it has the added advantage of assuming Hemingway's ability to develop a major theme in his story by means of consistent characterization and without slipshod craftsmanship" (Reinhert 418). In short it seems that to discredit Hemingway by claiming the dialogue is in error is to discredit his ability as an author. To that end, would it not be further discredit to Hemingway to not accept that the "error" might be intentional? A reading that attempts to determine the structure of the story reveals that to focus solely on the dialogue produces only questions, but if paired with the sparse descriptions serves to build a layered infrastructure of light and dark within the story, which in turn creates a reflective mood. This mood is evident in the process of social-inspection and self-reflection as portrayed in the two waiters and the old man. The young waiter clearly views his

world from the social-inspection position. He is concerned primarily with how others' actions aid or deride his own self-perception. The second waiter conversely acts from a middle-state between social-inspection and self-reflection. He is aware of his impact on others and through his self-reflection finds ways to understand others. Lastly, the old man in his deafness and preference for silence lives purely in self-reflection.

Though I am amenable to all the aforementioned arguments, confusion does seem to be the lady of the hour with the dialogue in this particular story. However, these earlier arguments fail to account for the chance that Hemingway intended there to be confusion surrounding the identities of the speaker at any given point in the dialogue. Some critics interpret the story to be about a single character battling alcoholism. Support for this argument typically draws from psycho-analytics and biographical information about Hemingway rather than the story itself. I believe the answer to this enduring problem resides in the text itself. Hemingway's brevity is unarguably intentional, so we must consider that the story's theme and structure are also intentional.

Looking at the descriptions in the story, immediately one notices that there is an abundant use of repetitive adjectives that portray light and darkness. For example, in the first paragraph of the story we are introduced to a man who sits "in the shadow . . . made by the electric light" (Hemingway 288). It must be noted that light and darkness in this story are both binary opposites and non-sequiturs to each other. Adjectives of this type continue throughout this descriptive paragraph. These adjectives appear to create layers—first darkness, then light—as if Hemingway is stacking blocks one atop the other. Take for instance the first line wherein we begin with "shadows" then end in "electric lights." Subsequent lines perform the same layering of dark and light, for example we go from "day time"—from which we must connote light—to "dusty" which suggests a covering of darkness. Later we are told that the waiters sit "inside"—where one instinctively knows light is at night—as opposed

to the old man sitting “outside”—where one instinctively knows darkness is at night.

Hemingway leads the reader a bit by suggesting that the old man is deaf. Though deafness like darkness is the absence of its opposite—sound and light respectively. This only furthers the “layers” theory by suggesting “he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference” (288). From these layers, it seems prudent that the reader find a sense of the process of reflection and how this sense aids in understanding the story’s quizzical dialogue.

Further, the old man “sitting in the shadow rapped his saucer with his glass” (288) suggests further layering by the use of the word “shadow” followed by “glass” a euphemism for clarity, transparency, and light. Descriptions of the old man are not the only descriptions that contain this layering of light and dark; they occur both in observations of other ancillary characters as well as the waiters’ observations about each other.

The description of the soldier and the prostitute passing by the cafe contain this layering of adjectives as well; as in the line “The street light [*sic*] shone on the brass number on his collar” (288). In this description, however, the layers of the adjectives have reached their pinnacle; they have produced a reflection of light. Physical mirrors are created in a similar fashion. A layer of darkness set upon by a layer of light repeatedly until the level of reflection required for the mirrors particular application is achieved. If indeed Hemingway possessed an awareness of this layer based construction—and it is doubtful that he did not—then he created in his story through a similar process a literary “mirror” through which the reader should read the dialogue as an epideictic conversation between one character and his own reflection in the mirror.

Proof of this exists in the “traps” elucidated by Kroeger et al. The lines “He’s drunk now” and “He’s drunk every night” (Hemingway 289) clearly resound with the praise and blame technique associated with the epideictic argument. But to whom and at who is this praise and blame being uttered? Clearly, this is the self-reflective mind

chiding itself. Therefore a line break and indentation would clearly be required because, as Reinhert states, “except in question and answer sequences, there is no need to assume regular alternation of the speakers with each new, indented line” (Reinhert 418). I assert since indeed this is an internal “question and answer sequence,” the indentation and line breaks are requisite for appropriate understanding.

Regarding the post-1965 attempt to change the way the story reads, I assert that the modified lines “His niece looks after him. You said she cut him down” and “I know” (Hemingway 289) be reassigned to their original places: “His niece looks after him” and “I know. You said she cut him down” (Bennett 615).

Such a reading eliminates the need to identify the speaker of each line of dialogue and absolves Hemingway and Scribners of their typographical transgressions mentioned earlier. Certainly there are critics who will disagree with this reading, but we apply this type of reading to texts of greater esteem than Hemingway’s works such as Plato’s *Republic* without much ado. In fact we revel in the dichotomy of such imagined narrations. To do similarly with Hemingway’s waiters is to look at the moral value of the piece and not just merely the literal. I agree with Joseph Gabriel’s assertion in his contribution to what I’ve come to call The Great Waiter Debate in his essay “The Manuscript and the Dialogue of ‘A Clean, Well-Lighted Place’”: “What specifically I contend is that there was no error made in the dialogue, either by Scribner’s [sic] or Hemingway himself; that we have here one of the most artfully contrived pieces in the Hemingway canon” (614). And indeed as is evidenced in the layering of darkness and light and Hemingway’s nod toward self-reflection and social-inspection “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” remains a work of artistry.

---

Works Cited

- Bennett, Warren. "The Manuscript and the Dialogue of 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *American English* 50:4 (1979): 613-624. JSTOR. Web. 04 Dec 2008.
- Colburn, William. "Confusion in 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *College English* 20:5 241-243. JSTOR. Web. 04 Dec 2008.
- Hemingway, Ernest. "The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition." New York: Scribners, 1987. Print.
- Kroeger, F.P. "The Dialogue in 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *College English* 20:5 (1959): 240-241. JSTOR. Web. 04 Dec 2008.
- Reinhert, Otto. "Hemingway's Waiters Once More." *College English* 20:8 (1959): 417-418. JSTOR. Dixie State College Lib. 04 Dec 2008.
- Stone, Edward. "Hemingway's Waiters Yet Once More." *American Speech* 37:3 (1962): 239-240. JSTOR. Web. 04 Dec 2008.

## “Ye Hearers, Take It of Worth”: Participatory Mimesis in *Everyman*

| Matthew Miller

*Matthew Miller is a recent graduate from Oklahoma Christian University, where he received a B.A. in English and Religion. He also received his Associate of Arts from York College of Nebraska. He plans to pursue a Ph.D. in English Literature at a yet-to-be-decided university. His research interests include medieval literature and medievalism, theological aesthetics, devotional poetry, and modern drama.*

---

Perhaps the greatest difficulty that contemporary readers face in encountering the medieval play *Everyman* is to reconcile the play’s artistic power with its unabashed didacticism. Although the play has great aesthetic force, its teaching element seems a flaw: one senses the pulpit infringing on the stage. Critical discussion of medieval morality plays such as *Everyman* has frequently acted on this perception, treating medieval allegory and morality plays as moralistic depictions of abstract themes. *Everyman*, however, is certainly not abstracted in the same manner as non-medieval allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* or *Animal Farm*, for example. Rather than attempting a concrete representation of abstract themes (as does *Pilgrim’s Progress*) or a metaphorical representation of specific events (as does *Animal Farm*), *Everyman* in fact presents a condensed, dramatic version of what the medievals saw as real life. Its allegory is balanced, then, by mimesis—the dramatic representation of real life—though mimesis is not by any means the sole function of the play. Although the core of the play is mimetic, it is framed with a non-mimetic prologue and a similar epilogue which attempt to reinforce the play’s moral, as well as to unite the audience with the main character. These sections explicitly identify the audience with *Everyman*. The play makes another attempt at encouraging audience engagement in that the most sublime moments of the play, *Everyman*’s absolution and ascent to heaven, occur offstage. This repression of spectacle, this anti-theatricality, invites a participatory mimesis, allowing the audience to share in *Everyman*’s experiences

by forcing the most dramatic moments of the play into their imaginations.

Early critics describe *Everyman* and other medieval morality plays primarily in terms of their didacticism and their abstract doctrine, neglecting mimetic and theatrical elements. E. K. Chambers, perhaps the most influential early critic writing in the early twentieth century, claims that in the moralities, “the characters are . . . wholly, or almost wholly, abstractions” (151). Chambers finds mimesis in the cycle plays, and in secular plays based on the cycle elements, but views the moralities as pure teaching pieces. Alfred W. Pollard levels a similar criticism at medieval morality plays: “In itself, as tending to didacticism and unreality, personification is wholly undramatic, and the popularity of the later Morality significantly coincides with the dullest and most barren period in the history of English literature” (xliii). Pollard calls the medieval playwright “too simpleminded” to conceive of uniting personification of ideas and concrete individuals, and thus views the moralities as dull and untheatrical (xliii). Though Lawrence V. Ryan’s analysis is somewhat more charitable, it rests on similar assumptions. Ryan argues that “the theology involved [in *Everyman*] is indispensable . . . it gives the play its characters, structure, significance, and even its dramatic impressiveness” (723). Unlike Pollard, Ryan contends that the didactic and creative acts work together effectively in *Everyman*; however, like Chambers and Pollard both, he maintains a firm line between the teaching and the creative functions of the play, and thus continues to treat the play as consisting of abstractions.

Analysis of medieval works on the basis of contemporary perceptions of the abstract and the concrete, or the interpretive and the creative, can become problematic. Several scholars of medieval literature have argued that the medievals made little distinction between the interpretive and the creative acts. C. S. Lewis, for example, argues that medieval writers saw themselves fundamentally as interpreters, not creators: “For the aim is not self-expression or ‘creation’; it is to hand on the ‘historical’ matter worthily; not

worthily of your own genius or of the poetic art but of the matter itself” (211). For Lewis, medieval literature is based upon conveying a description of the universe from authority, not offering an original interpretation. Similarly, John MacQueen claims that medieval theology saw not merely literature, but the universe, as allegorical: “God, as author of the universe wittily arranges that his creation shall operate at two levels, the immediate and the prophetic” (52). MacQueen contends that medieval theologians saw allegory not merely as a symbolic mode of literature, but as the means by which creation conveys God’s wisdom. Angus Fletcher discusses allegory in a like manner, arguing that “[t]here is . . . a constant harmony of creative and interpretive vision as soon as one accepts the medieval theocentric cosmology. . . . Man, in his divinity, could imitate the creation of the world by his artistic efforts” (135). For Fletcher, medieval allegory does not operate by imbuing concrete figures with abstract themes, but by depicting in a condensed, literary form the way medievals really believed the universe to work—actual events laden with theological meaning. Older critical conceptions of medieval allegory as abstracted and didactic have been perturbed, then, by more sympathetic understandings of medieval theology and literature.

Based on the no longer clear-cut descriptions of medieval attitudes toward the interpretive and the creative in the medieval period, three scholars have formulated important theories of medieval drama. These theories are central to this discussion of *Everyman*. Natalie Crohn Schmitt’s mimetic theory draws on the work of scholars such as Lewis, McQueen, and Fletcher to reexamine medieval allegory in morality plays. Schmitt argues “that while the object of the [medieval morality] plays is didactic, their effect is mimetic; that, more literally than the analyses have allowed, the plays provide a phenomenological account of existence” (304). For Schmitt, a person holding to a medieval worldview—who would have seen the world as inherently meaningful—would have perceived allegory not as an abstraction, but as the most direct

mimesis. V. A. Kolve's theory of medieval drama as play and game is based on similar ideas.<sup>1</sup> Kolve contends that because religious drama necessitated a man imitating God, medieval dramatic companies would have been open to censure: "[H]ere the image and its referent are so different in kind that blasphemy or sacrilege may be involved" (*Play* 9). For a man to imitate God on the stage would have seemed prideful or disrespectful to medieval thinkers, Kolve argues. To counter this accusation (which rests on a mimetic theory of drama), medieval dramatists developed a theory of drama as play and game which placed their work outside the normal rules of truth and falsehood. For Kolve, then, medieval theatre self-consciously creates a tension between the mimetic and the theatrical. Stanton B. Garner, Jr., emphasizes this last trait in his analysis of *Everyman*. Garner contends that *Everyman* is aware of its own theatricality and represses spectacle with a "steady anti-theatricalism," stripping away spectacle to enhance the power of the bare stage to communicate meaning (284). Although Garner's analysis at times tends, like early critics, towards a flawed dichotomy between the abstract and the concrete, his emphasis on the performative aspect of the play remains valuable. Analysis of *Everyman* and other medieval morality plays, then, must balance these three theories: mimetic, gameplay, and theatricality.

Schmitt's mimetic theory of medieval drama merits first consideration when examining *Everyman*. The core of the play is fully mimetic: the story of "[t]he *Summoning of Everyman*"<sup>2</sup> represents in detail an event which the medievals believed to be literally true (*Everyman* 207, line 4). The play purports to teach the truth of human life: "ye shall hear how our Heaven King / Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning" (207, lines 19-20). An accurate depiction of the world is thus central to the play's purpose. Furthermore, although the play's characters are universalized, they remain mimetic. Kolve has noted the ambiguity of the play's portrayal of *Everyman*—he is depicted as both singular and plural ("*Everyman and the Parable*" 83). Although *Everyman* is sometimes treated as a

universal figure (“every man,” “we”), he is at other times treated as an individual (“Everyman,” “he”). This tension allows Everyman to appear not only as an abstraction, but an actual person. There are similar ambiguities, played to comic effect, in other characters—as when Cousin claims he<sup>3</sup> has “the cramp in [his] toe” (217, line 356). This line carries little if any allegorical significance, serving rather to draw a laugh and to trouble the boundaries between Cousin’s role as an abstraction and as a concrete figure. Cousin here functions, like Everyman, not only as a universal type but as a particular, real-life individual: in this case one who has a mysterious toe problem. Finally, the set of characters who represent Everyman’s attributes and possessions—Goods, Good Deeds, Knowledge, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five Wits—represent a mimetic process in their departure from the stage. Although the characters themselves are allegorical, their removal from Everyman dramatically presents a biological process, a dying man’s loss of his faculties. The play creates the effect of mimesis, then, though it uses the techniques of allegory.

Although the primary storyline of *Everyman* operates mimetically, elements of Kolve’s theory of drama as play still appear. The primary evidences for this view are the multiple instances in which the play appears aware of the limits of its mimesis, moments which it typically exploits to create humor—for example, Cousin’s toe problem. Another instance is Goods’ initial speech: “I lie here in corners, trussed and piled so high, / And in chests I am locked so fast, / Also sacked in bags” (218, lines 394-6). The play makes no effort to avoid the obvious tension between Goods’ physical reality as an actor and his allegorical reality as a collection of items; rather, it embraces the humor of its imperfect mimesis for the purposes of its game. At other points, the play uses non-mimetic items for dramaturgical convenience, as at the entry of Everyman’s attributes. If the play were fully mimetic, Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and Five Wits would necessarily follow Everyman from his first entry.

This, however, would unnecessarily clutter the stage during the early part of the play. Faced with this problem, the playwright keeps the characters representing Everyman's attributes offstage until they are needed, at which point Knowledge tells Everyman: "You must call them hither" (226, line 665). Everyman does so, and the attribute characters arrive in an unabashedly theatrical moment, necessary for neither the play's mimesis nor its allegory. The calling of Everyman's attributes represents neither a moral point nor a physical process. This scene only remains palatable if the audience accepts conventions of the drama as a game—within this part-mimetic, part-allegorical gameplay, the scene is necessary as a piece of dramatic convention.

Although mimetic gameplay dominates the core narrative of *Everyman*, it does not account for the whole play. The narrative of Everyman's summoning, repentance and death is framed by two non-mimetic sections, the prologue and the epilogue. The characters delivering these speeches, the Messenger and the Doctor, present themselves to the audience as explicitly theatrical figures, stepping outside the main narrative to deliver exposition and teaching. These figures have no mimetic correspondent, and their statements are not part of the play's allegorical scheme. Although *Everyman* leans heavily on mimetic gameplay, then, the prologue and the epilogue offer plain didacticism. Far from having any Brechtian effect of distancing, however, these speeches in fact invite the audience to involve themselves in the world of the play. Their use of pronouns directed at the audience reveals this. The Messenger makes clear in the prologue how the action of the play affects his hearers: "[Y]ou shall see how Fellowship and Jollity, / Both Strength, Pleasure, and Beauty, / Will fade from thee as flower in May" (207, lines 16-18). These lines show that Everyman's plight is not his alone—the audience shares his situation. They will experience the process they are about to see enacted. The Doctor makes a similarly direct application of the play's moral in the epilogue, charging, "Ye hearers, take it of worth" (233, line 903). The use of second person

by these non-mimetic characters invites the audience to place themselves within the mimetic gameplay of the main narrative and creates a participatory sense of drama. Given the performance conditions of medieval drama—full light, no proscenium, with actors made up of local craftsmen and an audience gathered from the street—such a participatory element seems plausible, even necessary. The casual and intimate nature of this street performance style makes a close connection with the audience easier to attain, and more pressing, than in contemporary proscenium theatre: the play must involve the audience in order to hold their attention against myriad surrounding distractions. The Messenger and the Doctor thus make strong appeals to the audience to involve themselves within the story of the play, inviting participation in hopes of holding interest.

Despite the importance of the appeals to the audience in the prologue and epilogue, the key moments of participatory theatre in *Everyman* actually appear within the mimetic body of the story. Perhaps the two most central elements of the play theologically are Everyman's reception of extreme unction and his ultimate salvation, both of which occur offstage. Significantly, although his confession and his death happen onstage, the more sublime conclusions of these processes are left to the imaginations of the audience. The space in which Everyman receives extreme unction offstage is filled by Knowledge's sermon on the priesthood, "If priests be good . . ." (229, line 750). Similarly, the audience does not see Everyman receive his heavenly reward, although they hear an angel welcome him: "Come, excellent spouse, to Jesu!" (233, line 894). In both these passages, although the audience cannot see the action, their minds are directed to contemplation upon the respective images of the priesthood and of heaven, and potentially their own past and future experiences with these entities. In fact, Everyman's absences in these crucial moments—his only exits in the play—function to draw the audience into his place, allowing them to imaginatively experience what he experiences. The play has

encouraged the audience in this involvement with *Everyman* already by the ambiguity it creates in the prologue and epilogue between his universal and particular natures: he is both a “he” unto himself, and a “we” who includes the audience. The audience thus has the opportunity to fill in *Everyman*’s absence with their own experience. The physical absence of the actor playing *Everyman* allows them to project themselves into his place—a participation that the play has encouraged from the beginning.

As the dramatic theories of Schmitt, Kolve and Garner reveal, *Everyman* balances a number of complex dramatic effects to accomplish its twin goals of theatrics and didacticism. The play successfully combines allegorical meaning and mimetic technique with a sense of gameplay and a prominent theatricality to create its participatory appeal. Far from being merely a set of abstract themes personified for the purpose of preaching doctrine, the play is instead a complex piece of art which often perturbs its own mimetic technique. Beyond these methods, a primary element in the play’s success is its direct involvement of its audience, particularly in the moments of *Everyman*’s absence. These participatory elements allow the play to create a more vivid picture of *Everyman*’s salvation by placing the most powerful moments of the drama wholly within the audience’s imagination. The reception of the final seal of salvation, and salvation itself, thereby become more personal and sublime. Furthermore, this emphasis on participation serves the didactic purposes of the play: by encouraging the audience to involve themselves imaginatively in the play’s two most central doctrines, it encourages them to participate in fact as well. By calling on its audience to join in its game of imitation, *Everyman* implicitly suggests that they engage in the real-life salvation it portrays.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Kolve's theory addresses medieval mystery plays, and it might thus be argued that it is inapplicable to the greatly different genre of the morality. The reader is asked to bear in mind, however, that these genres are creations of later literary critics rather than the medievals themselves—and thus have little bearing on an argument regarding medieval perceptions of the plays.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from *Everyman* are from the Cawley text, which adopts modernized spellings but retains the text unchanged.

<sup>3</sup> I use the masculine pronoun for the play's characters on the assumption that a medieval staging would likely have featured an all-male cast.

---

 Works Cited

- Anonymous. *Everyman. Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*. Ed. A. C. Cawley. Everyman's Library. London: Dent, 1970. 206-34. Print.
- Chambers, E. K. *The Mediaeval Stage*. Vol. 2. London: Oxford UP, 1903. Print.
- Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory: the Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1964. Print.
- Garner, Stanton B. Jr. "Theatricality in *Mankind* and *Everyman*." *Studies in Philology* 84.3 (1987): 272-85. *Academic Search Elite*. EBSCO. Web. 18 Nov. 2008.
- Kolve, V. A. "Everyman and the Parable of the Talents." *The Medieval Drama*. Ed. Sandro Sticca. Albany, NY: Albany State of New York UP, 1972. 69-98. *NetLibrary*. 9 Dec. 2008.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964. Print.

- MacQueen, John. *Allegory. The Critical Idiom. No. 14.* London: Methuen, 1970. Print.
- Pollard, Alfred W. *English Miracle Plays: Moralities and Interludes.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1965. Print.
- Ryan, Lawrence V. "Doctrine and Dramatic Structure in *Everyman*." *Speculum* 32.4 (1957): 722-35. Print.
- Schmitt, Natalie Crohn. "The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays." *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays.* Eds. Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and Stroupe, John H. *AMS Studies in the Middle Ages. No. 4.* New York: Amis P, 1982. 304-15. Print.
- The Play Called Corpus Christi.* Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1966. Print.

## “Changes” in the “Country of the Mind”: Seamus Heaney’s Revision of William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”

| Trenton Olsen

*Trenton Olsen is a recent graduate from Utah State University, where he received a B.A. in English Literary Studies and served as President of the Rho Tau Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. His research on Seamus Heaney and William Wordsworth was supported by the Utah Humanities Council, and his essay on Mormon poetry of the Utah War was published by the Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies. He plans to enter a doctoral program in English Literature in 2010.*

---

In 1973, Seamus Heaney told Darcy O’Brien that he had been “getting a lot out of Wordsworth lately” (37). O’Brien struggled to see the connection. The personality, philosophy, and technique of the two poets seemed to him fundamentally different. Seven years later, O’Brien published an article on the poets’ relationship, when he had “begun to understand” it (37). Scholars have subsequently claimed an increasingly close correspondence between Heaney and Wordsworth. Richard Gravil’s essay, for instance, identifies Heaney as one of “Wordsworth’s Second Selves” and, more recently, Hugh Houghton contends that Wordsworth “haunts Heaney more than any other poet” (62). While these arguments have been insightful attempts to extend the similarities O’Brien first identified, they have overlooked the stark differences with which he initially struggled. Paradoxically, the most productive way to explore the significant contrasts between Heaney and Wordsworth is through a close examination of their key similarities. Heaney’s poem “Changes,” though almost completely ignored by scholars, enables such a study, as it explicitly imitates and modifies Wordsworth’s most famous work, “Tintern Abbey.” In this essay I will attempt what Heaney accomplishes in his poem—that is, to demonstrate the distinct boundaries that separate him from his Romantic predecessor. Inasmuch as O’Brien instigated the discussion of the poets’ similarities by outlining the analogous “link between man and nature” in their work (42), I will focus on the differences in

their depictions of landscape, mapping the border between their respective “count[r]ies of the mind” staked out in the poems (*Preoccupations* 132). This analysis will show not only the multiple levels on which Heaney patterns “Changes” after “Tintern Abbey” but, more instructively, how and why he consciously departs from Wordsworth’s model, revising as well as reviewing his text. Studying these poems in dialogue provides important insight into the poets’ fundamental, though oft-neglected, differences.

“Changes” clearly mirrors “Tintern Abbey,” both thematically and rhetorically. Heaney said of Wordsworth, “He was the first man to articulate the nature that becomes available to the feelings through dwelling in one dear perpetual place” (*Preoccupations* 145). In each piece, the poet revisits such a setting from his past—“one dear perpetual place” that inspires and sustains his poetry. Wordsworth returns to the River Wye while Heaney revisits the old pump at his family’s farm at Mossbawn—a significant image for him with life-giving symbolism. While Wordsworth is accompanied by his sister, Dorothy, Heaney’s companion is presumably one of his children, as various poems in the volume *Station Island* recount experiences with his family. As Heaney deliberately returns to his secluded spot after many years, Wordsworth, “though absent long,” returns to the natural scene “once again” (24, 5). Each poet’s experience differs from his earlier memories, as Wordsworth finds the landscape at the Wye no longer brings inspired thoughts and feelings, and Heaney and his child have the unexpected experience of seeing a mother bird and her egg in the now rusted pump. In addition to parallel rhetorical situations, “Changes” closely mirrors “Tintern Abbey” thematically, as both poets learn that experiences in nature can be relived in memory, passing the lesson on to their respective companions. Heaney’s closing counsel to his child is to “remember this” experience and mentally “retrace this path / When you have grown away and stand at last / At the very centre of the empty city” (23, 24-6). Heaney’s advice directly parallels Wordsworth’s speech to Dorothy to “remember me, / And these

my exhortations,” urging her not to forget “that on the banks of this delightful stream / We stood together” (49-50, 25). Both writers speak from experience as they have recalled memories in nature in “tranquil restoration,” bringing “sensations sweet” “mid the din / Of towns and cities” (“Tintern Abbey” 29, 27-8).

These parallels in the poets’ approaches to the natural world are underscored by Heaney’s use of Wordsworthian language and imagery in his description of the scene. Heaney tells us that “the high moments of Wordsworth’s poetry occur when the verse has carried us forward and onward to a point where line by line we do not proceed but hang in a kind of suspended motion, sustained by the beat of the verse as a hanging bird is sustained by the beat of its wing” (P 65).

Heaney’s words “hang[ing] in a kind of suspended motion” echo Wordsworth’s line in “Tintern Abbey”—“the motion of our human blood almost suspended”—and affirm that Heaney considers Wordsworth’s return to the Wye a “high moment” (44-5). The comparison of Wordsworth’s poetic rhythm to a bird sustained in flight also extends to “Changes,” as the mother bird serves as a Wordsworthian symbol. Heaney’s description of the scene as “so tender” may also allude to the qualifications of a poet outlined by Wordsworth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, a text that Heaney has continually praised, as being endowed with more “tenderness” than is “supposed to be common among mankind” (viii “Introduction,” 125). Heaney’s gentle manner toward the bird and her egg may also point back to *The Prelude* where, by contrast, Wordsworth describes his youthful self as a “fell destroyer,” trapping birds and stealing their eggs (1.34).

As these discrepant details suggest, while the two poets’ experiences in nature are apparently parallel, they also show stark differences. Wordsworth initially tries to ignore the man-made images in “Tintern Abbey,” depicting the riverbank as a “wild secluded scene” which he insists “impress[es] / Thoughts of . . . deep seclusion” (6-7). In the first stanza, he emphatically attempts to

distinguish the natural from the human elements of the setting. The surrounding imagery of civilization is eclipsed by the natural scenery as Wordsworth observes the “plots of cottage ground, these orchard-tufts, / Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits, / Among the woods and copses lose themselves” (11-3). While he acknowledges the cottages and orchards, he maintains that they remain “green to the very door” and do not “with their green and simple hue, disturb / The wild green landscape” or “houseless wood” (14-5). Wordsworth portrays the cultivated bushes which separate tracts of land as part of nature saying, “These hedge-rows, [are] hardly hedge-rows, [but] little lines / Of sportive wood run wild” (16-7).

Rather than dividing the human and the natural, Heaney conflates them in “Changes,” undoing the binary opposition of “Tintern Abbey.” He describes his rural destination not as a purely wild scene, but rather as a man-made object in nature: “the pump in the long grass” (2). Heaney hears in his memory the sounds of the pump’s construction: “the bite of the spade that sank it, / the slithering and grumble / as the mason mixed his mortar” (4-6). His word choice of “bite,” “grumble,” and “slithering” to describe the function of the tools links the human-operated instruments with animals, associating them with the natural as well as the civilized. The poet also applies a natural, animalistic description to the women who formerly used the pump, “coming with white buckets / like flashes on their ruffled wings” (7-8). Indeed, the pump itself is portrayed as an animal as the bird is found in “its mouth” (11). While the bird’s habitation of the pump seemingly signals its reclamation by nature, the description of her shelter as a “citadel,” a man-made edifice in command of a city, connects the wild bird to civilization. Heaney even reverses the roles of humans and nature with his perspective of the animal: “a bird’s eye view of a bird” (12).

Wordsworth’s inability to conflate the human and the wild as Heaney does stems from the anxiety inherent in his relationship with nature. The central crisis in “Tintern Abbey” is that nature initially fails to impress “elevated thoughts” and “powerful feelings”

on the poet (98, 123). Wordsworth realizes that he has lost his connection with the natural world and panics, as signaled by the first two abrupt stanza breaks. Lamenting the loss of his source of inspiration, Wordsworth is painfully aware that he is no longer “like a roe” or part of the wild setting (67). In the third stanza this anxiety increases in intensity, taking on a desperate, exclamatory tone as Wordsworth questions whether nature ever inspired him: “If this be but a vain belief, yet oh!” he cries, “How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee / O sylvan Wye! . . . How oft has my spirit turned to thee!” (52-3, 58-60). Wordsworth’s anxiety is a function of his historical perspective. As urbanization encroached ever closer on nature, he insists on the boundary between them and attempts to diminish the man-made elements of the scene in an effort to protect his beloved natural scene. Indeed, the message of Wordsworth’s poetry is as social as it is aesthetic, implicitly speaking against industrialization by its continual emphasis on nature. Further evidence of this anti-industrial perspective lies in his dismal descriptions of the city in the poem, as he thinks back to “lonely rooms . . . ‘mid the din / Of towns and cities” (27-8). In the urban center, Wordsworth only sees “darkness” and “joyless daylight” (54, 55).

On the other hand, Heaney’s ability to conflate the human and the natural is due to his thorough accustomization to the intersection of boundaries and deep aesthetic interest in dividing lines. Heaney’s interest in division is profoundly connected with his identity and can be traced back to his childhood growing up on the border between his mother’s “predominantly Protestant and loyalist village of Castledawson and his father’s generally Catholic and nationalist district of Bellaghy” (53). This boundary also distinguished the rural from the urban. As Heaney states, “Castledawson was a far more official place . . . more modern, more part of the main drag.” There, “factory workers came and went to the sound of the factory horn.” In contrast, in his father’s Bellaghy, “their dwellings were thatched rather than slated, their kitchens had open fires rather than polished stoves, the houses

stood in the middle of the fields rather than in a terrace, and the people who lived in them listened to the cattle roaring rather than the horn blowing” (52). The intersection of these two contrasting communities, cultures, and economies is central to Heaney’s identity; as he notes in his poem “Terminus,” “I grew up in between” (16). Thus Heaney is not only comfortable with the intersection of the human and the natural, but for him it is a source of inspiration and identity. Blurring the division between them allows him to see the man-made in the natural and the natural in the man-made, shifting back and forth between the two; he is able to reoccupy his former place in nature with a “bird’s eye view of a bird” (12), whereas Wordsworth can no longer “[bound] like a roe” after returning from the city (70). Michael Parker’s photograph of the Mossbawn pump, included in his biography on Heaney, reveals a wire fence standing a few inches behind it. Considering that the poet’s father, Patrick Heaney, said the photograph was “the very same” as his son “had written,” this fence likely would have been there when Heaney wrote “Changes” (269). The placement of the fence makes the pump a site where boundaries meet, providing further insight into Heaney’s merging of the human and the natural while at the scene.

Another boundary dividing the two poets is their gendered views of nature, as Heaney portrays the natural scene as feminine whereas Wordsworth depicts landscape as masculine. Wordsworth emphasizes a masculine grandeur in his description of the natural scene, attributing his past inspiration to “steep and lofty cliffs” (5). His broad and all-encompassing view of the natural scene includes the entire “landscape” and “sky” (8). He also describes the River Wye, the woods, mountains, meadows, ocean, and the sun as he returns to the specific spot, highlighting its magnitude. By contrast, Heaney’s vision of nature is distinctly feminine. Rather than describing each feature of an immense landscape, Heaney focuses on a bird and her egg. The description of his perspective as a “bird’s eye view” emphasizes the smallness of his subject (12). The mother

bird guarding her egg also makes nature explicitly female in the poem, serving as a maternal symbol as well as a natural image. The women from Heaney's memory who formerly used the pump are described as birds with "ruffled wings," again linking nature with femininity (8). Rather than lauding the magnitude of the setting as Wordsworth does, Heaney is quietly moved by its beauty and adopts a "tender" demeanor toward the bird, covering its shelter "as gently as [he] could" (17, 23). As with other boundaries in his poetry, Heaney combines the female and male elements of the setting in the image of the pump, which again serves as an important symbol for the intersection of borders. His feminine view of nature is consistent with Parker's interpretation of the pump itself as an important "fecund presence" in the poet's consciousness, that "with its phallic shape and life-giving water . . . symbolizes the creative union of his parents, the male and female" (Parker 6). Thus the landscape itself is feminine and the man-made object that has been inserted into the earth is masculine. The sexual element Parker identifies in the pump is further illustrated by Heaney's recollection of the pump's construction in his essay "Mossbawn," as he describes "men coming to sink the shaft of the pump and digging through that seam of sand down into the bronze riches of the gravel that soon began to puddle with the spring water" (FK 6).

The symbolically sexual union of the pump and the earth in the poem, however, suggests more than the "creative energy" Parker attributes to it, as it also carries subtle and sinister undertones of the national borders separating the Irish poet from England's Wordsworth (6). The cast iron Mossbawn pump is almost certainly one of the British-made hand pumps that were heavily produced and exported in the 1930s and '40s. This detail allows us to view the pump itself as a symbol of the British presence in Ireland, corresponding with Heaney's colonial metaphor of both sexual conquest and desecration of nature in his poem "Act of Union." Heaney personifies England as the poem's speaker, the "imperial / Male . . . tall kingdom over your shoulder" that is addressing

Ireland—his female rape victim (15-16, 9). He describes the sexual and imperial “act of union” as “a gash breaking open in the ferny bed” and attributes “the rending process in the colony / [to] The battering ram, the boom burst” (4, 17-8). The victim’s “stretchmarked body, the big pain” is left “raw, like opened ground” (27-8). The sexual—and by implication national—symbolism of the pump’s union with nature is Heaney’s way of accounting for the contrasting nationalities of himself and Wordsworth. Heaney’s insistence on this distinction is evident in his more lighthearted verse epistle *An Open Letter*, written in response to Penguin Books’ inclusion of his work in an anthology of contemporary British poetry, in which he states, “Be advised / My passport’s green. / No glass of ours was ever raised / To toast *The Queen*” (6-8). Heaney has written that “the feminine element for me involves the matter of Ireland and the masculine strain is drawn from involvement with English literature” (P 132). As Elmer Andrews states, this national division “underlies two different responses to landscape;” one that is, in Heaney’s words, “lived, illiterate, and unconscious” and one that is “learned, literate, and conscious” (P 131, qtd. in Andrews 374). True to form, Heaney straddles this divide in his poetry, torn between the opposing influences of his rural Irish heritage and his British literary education, as the “illiterate self was tied to the little hills and earthed in the stony grey soil and the literate self . . . pined for the ‘City of the Kings’ where art, music, and letters, were the real things” (P 137).

Differences in setting and form between “Changes” and “Tintern Abbey” provide insight into Heaney’s purpose in imitating Wordsworth as well as the ways in which he differs from his predecessor. Heaney represents nature through a bird and her small egg, which are dwarfed by Wordsworth’s “lofty cliffs” on the banks of the Wye (5). Heaney’s poem is a mere 26 lines in couplets, compared to Wordsworth’s 163. “Changes” is only one word compared with his predecessor’s eight-word title and explanatory subtitle. These differences demonstrate Heaney’s

deliberate miniaturization of "Tintern Abbey" as a way of honoring Wordsworth. Parker's reading of Heaney's acknowledgement of Wordsworth in the "Glanmore Sonnets" supports this humility of purpose: "To allude, for Heaney, is to pay tribute, to claim kin, but not equality" (168). Thus, rather than competing with Wordsworth, Heaney honors him, crediting his poetry for its influence in his own development. On the other hand, Heaney's "Changes" is an extension as much as a miniaturization of "Tintern Abbey" as he merges the human and natural, feminizes the landscape, and maintains the national border that separates him from Wordsworth. His explicit imitation of Wordsworth, together with his deviation from the Romantic's model, correspond with his view described in the poem as "a bird's eye view of a bird" (12). It will be remembered that the bird, for Heaney, is a Wordsworthian symbol. Thus, in seeing the bird from a bird's perspective, he writes both about Wordsworth and like Wordsworth. As Heaney compares both himself and Wordsworth to birds, he can be seen as the bird's egg, or Wordsworth's poetic offspring, as he has been taught and nurtured by his predecessor. While Heaney has "remember[ed]" Wordsworth "and these [his] exhortations" ("Tintern" 149, 150), retaining his ability to "retrace [his predecessor's] path," he has also "grown away" from him, transcending the boundaries of his influence to explore his own poetic territory ("Changes" 24, 25).

---

#### Works Cited

- Andrews, Elmer. "The Gift and the Craft: An Approach to the Poetry of Seamus Heaney." *Twentieth Century Literature* 31 (1985): 368-79. Print.
- Gravil, Richard. "Wordsworth's Second Selves?" *The Wordsworth Circle* 14 (1983): 191-201. Print.
- Heaney, Seamus. "An Open Letter." Reprinted in *Ireland's Field Day*. London: Hutchinson, 1995. 23-29. Print.

- . *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002. Print.
  - . Introduction. *William Wordsworth: Poems selected by Seamus Heaney*. By William Wordsworth. London: Faber and Faber, 2001. vii-xii. Print.
  - . *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998. Print.
  - . *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. London: Faber and Faber, 1980. Print.
- Houghton, Hugh. "Power and Hiding Places: Wordsworth and Seamus Heaney." *The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Influence in Twentieth-Century Literature*. Ed. Damien Walford and Richard Marggraf Turley. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2006. 61-100. Print.
- O'Brien, Darcy. "Seamus Heaney and Wordsworth: A Correspondent Breeze." *The Nature of Identity: Essays Presented to Donald E. Haydon by the Graduate Faculty of Modern Letters, the University of Tulsa*. Ed. William Weathers. Tulsa: U of Tulsa P, 1981. 37-46. Print.
- Parker, Michael. *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993. Print.
- Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads. The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Concise Edition Volume B*. Ed. Don LePan. New York: Broadview P, 2007. 113-28. Print.

## An Essential Distortion: The Form and Style of *The Sound and the Fury*

| Dylan Phillips

*Dylan Phillips is an English major with a concentration in Literature and Language and Creative Writing minor at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. While this is his first critical publication, his poetry appears most recently in the Old Mountain Press anthologies, Exit 109 and You Gotta Love 'Em.*

---

His mind churning and his pen furiously spilling ink, William Faulkner scribbled a short story about a brave little girl inspired by a single image of that same girl, wearing dirty britches, and peering into a window, from a tree, at her dead grandmother. Faulkner, a raging revisionist, toyed with the idea of expounding on the theme of childhood innocence and developed more characters, including the embodiment of innocence in what he called “an idiot” (“Remarks” 14). Eventually, ideas were flooding out onto the overwhelmed page, and a short story blossomed into an epic about the entire Compson family and into one of the most hailed and influential American novels of the twentieth century, *The Sound and the Fury* (“Remarks” 14). Unable to tell his story in a conventional way, Faulkner relied on unconventional stylistic choices to give a whole new meaning to his novel. Donald M. Kartiganer, the William Howry professor of Faulkner studies at the University of Mississippi and contributor to nine books on Faulkner, describes the outcome: “[Faulkner] had found a form commensurate to his vision—a succession of grotesquely shaped fragments struggling to discover their own unity” (613), and further argues that “*The Sound and the Fury* . . . is the quintessence of fragmentation failing to unify itself. . . .” (619). While Faulkner himself admitted he felt that his novel was a failure, believing his original intention for the story had never been captured (“Remarks” 15), the failure of unification that Kartiganer describes is not a failure at all. In fact, the way in which Faulkner achieves successful unity in his novel is one of the work’s most appealing aspects. Faulkner’s deliberate and varied execution of unorthodox and orthodox format and style is an essential piece to

his novel, as much as the words on the page, achieving two things: the unique and believable genesis of separate and unique characters, alienated from one another, through use of creative form, and also the skillful juxtaposition of those “fragments” to create a unified work of fiction.

Faulkner chose to begin his novel with the character he felt to be the most innocent, the “idiot,” Benjy Compson (“Remarks” 14), a 33-year-old mentally handicapped man, and the youngest brother of the girl Faulkner wanted to write about, Caddy. Writing a first person narrative from inside the mind of a mentally handicapped person is no small task. Faulkner knew that he would have to rely on his creativity and unconventional prose to convey Benjy’s story effectively and believably. The result was a collection of disjointed stories, told from sensory perception rather than by actual thought, relayed in chopped fragments and scattered about with absolutely no reverence to chronology.

At a Q&A at the University of Virginia, Faulkner said, “[Benjy] didn’t know too much about grammar, he spoke only through his senses” (“Discussions” 22). Indeed, Faulkner manages to play off of all five of Benjy’s senses: sight—“I could see them hitting” (*The Sound and the Fury* 3), smell—“She smelled like trees” (9), sound—“I could hear him rattling in the leaves” (6), touch—“I could feel Versh’s head” (27), and while not actually utilizing taste, Benjy shows his familiarity with it—“his mouth moved, like tasting” (72). Faulkner’s decision to have Benjy tell his story through sensory images is a stylistic choice that works perfectly for the seemingly impossible task of getting inside the head of the “idiot.” It would be difficult to believe Benjy was telling this story himself if he delved deeply into cognition, but his simple and straightforward recollection of the things he sensed fits within a realistic scope of Benjy’s psychological ability.

While Benjy’s sensory storytelling may be simple and straightforward, readers find his section of the novel to be a particularly difficult read. Even Faulkner said, in his reflections

on the book, “And so I told the idiot’s experience of that day, and that was incomprehensible, even I could not have told what was going on then. . . .” (“Remarks” 14). The difficulty can be attributed to the lack of chronology to tie together the sixteen “disjointed” incidents outlined within the section (“Discussions” 21), which Faulkner justifies, saying, “that was simply the groundwork of the story, as that idiot child saw it. He himself didn’t know what he was seeing” (“Discussions” 21). Faulkner went on to explain his clues in the novel to help the reader, notably his use of italics: “I had to use some method to indicate to the reader that the idiot had no sense of time. That what happened to him ten years ago was just yesterday” (“Discussions” 22).

Faulkner achieves this effect masterfully, sewing the disruptions of time into the text so seamlessly that an inattentive reader may miss them, such as the scene near the beginning of the novel when Benjy is crawling under the fence: “‘Wait a minute.’ Luster said. ‘You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail.’/Caddy *uncaught me and we crawled through*” (*The Sound and the Fury* 4). The time shift, denoted by italics, seems, on the surface, to continue from the paragraph before it, but it actually portrays Benjy’s being reminded of a similar situation in the past, and his mind jumps back to it. This effect continues throughout the section, sometimes even within the confines of the grammar in a single sentence: “I hushed and got in the water *and Roskus came and said to come to supper*” (17). Ultimately, Faulkner’s distortion of time and sequence through Benjy’s mind is effective and well executed, creating a realistic look into the mind of a mentally handicapped person while not trying to trip the reader up too much.

This distortion of time is something that Faulkner uses throughout his novel in decreasing increments as a tool to unify his vignettes and compare and contrast his characters. Faulkner speaks about the italics being used again for the same reason but with fewer occurrences, in his second section, devoted to Quentin

Compson, one of Benjy's older brothers, "because [Quentin] was about half way madness and sanity" ("Discussions" 22). Faulkner paints a very different character from Benjy with Quentin, an educated, uninhibited man on the verge of insanity leading up to his eventual suicide. Conclusions about Quentin's character can be made by analyzing the similarities and differences between his narrative and Benjy's. While both characters tell their stories outside the confines of chronology, Quentin does this to a lesser extent. The presence of italics early on in Quentin's section shows a connection between his state of mind and his "idiot" brother's, likening them, but its reserved use conveys that Quentin is only just on the verge of insanity and has not quite reached Benjy's level of psychological disturbance, or at least not in the earliest pages of his section.

Other than just contrasting Quentin's and Benjy's time shifts, there is a crucial difference in the way the two characters tell their stories. While Benjy told his story exclusively through his senses, Quentin adds a new level of depth to the story by thinking about things: "I thought about how, when you don't want to do a thing, your body will try to trick you into doing it" (*The Sound and the Fury* 83). In fact, the words "think" and "thought" and all their derivatives are used ninety-nine times in Quentin's section. None of those words appear anywhere in Benjy's voice unless as part of another character's dialogue that Benjy recalls. Quentin does not think the same way as Benjy. While he is going insane, his psyche is plagued by something different than a mental handicap. He is still able to think like a normal human being, unlike his brother.

Quentin's ability to think may prove he is not impaired the same way as his brother, but he does have his own stylistic quirk to reveal his rising insanity. Later in his section, proper grammar, punctuation, and capitalization all disappear: "and i i wasnt lying i wasnt [sic] lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth" (177). Faulkner explained this unorthodox stylistic choice, saying, "Quentin was an educated half-madman, and so he dispensed with

grammar. Because it was all clear to his half-mad brain and it seemed to him it would be clear to anybody else's brain, that what he saw was quite logical, quite clear" ("Discussions" 22), and specifically about lack of capitalization, "Quentin is a dying man, he is already out of life, and those things that were important in life don't mean anything to him any more [sic]" (20).

So just as Benjy's complete disregard for sequence and use of sensory images culminate to poetically create a mentally disabled man in a way that is relatable to readers, Quentin's half disregard for time puts his mental capacity into perspective with Benjy's for the reader, and his unique disregard for grammatical conventions illustrates his own unique and separate way of going insane. In this way, these two sections of the novel play well off of each other. Benjy's and Quentin's styles of storytelling show their similarities (that neither has total psychological harmony) and their differences (that they are psychologically disrupted in different ways). Quentin's use of time shifting italics would only be another sign of insanity if looked at alone, but if compared and contrasted with Benjy's section, a scale of relative madness is created for all the narrators of the novel. Benjy has the least control over his mind, and so he has the least regard for chronology. Faulkner describes Quentin as "half-mad" (22), and so Quentin has a somewhat more lucid sense of time and sequence than Benjy.

This relative scale of madness continues to apply to the third narrator, Quentin's and Benjy's brother, Jason Compson. In Jason's section of the novel, he tells his story more or less chronologically, never once employing the italics that his brothers used. Faulkner discusses the italics in all three sections, saying that Quentin did not use "as much as in Benjy's part, because Quentin was only half way between Benjy and Jason. Jason didn't need italics because he was quite sane" ("Discussions" 22). Again, the juxtaposition of the differing styles in the novel creates both a separation and a unity. The segments are separate in that they are told by very different characters that are starkly contrasted from one another. A unity

among these characters is created, however, with the necessity for comparison between them; Jason's total lack of italics and fewer shifts in time, conventional by itself, is only significant when juxtaposed with the previous narrators who did use italic time shifts to varying degrees.

Aside from the use of italics, Jason is contrasted from his brothers simply by the way he tells his story. His narration is a completely conventional first-person narrative. His depth goes beyond Benjy's senses into thought like Quentin, and unlike Quentin, Jason adheres fairly faithfully to American English grammar. Faulkner has created a more or less sane individual as compared with Benjy and Quentin, although he viewed Jason as a representation of "complete evil" ("Remarks" 14). Once again, Faulkner's stylistic choices for form are seen to be drastically different for each section, and when they are juxtaposed with one another, the reader is more easily able to spot these characteristic qualities hidden in the author's style than if they were presented alone.

Another way that Jason's section helps create unity throughout the context of the novel is by clarifying previously unclear events. In Benjy's section, for example, a brief and unclear reference is made to the character's castration: "*I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them ain't going to do no good. They're gone*" (*The Sound and the Fury* 73). This scene, buried amongst multiple and non-sequential scenes, could easily be overlooked or misinterpreted by a reader who is still baffled by the unorthodox style of the storytelling. To clarify, Faulkner takes advantage of Jason's conventional style to restate this event more clearly: "you can send Ben to the Navy I says or to the cavalry anyway, they use geldings in the cavalry" (196). Jason's clarification of unclear events, such as Benjy's castration and Quentin's suicide, compliments the earlier sections of the novel, meriting second and third readings.

Besides comparative characteristics within the separate vignettes, and this delayed understanding between the earlier and later

segments of the novel, there is yet another element of unification to dispel Kartiganer's claim of failure, and that unity arises from the novel's title. Taken from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the title refers to a "tale told by an idiot." The reference could easily be attributed to Benjy, the "idiot," but Faulkner discusses the title, saying, "the more I had to work on the book, the more elastic the title became, until it covered the whole family" ("Discussions" 22). The title can refer not only to Benjy, but to Quentin or Jason, both "idiots" in their own unique ways. In this way, all of the first-person narrators are brought together and unified. Even though Benjy is mentally disabled, Quentin is becoming insane and heading for suicide, and Jason seems sane enough despite his evil actions, all three characters are "idiots" in Faulkner's mind, and all three of their stories are "signifying nothing."

Contrary to Kartiganer's labeling Faulkner's novel as the "quintessence of fragmentation failing to unify itself" (619), Hyatt H. Waggoner, former English professor and author of *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World*, wrote in his essay, "Form, Solidity, Color":

It is true that if we center our attention not on the larger aspects of structure, on the arrangement of the sections and the relation of this arrangement to the story being told, but on the smaller units of structure, on the order of events within any one of the first three sections, we may get the impression of disorder. But this "disorder" is of a kind to which we are thoroughly accustomed by now, the shuffling back and forth in memory between past and present; and there is a significant, a very immediate and human point of view from which it seems not "disorder" at all but *our* kind of order, the order of human experience, human reality. (98)

Waggoner understands the unity of the "fragments" in *The Sound and the Fury*; the unity to which Kartiganer seems oblivious. While the different sections of the novel may seem to be fragments, constructing very different people, and utilizing very different

stylistic conventions, in the end, the novel as a whole creates a unified family, no matter how dysfunctional. Through comparing and contrasting the different stylistic choices in each of the narratives, employing delayed understanding with later clarification of earlier events, and thematically linking each of the three brothers, Faulkner has created a single cohesive and unified work of fiction. While he may never have accurately told the story that he wanted to tell about the little girl with the soiled britches in the image that inspired this whole masterpiece, no one could ever know but him. Ultimately, the world is left with a beautiful “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

---

#### Works Cited

- Cowan, Michael H., ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968. Print.
- Faulkner, William. “Discussions at the University of Virginia, 1957-58.” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury*. Ed. Michael H. Cowan. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968. 18-24. Print.
- . “Remarks in Japan, 1955.” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury*. Ed. Michael H. Cowan. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968. 14-15. Print.
- . *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Vintage, 1929. Print.
- Kartiganer, Donald M. “*The Sound and the Fury* and Faulkner’s Quest for Form.” *ELH* 37.4 (Dec. 1970): 613-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 Nov. 2008.
- Waggoner, Hyatt H. “Form, Solidity, Color.” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury*. Ed. Michael H. Cowan. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968. 97-101. Print.

## A Play of Opposites in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale”

| Rachel Pietka

*Rachel Pietka received her M.A. in English from Chapman University in December 2009, where she served as Co-President of the Alpha Zeta Iota Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Her publications reflect a range of interests, including a devotional essay in 7 Minutes with Jesus, printed by NavPress, and an article on Flannery O’Connor in Notes on Contemporary Literature. The areas of her scholarly focus are literary theory, gender studies, and theology and literature.*

---

Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* consistently evades conclusion and requires the pilgrims, as well as the readers, to participate in the tales. Though many end with a moral, it is often a moral that is undermined by the story itself, leaving the hearers and readers to draw their own conclusions about its purpose. The “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” is no exception, as it introduces opposing perspectives regarding poverty, gender, fate and free will, as well as authenticity and deception. This tale confuses and blurs the lines between opposing modes of thinking. While Chauntecleer’s speech about the gravity of death dreams followed by his near-death experience in the mouth of the fox indicates the workings of fate, his subsequent escape privileges free will. Chaucer is interested in subverting these opposites and presenting his audience with a variety of conflicting perspectives that undermine each other yet co-exist in a rich, entertaining story as a coherent work. Though this tale is inconclusive regarding the moral and social values it addresses, the story demonstrates an aversion to binary opposites thereby promulgating an inclusive perspective that avoids fixed interpretations of the ideas presented in this tale.

The “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” begins with a quaint description of the “poore widwe” whose situation contrasts with that of her rooster’s, Chauntecleer (55). He is the initial representation of the aristocracy in this tale, which is evident in his grand introduction. His physicality makes him worthy of praise in the barnyard with his “comb” which is “redder than the fin coral,” his jet black beak, legs

the color of azure, “nailes whiter than the lilye flowr,” and finally, “lik the burned gold was his colour” (93-98). Following his physical description is affirmation of his social status: “This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce / Sevene hennes for to doon all his pleasance” (99-100). Chauntecleer displays his dominance over his wives when he “fethere[s] Pertelote twenty time,” and this power is displayed on a larger scale when he is snatched by the fox and all of the farm rallies to protest his seemingly fatal abduction (411). Chauntecleer’s representation of the ruling class is nevertheless made ironic by the very fact that his owned by a poor widow, who falls at the opposite end of the social scale. On the one hand, Chauntecleer’s feathering of Pertelote displays his social power, his “governaunce,” yet on the other, this act produces eggs which sustain the widow and her daughters (99). Though Chauntecleer’s stately description detaches him from the poverty in which the widow lives, he is equally the property of the poor woman, a detail that undermines their differences in social status.

The reference to Jack Straw and the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381 also blurs Chauntecleer’s representation of royalty and power. Richard West describes the mob in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” as “actively protecting the widow’s property” (West 202). That the poor widow is on the verge of a material loss is congruent with her station as the poor, but this scene breaks down the differences between Chauntecleer and the widow and again places them both on the same side. The fox becomes the enemy, the representation of the rich oppressor of the poor. Larry Scanlon argues that the fox stands for Richard II who eventually speaks to the peasants in 1381 in an attempt to placate their demands (Scanlon 190). Just as Richard addresses the angry mob, so does the fox, but it is through this very act that he relinquishes his power (191). In the famous mob scene of the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” Chauntecleer, who initially reminds readers of the oppression of the poor with his stark contrast to the widow, suddenly is changed into an object of misuse at the hands of the nobility. Not only is he the revered rebel leader who is

abused by the child king, but he is the economic loss of the poor, innocent widow who undoubtedly would have suffered from the tax regulations that triggered the revolt itself.

Chaucer also brings into question contemporary labels of the poor through the widow and her daughters. Dinah Hazell writes that “[a]ttitudes toward the peasantry, and the poor, generally were polarized between elevation and scorn, and suspicion and forbearance” (29). Though the widow and her daughters live in poverty, they are portrayed as happy and content. Hazell calls their portrayal “deceptively romantic” especially when considered in light of the Prioress’s extravagant diet and resolve to feed her dog better food than the widow and her daughters are accustomed to (Hazell 26-28). John Finlayson asserts that the “simplicity and poverty” of the widow and her daughters is “splendidly contrasted with the heraldic royalty and sophisticated life style” of their own rooster (Finlayson 496). Chaucer romanticizes the poor, yet the context in which the tale is placed, including the sensibilities of the priest’s employer as well as the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381, allows for a great amount of speculation concerning his presentation of this story. Though locating Chaucer’s perspective on the Peasant’s Revolt and the condition of the poor is an insurmountable challenge for critics, the great differences between Chauntecleer and the widow can be viewed as one of the many ways Chaucer seeks to destabilize the labels that the poor were often given. While the description of the widow falls into the “elevation” category that Hazell explains, the contrast between the Prioress’s diet and the widow’s speaks of injustice as does Chauntecleer’s majesty and the widow’s “simple lif” (Hazell 29; Chaucer 60). Chaucer offers his readers the romanticized version of the poor, but tempers this presentation with enough details, such as the Prioress’s dog who eats better than the widow, to bring into question the polarized categories.

Though the widow is the first female to appear in the story, Pertelote is the most dominant female presence. Pertelote’s and Chauntecleer’s exchange regarding his disturbing dream is a

complex construction of the different perspectives of male and female. Pertelote insists that dreams are simply the result of indigestion and easily cured by taking laxatives. She reproaches him for his display of fear, calls him “hertelees” and adds, “I can nat love a coward” (142, 145). Finlayson writes that Pertelote’s initial objection to Chauntecleer’s cowardice recalls the values of courtly love which contrast with the subsequent “hectoring, scolding tone,” reminiscent of the Wife of Bath, which he argues is a more “domestic” picture of marriage (Finlayson 500). The variety of Pertelote’s reactions to the dream reinforce the ambivalence of the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale.” Her character reflects the tradition of courtly love while simultaneously stooping to the common sphere of the peasantry with her domestic fussing. The blending of courtly love values with the droll, commonplace behavior of a female deconstructs the binaries of aristocratic love and peasantry love.

These contrasting modes of femininity that Pertelote demonstrates precede the deeper discussion on male and female that is generated by her husband’s dream. Pertelote’s reference to the work of Marcus Porcius Cato to justify her opinion about the dream contrasts with Chauntecleer’s ensuing informed speech about the legitimacy of dream theory. Chauntecleer establishes his male dominance by refuting Pertelote’s opinion with his thorough examples from a variety of sources. He makes her surmise about indigestion seem amateur in light of his detailed account of famous dreams throughout literature. His intellectual superiority to her is made evident by her silence following his extensive speech. Up to this point, the binaries of male and female are intact. However, Chauntecleer undermines himself, as Scanlon points out, by “mistranslating a Latin authority” (Scanlon 187). Chauntecleer translates “Woman is the ruination of mankind” as “Womman is mannes joye and al his blis” (Chaucer 400). Though he does this in order to invite Pertelote to have sex with him, it inevitably weakens the intellectual authority he has just worked to establish. His speech on dream theory, which accurately accounts for legendary

dreams, is followed by an inaccurate quotation which Chauntecleer manipulates to his own ends. He outshines Pertelote with a dazzling retort about the importance of dreams, yet the mistranslation immediately undercuts his supposed authority. However, Pertelote's validity is eventually established until at end of the tale, when her perspective that "No thing, God woot, but vanitee in swevene is!" challenges Chauntecleer's long explanation on the authority of dreams (Scanlon 156). At the end, Chauntecleer lives, just as Pertelote argues. Though Chauntecleer's dream of a dog-like animal whisking him away does come to pass, his death does not. Because Chauntecleer and Pertelote are both right in a sense, Chauntecleer's authority is subverted, making his intelligence no greater than that of his female counterpart. Chaucer presents both men and women as foolish, as neither were able to correctly interpret the dream or to follow the warning signs it provided.

Chauntecleer's evasion of death is also an element of this tale that thwarts the beginning discussion of the importance of dreams. The rooster's dream is an obvious introduction of fate (or predestination, in religious terms) and thus commences the debate about the extent to which humans are fated to certain acts or if they actually have control over their futures. Chauntecleer's speech about famous dreams throughout history upholds the idea that humans are destined to have certain experiences, thereby making them incapable of directing their own lives. He gives Pertelote several examples of dreams that accurately foretold of legendary events. However, each event that can be labeled as fate in the "Nun's Priest's Tale" can equally be viewed as the result of a character flaw, namely vanity, which is an act of free will that Chauntecleer can direct. The different interpretations that spring from such scenes build a story where fate and free will are in tension. The events leading up to Chauntecleer's abduction by the fox can be viewed as destiny, or, just as validly, as a result of Chauntecleer's poor choices. After his lengthy speech about dreams, his desire for Pertelote overwhelms him and he dismisses his prior fears, saying, "I am so ful of joye

and of solas / That I defye bothe swevene and droom” (Chaucer 404-05). The rooster and the hen proceed to move from the beam to the ground where Chauntecleer eventually meets the deceptive fox. On the one hand, Chauntecleer’s bodily desires could be the intervention of fate urging him to leave the safety of the high beam, yet his concluding defiance of the dream equally speaks to his vanity which can also be held responsible for his mistakes. After Chauntecleer has satisfied himself with Pertelote, he praises her beauty and takes delight in the splendor of the world, but the priest adds an uncanny line directly after he has finished his praises: “But sodeinly him fil a sorweful cas” (438). This sudden change in mood, like the dream, forebodes the tragic event involving the fox, who is on the verge of making his appearance.

Russel, the fox, is described as waiting for a chance to steal the rooster. The priest overtly refers to Chauntecleer’s fate and reproaches him for not heeding the warning signs:

O Chauntecleer, accursed be that morwe  
 That thou into the yeerd flaugh fro the bemes!  
 Thou were ful wel ywarned by thy dremes  
 That thilke day was perilous to thee;  
 But what that God forwoot moot needs be,  
 After the opinion of certain clerkes (464-469)

Though the priest mourns that Chauntecleer did not stay upon the high beam, he resolves that it was the rooster’s inevitable fate that brought him down. The priest then recognizes the debates surrounding predestination and foreknowledge. The doctrine of predestination, like fate, would view Chauntecleer as having no control over his actions. Foreknowledge would allow for Chauntecleer’s ability to make his own decisions, yet acknowledges God’s unbound vision that sees future events, yet does not interfere with the free will of the individual. The priest does not come to a conclusion which is exemplary of this tale. He considers the implications of both predestination and foreknowledge and says, “I wol nat han to do of swich matere: / My tale is of a cok, as ye may

here” (485-86). Marc M. Pelen describes this element as “the Priest los[ing] control of his own argument” (330). The priest talks himself into a corner which causes his grip on the present theological matters to slip. This phenomenon, however, reverberates throughout the whole tale. Numerous perspectives are presented and put in play with each other, but no conclusions are reached.

Another reference to fate (“destinee”) is made directly after the fox snatches up Chauntecleer and begins to run with the rooster in his mouth. The priest mourns Chauntecleer’s plight and refers to the different events that preceded his abduction, “O destinee that maist nat been eschued! / Allas that Chauntecleer fleigh fro the bemes! / Allas his wif ne roughete nat of dremes!” (572-74). The priest references Chauntecleer’s descent from the high beam and Pertelote’s slighting of his dream, though not Chauntecleer’s own vanity nor his initial impulse to flee when the fox appears. The elements that the priest includes in this passage are those he views as the workings of fate. However, his failure to include the aspects of the story that emphasize Chauntecleer’s flaws as an individual leaves open the possibility for free will. The priest is categorizing the “votes,” in a sense, for free will and fate. Chauntecleer’s ultimate evasion of death also comes down on the free will side, for the experience changes him. His glaring character flaws, particularly arrogance and susceptibility to flattery, are frightened into dormancy as Russel tempts him the last time. He withstands the appeal to his vanity and as a result, he lives. Because the conclusion of the story ends on Chauntecleer’s act of free will, it may seem that the tale privileges free will over fate. However, this is not the case. The priest again refers to a power higher than human free will previous to Chauntecleer’s escape. He says, “Lo, how Fortune turneth sodeinly” (637). This line is another reminder of the ambiguity surrounding this debate. While Chauntecleer may have exercised his own will by deceiving the fox, he may also have been the recipient of grace as he faced death.

The final set of opposites is the difference between authenticity

and deception. Chauntecleer's "authentic" self possesses a beautiful voice, for "In al the land of crowing nas his peer. / His vois was merrier than the mery orgon / On massedayes that in the chirche goon" (84-86). The priest's expressive description of Chauntecleer's unmatched voice foreshadows the later scene when Russel begins to flatter him and coax him into imitating his father. For Chauntecleer could outdo any other rooster in "al the land," yet the wily fox puts a task before him that is challenging indeed: to sing as his father once did. When Chauntecleer succumbs to the fox's request, "Lat see, conne ye youre fader countrefete," he leaves himself vulnerable and comes close to losing his life (555). The initial scene between the fox and the rooster demonstrates the danger of inauthentic speech and actions, embodied by both characters. Chauntecleer's attempt at imitation causes his near-death experience and the fox's flattery makes him into the villain of the tale, "a losengeour," as the priest calls him (560). Chauntecleer's attempt at imitation is a direct replica of the fox's description of his father, as he closes his eyes and stretches out his neck just as the fox says. The insincerity of both animals in this scene reaps hazardous results, which is the first side of the pair of opposites.

The other side is presented when Chauntecleer uses flattery to escape from the fox's mouth. Chauntecleer behaves as the fox did by manipulating words to his own end. He tempts the fox to gloat over the mob of farm animals who are protesting Chauntecleer's capture just as Russel did when he cajoled the rooster into imitating his father. Chauntecleer uses the power of deception against the fox and earns his liberty, saves his own life. The binary of authenticity and deception is thus challenged, as the rooster's feat is celebrated. While in the former scene, the failure to be authentic wreaks havoc on the farm, Chauntecleer's subsequent use of flattery is what restores order. Both perspectives are valued in this tale, for at the end, Chauntecleer has learned how not to fall prey to the deception of flattery (for he is tempted a second time and withstands), yet he learns to wield flattery as a weapon which he uses to save his life.

By undercutting the binary opposites presented in this tale, Chaucer writes against the grain. His idealized version of the widow's poverty is undermined by the abundance of her very own rooster as well as the Prioress, creating a perspective of poverty that brings into question the societal labels that Hazell describes. The different, often contradictory, representations of male and female similarly destabilize male dominance, though there is too much misogynist material in the "Nun's Priest's Tale" to conclude that Chaucer is a defender of women. Instead, the play between the genders parodies the antics of both, ultimately presenting the pilgrims and readers with pertinent yet unanswered questions about the perception of male and female as well as their interactions with each other. The exchanges between Chauntecleer and Russel put into play authenticity and deceit, turning the binary on its head in the final scene where deception is the key to Chauntecleer's release. As the priest brings the tale to a close, he implores his listeners to "taketh the moralitee, goode men" (458). The most ostentatious moral of the tale is "to never trust a flatterer," or perhaps, "to learn the art of flattery but beware of falling prey to it." The moral, however, is only surface amusement, as Chaucer has created in this fable a plethora of debates on issues of both heavenly and earthly nature, encompassing divine, societal, and individual concerns, in order to defy the strict oppositions presented.

---

Works Cited

- Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Nun's Priest's Tale." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Vol. 1A. Eds. David Damrosch and Kevin J.H. Dettmar. New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006. 444-59. Print.
- Finlayson, John. "Reading Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*: Mixed Genres and Multi-Layered World's of Illusion." *English Studies*. 86.6 (2005): 493-510. Print.
- Hazell, Dinah. "Poverty and Plenty: Chaucer's *Povre Wydwe* and Her *Gentil Cok*." *Mediaevalia*. 25.1 (2004): 25-65. Print.
- Pelen, Marc M. "The Escape of Chaucer's Chauntecleer: A Brief Revaluation." *The Chaucer Review*. 36.4 (2002): 329-335. Print.
- Scanlon, Larry. "The Authority of Fable: Allegory and Irony in the Nun's Priest's Tale." *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer*. Ed. Thomas C. Stillinger. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998: 173-194. Print.
- West, Richard. *Chaucer 1340-1400*. New York: Carol & Graff, Inc., 2000. Print.

# The Divine Rake: God's Seduction of Theodore Wieland in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*

| Jenna Prince

*Jenna Prince is a recent graduate from St. Norbert College, where she received a B.A. in English and an emphasis in creative writing. She now resides in Marquette, Michigan.*

---

“All passions are base, all joys feeble, all energies malignant, which are not drawn from this source,” testifies Theodore Wieland when he defends the murders of his wife and children in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (159). But his bold statement does not only defend Wieland’s crimes, it depicts God as the source. Given this forthright conviction, the reader assumes Wieland holds fast—even clings unwaveringly—to God’s word. While critics discuss the different romantic intrigues in the novel, they have failed to recognize the most significant romantic relationship: namely that between Wieland and God. And while the Old Testament depicts a formidable God and the New Testament a benevolent one—a seemingly irreconcilable rift in God’s depiction—Brown unites both notions in a God who revels in destructive intimacy with His follower. God, as Brown’s antagonist, acts out all the components of the rake in the nineteenth-century seduction novel. The seduction novel narrates a tale in which a persuasive libertine seduces away a naïve female victim, deceives her, and ultimately leaves her ruined. In *Wieland*’s case, Brown casts Theodore Wieland as the naïve victim and God as the libertine lover: the divine rake. Their passionate relationship follows the seduction formulae and ends in utter destruction.

At first glance, it may seem that religion, as it appears in *Wieland*, reflects merely the “the old worldview of man’s depravity and utter dependence on God,” that is, Wieland’s religious dependence (Surratt 310). However, as an institution, the religion Brown illustrates provokes both sexual and destructive tendencies, like those of the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century rake, and God

emerges as the divine rake who seduces Wieland and leaves him destroyed. The rake's "participation in the seduction plot as a character proceeds . . . as its primary agent. That is, the 'artful villain' is the plot's creator as well as its antagonist" (Traister 6). Brown's God dictates Wieland's actions and determines the chain of events that lead Wieland to destroy others and himself. Once readers pay attention to Wieland and God's destructive sexual relationship in the novel, they can recognize how religion conceives its very presence. Readers will see the negative consequences Wieland suffers when he succumbs to God's seductive ways. In *Wieland*, Charles Brockden Brown critiques religion as a seductive institution in which one must foster a volatile relationship that consists all at once of fear, pleasure, absolute devotion, and eventual destruction.

Brown emphasizes Wieland's divine relationship with God when he creates a foundation on which to build God's seductive character. This foundation consists in a narrative in which Brown conveys moments of simultaneous fear and pleasure through characters other than Theodore Wieland. Readers learn from Clara that her father's—elder Wieland's—religion forms with both speed and intensity. As soon as he gets his hands on a Bible "a thousand scruples to which he had hither to been a stranger" lay bare before him (11). The more he learns, the more he is "alternately agitated by fear and ecstasy," but these converse emotions do not cease, nor does elder Wieland's wish for their end (Brown 11). Rather, he "laboured to keep *alive* a sentiment of fear, and a belief of the awe-creating presence of the Diety" (11, emphasis added). Elder Wieland resolves to throw all other ideas to the wayside and hold fast to the very sentiments with which readers later learn God inflicts on Theodore Wieland. Clara, however, reacts to God's fear and pleasure in a different manner. "Clara, [is] somewhat more cautious," and arguably unaffected by the divine, unlike her father or brother, yet Brown still evokes similar emotions in his narrator (Schmidt 287). Clara confesses that the "tales of apparitions and

enchantments did not possess that power over my belief,” and “I . . . was a stranger even to that *terror* which is *pleasing*” (Brown 44, emphasis added). She desires that pleasing terror, that combination of fear and ecstasy, that her father experiences and that her brother continuously basks in. Her female companion, Catherine, even expresses “exclamations of wonder and terror” before she meets her end (162).

While Catherine, Clara, and elder Wieland each experience fear and pleasure’s pull in the novel, these two sensations are mutually exclusive and always coupled with God’s presence for Theodore Wieland. He undergoes a “lustre,” or ecstasy, that reveals itself before his ultimate sacrifice (160). This ecstasy conjures a “nameless fear . . . as if some powerful effulgence covered [him] like a mantle” (160). Instead of shying away from the “nameless fear,” Wieland exposes his conflicting sensations in his testimony and continues to pair pleasure and fear with one another. Brown captures this unique pairing in each of his characters. Elder Wieland experiences fear and ecstasy when he discovers religion—when he is seduced; Clara yearns to experience these sensations; and young Wieland feels them always in God’s presence. Together, the crucial players show that mingled fear and pleasure can be utterly enticing. This is to say that both Wieland men strive to keep in their presence the *presence* that is responsible for such opposing and destructive sensations.

When Brown lays the foundation on which the divine rake may thrive he also defines Wieland through feminine characteristics. Wieland’s femininity then creates the appropriate power dynamic of the seduction plot because Brown feminizes Wieland in God’s presence and aligns him with the seduction narrative’s naïve female character. He therefore illustrates God as the male dominating figure and Wieland as the weaker, obedient one. God’s rank and Wieland’s subordination is significant because the seduction novel “invariably [features] the same array of cruel libertines, foolish coquettes, ruined women” (Tennenhouse 1). Both God and Wieland must assume these roles in order to fulfill the proper

narrative. Wieland vanishes in stature before God when he declares, “I stretched forth my hands; I lifted my eyes, and exclaimed, O! that I might be admitted to thy presence; that mine were the supreme delight of knowing thy will, and of performing it!” (Brown 159). The vision of this man, who reaches out and pleads to merely *be* in this other’s presence, illustrates weakness because Wieland does not claim his own worth in his statement; he *asks* to be “admitted to thy presence” (159). Similarly, Wieland conveys his reliance on God when he states, “[My] *duty* is known, and *I thank* my God that my cowardice is now vanquished” (Brown 164, emphasis added). Wieland does not command—rather, he “*fulfills* [the] divine command” (Brown 164, emphasis added). His testimony no more speaks to his comparative weakness to God than when he describes God’s absolute power over his faculties. Wieland explains, “The breath of heaven that sustained me was withdrawn, and I sunk into *mere man*” (165). Here, Wieland emasculates himself, for God holds enough power over Wieland to bring him down as much as He “raises [Wieland] aloft” (165). Brown’s God elevates and dismisses Wieland at His will and renders His victim powerless and dependent.

While Wieland’s rueful sentiments speak volumes of his inferior position in his relationship to the divine rake, Brown’s portrayal of Clara contrasts both Wieland and the nineteenth-century feminine norm—meek, mindful, and dependent. This contrast fleshes out a juxtaposition that renders Clara masculine and Wieland as feminine so that Wieland is the one involved in a quasi-sexual relationship with God; Clara remains unaffected. Her masculine characteristics allow the reader to view God as the trope rake because, as Bryce Traister contests, the rake’s or libertine’s “sexual agency depends on a female cultural sensibility” (14). Wieland’s femininity provides this sensibility; Clara, however, does not. From the start, Clara asserts her independence and subsequently places herself opposite the feminine norm. “My father’s property was equally divided between us,” she writes, “I can scarcely account for my refusing to

take up my abode with him, unless it were from a disposition to be an economist of pleasure . . . I was . . . desirous of administering a fund, and regulating an household, of my own" (23). Clara's independence allows most, if not all, the action to take place at her home. Other characters such as Pleyel even pay heed to her "daily accessions of *strength*," and "judicious discipline" (118, emphasis added). Moreover, Clara's self-awareness reinforces the contrast between her strength and her brother's dutiful weakness as God's seduced victim. She states, "None of those motives by which I am usually governed"—society's feminine standards—"would ever have persuaded me to meet any one of [Carwin's] sex, at the time and place which he had prescribed" (133). And she crushes "those motives" just two pages later when she recognizes her own strength and independence. "What should I fear in [Carwin's] presence?" Clara almost laughs at the fear, and goes on, "The freedom of my mind was untouched," which is likely a freedom most other women did not maintain. The narrator's servant, Judith, attests to this, for she "chiefly dwelt upon [Clara's] courage, because she herself was deficient in that quality" (193). And so, Clara stands apart from Judith—a representation of the feminine norm—because of her arguably masculine courage. Clara's independence, freedom, and courage combine and as a result, shrink Wieland and render him a vulnerable and venerable target for the divine rake. God cannot seduce Clara because she does not fulfill the role of the naïve woman. Instead, Clara distinguishes herself from the feminine norm and highlights her brother's feminization as he falls into that very feminine role of one who must serve and fulfill God's destructive demands.

While the contrast Brown presents between brother and sister serves to illustrate Wieland's feminization in God's presence, Brown depicts God's sexual character when he reveals devotion's private nature. He conveys the notion that devotion must be performed alone, and suggests that religion rouses intimacy between God and His follower—turned lover, turned seduced victim. Indeed, Wieland

follows down his father's path, and the elder Wieland's rigid practice and devotion conceives his son's later religious intensity. Clara explains, "This was the temple of his [elder Wieland's] Diety. . . . Twice in twenty-four hours he repaired hither, un-accompanied by any human being. Nothing but physical inability to move was allowed to obstruct or postpone this visit" (13). Elder Wieland's devotion allows no excuses; it demands frequency and shared intimacy. Devotion "*must* be performed alone," which is the precise reason "[social] worship . . . found no place in his creed," and the reason for which the reader never experiences young Wieland amongst other worshippers (13, emphasis added). This speaks to Richard Dawkins' jealous God. Overbearing, suffocating, and isolated shall be added to Dawkins' list. The reader no more senses the depth of elder Wieland's intimacy with God than when he makes what will be his final journey to the temple. At midnight "his duty called him to the rock. . . . He was going to a place whither no power on earth could induce him to suffer an attendant" (16-17). Here, God controls elder Wieland, just as he later holds Theodore to an inferior, and at the same time intimate, position. When "duty" requests him, elder Wieland must go forth. In addition, the significant evidence that "[the] Wieland family" is "steeped via their father in a long history of radical Protestant sectarianism," illustrates a generational trend among the Wieland men, which ultimately causes Theodore Wieland to step into the role his father leaves behind—as God's intimate partner (Schmidt 287). The two men, as the divine rake's lovers, meet the same self-destructive end: a result of "destinies misshapen by desire" (Tennenhouse 1).

More significantly, Wieland receives arousal from his own horrific acts. His success in murdering Catherine, and his gratification from the act illustrates God's success as seducer because Wieland's murderous sacrifice derives from God's command and Wieland's passionate and submissive devotion to Him. In his testimony, Wieland does not ask forgiveness from the court. Rather, he states, "It is needless to say that God is the object of my supreme

passion” (Brown 158). With this, he admits that God successfully seduces him, for Wieland declares that his accusers cannot deny his own intense emotions. But his fervor for the divine hardly ends there as Wieland reveals a desire that borders on the erotic, even orgasmic. “I have *thirsted* for the knowledge of his will. I have *burnt* with the ardour,” he claims, much how one’s throat and mouth dry in the presence of a secret lover (158, emphasis added). For Wieland, God causes his “every vain [to] beat with raptures” (159). Indeed, God assumes all power over the relationship, and the moment that immediately follows Wieland’s sacrifice—Catherine’s murder—unveils the erotic sensations that course through Wieland because of his “duty” to God. He describes himself when he looks upon Catherine’s body: “This was a moment of triumph. . . . I lifted the corpse in my arms and laid it on the bed. I gazed upon it with delight. Such was the elation of my thoughts, that I even broke into laughter. I clapped my hands and exclaimed, ‘It is done! My sacred duty is fulfilled!’” (165). Wieland’s response borders on that of the post-coital. His choice terms—“delight” and “elation”—and his burst of laughter imply nothing other than an intense, even problematic ecstasy. After all, Clara “scarcely ever knew him to laugh” (24). Wieland trusts that this high is the result of his relationship with God and the duty that God bestows on him. While Wieland’s sentiments may shock many, Francis L. Kunkel explains the deep-rooted relationship of sex and religion and states, “sex and faith . . . have been part of the implicit wisdom of nearly all religions” (15). This suggests Brown may very well have been ahead of his time in his portrayal of Wieland’s romantic foray with the divine rake. In fact, if one considers that “sex and religion are the two most powerful non-rational forces of the human personality,” then Wieland and God are perhaps a match made in heaven—forgive the turn of phrase (Andrew Greeley qtd. in Kunkel 15).

Brown then discloses God’s sadomasochistic temperament and furthers suspicions towards a sexualized and seduction-based relationship between Wieland and God. God, as Wieland perceives

the voice to be, alternately revels when He instills pleasure and fear in his devoted worshipper. After the voice (which Wieland credits as God's) demands, "In proof of thy faith, render me thy wife," Wieland struggles to follow through with the request (Brown 160). Here, God does not ask for a sacrifice, he asks to see his lover in pain, which Dawkins likens to the "God of the Old Testament . . . [who] is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak" but most significantly, a "sodomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully" (31). Wieland stands as witness, as victim, to this particular trait, this sadomasochism, when the erotic pleasure he takes in God's voice changes to tangible, destructive pain. In the face of his task, Wieland does not thirst for, or burn for God, but rather he experiences a sensation "rigid and cold as marble" course through his body (Brown 162). In fact, "Horror diffused itself over me," admits Wieland, which at once admits God's ability to inflict both pleasure and pain—a trait consistent with sadomasochism as well as with the "rake's rise, reign, and ruin" of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature (Brown 162, Traister 5) Furthermore, what begins as pleasure only ends in self-destruction. Brown only solidifies God's disturbing predilection for pleasure and pain when he suggests God's sexual jealousy, for envy speaks to the most plausible reason for God to request Catherine, Wieland's wife, as the sacrificial human. God calls forth with not a single hitch in his voice, "This is the victim I chuse. Call her hither, and here let her fall" (Brown 160). One must then take notice that "here" references Clara's bed—Brown adds yet another erotic layer to God's character. After all, it is a plausible notion that those who are sexually jealous wish to be witnesses to the sacrifice of the "other lover." Furthermore, the murder scene becomes the common place of sexual intercourse—the bed. Dawkins reiterates this notion of God when he writes that God's behavior "resembles nothing so much as sexual jealousy," and therefore supports Brown's sexually charged, and subsequently destructive, characterization of God (243). When Wieland discloses

his passion, his pain, and when God demands the sacrifice of the “other lover,” Brown portrays God as the sadomasochistic, jealous lover: the ultimate rake.

Those who only tackle Brown’s novel when they delve into the human romances, such as the one between Clara and Pleyel, fail to see how Brown likens God to the destructive lover of the classic seduction novel when in Theodore Wieland’s presence. This is important because Brown does not simply portray the troublesome relationship between a naïve Wieland and a seductive God, but he suggests the negative consequences when one allows him or herself to be swept up in such a romance. Moreover, Brown fashions religion into a faulty romance, rather than an institution for worship. And because Brown illustrates this God, his message becomes one of religious caution. A further question might coincide with Dawkins’ own when he asks, “Devout people have died for their gods and killed for them . . . all in the service of religion. What is it all for? What is the benefit of religion?” (164-165). But a subsequent query may also question if Brown likens religion to faulty romance, then how do we reconcile religion’s pervading societal presence and individuals’ desire for it, without submitting to its destructive and seductive nature? Now we should consider how Brown collapses the preconceived notion of God at the time in which he was writing, and relate those constructs to those of the twenty-first century. Indeed, if “All passions are base . . . which are not drawn from this source,” then we are left impassionate *without* the divine rake, and we are destroyed *with* Him (159).

---

#### Works Cited

- Brown, Charles Brockden. *Wieland*. New York: Modern Library, 2002. Print.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Great Britain: Bantam P, 2006. Print.

- Kunkel, Francis L. *Passion and the Passion: Sex and Religion in Modern Literature*. Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1975. Print.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. "From Demon to Possession to Magic Show: Ventriloquism, Religion, and the Enlightenment." *Church History* 67 (1998): 274-304. Print.
- Surratt, Marshall N. "'Awe-Creating Presence of the Diety': Some Religious Sources for Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 33 (1997): 310-324. Print.
- Tennenhouse, Leonard. "Libertine America." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11 (1999/2000): 1-28. Print.
- Traister, Bryce. "Libertinism and Authorship in America's Early Republic." *American Literature* 72 (2000): 1-30. Print.

# The Transcendence of Class Ideologies in James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

| Sueanna Smith

*Sueanna Smith is currently pursuing an M.A. in English at California State University, Stanislaus. She plans to graduate in the fall of 2010 and enter directly into a doctoral program. The majority of Sueanna's scholarship examines the role of class ideologies within the African American literary tradition.*

---

James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* occupies a unique position in the autobiographical genre due to its status as a work of fiction. This fictional nature becomes the primary basis for many critical discussions, as critics attempt to establish a direct relationship between Johnson, the author, and his nameless narrator. A separate realm of critical debate centers around the narrative's theme of passing, as critics attempt to deconstruct the black/white binary of racial identity that predicates the biracial narrator's ultimate decision to pass for a white man. Roxanna Pisiak observes that many scholars deem the narrator "psychologically white." Similarly, Catherine Rottenberg suggests that the narrative demonstrates the ways in which black subjects are socially encouraged "to privilege and desire attributes associated with whiteness."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Kathleen Pfeiffer suggests that the values typically associated with whiteness—specifically equal opportunity, social mobility, and a unique self-determined identity—which the ex-colored man aspires toward, actually reflect his adherence to the American ideology of individualism (405). Pfeiffer's contention that the narrator's passing reflects this ideology, is valid; however, individualism is only one part of a much broader group of middle-class ideologies that the narrator espouses. To expand upon Pfeiffer's premise, I argue that the ex-colored man adheres to a broad, complex range of middle-class ideologies and values which include materialism, respectability, cultivation, and finally, individualism. As such, the narrator's adherence to this group of class values ultimately influences his decision to disclaim

his black identity and pass as a white man. Likewise, this decision ultimately reflects his attempt to secure his middle-class lifestyle and values, amidst the social and economic limitations imposed upon the black race.

As a child, the narrator's father instills in him a middle-class value of materialism that will ultimately guide his beliefs and decisions. His most significant childhood memories regard his "appointed duty" to exchange his father's boots for a pair of slippers, a task for which the man would reward him with a "bright coin" (Johnson 6). In this manner, the young narrator comes to value the coins, not for their monetary or exchange value, but for their surface value as shiny and fancy possessions. The narrator recalls the night when his father drills a hole through the center of one of these fancy coins and hangs it around the boy's neck, where it remains throughout his life. While the father essentially destroys the coin's intrinsic, monetary value, it remains a visual reminder of class. Heather Andrade describes the significance of this moment: the "reality is that the gold piece can never be more than fool's gold, beautiful to look at, but ultimately useless" (5). As a young boy, the narrator is unable to comprehend this complex truth because he has yet to learn the connection between shiny coins and their monetary worth. Rather, the coin maintains its worth as a tangible possession; it reflects the boy's identification with material objects. Furthermore, it is not until after he ultimately passes as a white man that he is able to recognize the empty value of the coin: "I have worn that gold piece around my neck the greater part of my life, and still possess it, but more than once I have wished that some other way had been found of attaching it to me besides putting a hole through it" (Johnson 6). This suggests that the ex-colored man, only in retrospect, realizes his error in embracing middle-class materialism.

The narrator's childhood preoccupation with possessions overshadows many of his personal relationships. This is the most apparent with his father, who he characterizes in terms of his fancy possessions. The narrator recalls, "I remember that his shoes or

boots were always shiny and that he wore a gold chain and a great gold watch . . . my admiration was almost equally divided between the watch and chain and the shoes” (5). Thus, the boy learns to value his father by the shininess of his shoes and the flashiness of his watch, rather than by any intrinsic worth he may have. The narrator offers a similar description when, as a youth, he learns of his father’s surprise visit by noting the presence of a derby hat hanging on the wall: “I stopped and gazed at this hat as though I had never seen an object of its description. . . . I stopped and looked at him with the same feelings with which I had looked at the derby hat . . . until my eyes rested on his slender, elegant polished shoes” (26). Again, the father becomes synonymous with the elegant possessions he displays. The boy’s preoccupation with surface values ultimately prevents him from developing any real sentimental attachment to his father. This is illustrated in the young boy’s superficial reaction to a piano his father sends him as a gift: “I thought, almost remorsefully, of how I had left my father; but even so, there momentarily crossed my mind a feeling of disappointment that the piano was not a grand” (31). Thus, his brief recognition of his father’s subjectivity is quickly disrupted by his fascination with objects. It can be argued that these memories, instead of reflecting the narrator’s true childhood perceptions, actually reflect an adult class bias. This objection is certainly valid; however, it still essentially supports the idea that materialism informs the narrator’s values and decisions.

The narrator represents his relationship with his mother in terms of her devotion to middle-class standards of respectability. He describes her meticulous attempt to maintain a respectable reputation and appearance: “my mother dressed me very neatly, and I developed that pride which well-dressed boys generally have. She was careful about my associates, and I myself was quite particular. . . . I was a perfect little aristocrat” (7). This description coincides with the memory of his mother vigorously bathing him as a young child, as he describes being “scrubbed until my skin ached” (5). Her

interest in his physical appearance reflects her emphasis on a clean and respectable appearance. Similarly, he describes the middle-class cottage in Connecticut where they lived, as “the place of purity and safety in which her arms held me” (8). The comfortable middle-class home provides him a sense of material security while his mother’s preoccupation with purity and cleanliness reinforce his development of middle-class standards of respectability. In this manner, respectability eventually becomes a value that not only informs but essentially defines the narrator’s valuations of other people.

The narrator’s discovery of his biracial identity becomes significant insofar as it carries the potential to jeopardize not only his established respectability but his potential for individual success. This becomes clear by the very situation which reveals his black identity: his exclusion from a group of white scholars. The narrator discusses his realization that the social implications of race will forever limit his potential for individual achievement. This realization occurs during his graduation ceremony as he reflects upon the amazing speech given by Shiny, his black classmate: “it did not take me long to discover that, in spite of his standing as a scholar, he was in some way looked down upon” (12). The young narrator gradually begins to view blackness as a handicap, a potential liability to the successful acquisition of one’s dreams and goals. He contends that, after these pivotal moments, he passed “into another world” where “I looked out through other eyes, my thoughts were colored, my words dictated, my actions limited” (17). Thus, he realizes that his middle-class ideologies of individualism and social mobility are inherently threatened by the social implications of his racial identity.

Pfeiffer claims that, throughout the narrative, the narrator attempts to alleviate the social limitations of race by personally rejecting “arbitrary classifications” (407). This assertion correctly identifies the narrator’s attempt to reject racial categorization; however, the ex-colored man consistently classifies himself and others by their social status. Moreover, he reinforces his own class

status by the attitudes he conveys about other people. During his first trip to Jacksonville he divides the black population into three distinct categories: the “desperate” or “degenerate” class, the domestic class, and the “well-to-do” or “educated” class. These categories essentially correspond to divisions in social class; therefore he classifies them according to class boundaries and imposes his own class bias upon them. He negatively criticizes the members of the “degenerate” class due to their failure to “conform to the requirements of civilization;” thus, he essentially regards them as savages simply because they lack a middle-class cultivation. Moreover, he justifies the abuse of this class by whites who “regard them just about as a man would a vicious mule, a thing to be worked, driven, beaten, and killed for kicking” (61). The narrator expresses his own personal contempt for this lower class: “the unkempt appearance, the shambling, slouching gait and loud talk and laughter of these people aroused in me a feeling of almost repulsion” (43). The ex-colored man essentially dehumanizes this class of blacks because they fail to satisfy his standards of respectability. He also reverts to a common classist rhetoric by suggesting that this lower class indeed possesses the ability to acquire cultivation and respectability, however, they are simply too “lazy” to do so. In this manner, the ex-colored man’s sense of social superiority overrides any possibility of him establishing ties with this “degenerate” class.

On the other hand, the narrator’s middle-class ideologies inform his strong desire to embrace the members of the black elite class. The ex-colored man, again, reveals a class bias by suggesting that, out of the entire black community, racism renders the greatest destruction to this upper-class because they subscribe to the very ideologies that are jeopardized by white resistance. He claims that “the fact that the whites of the south despise and ill-treat the desperate class of blacks . . . is not nearly so serious or important as the fact that as the progressive colored people advance, they constantly widen the gulf between themselves and their white neighbors” (63). This comment, while condemning white

discrimination against members of his own social class, actually justifies white racism against the black lower class. He describes the obstacles that the elite face in their attempt to adhere to an ideology of social mobility: “it seems that the whites have not yet been able to realize and understand these people in striving to better their physical and social surroundings in accordance with their financial and intellectual progress are simply obeying an impulse which is common to human nature” (63). The narrator reveals his great sympathy for the plight of the black elite because they share a common middle-class ideological framework.

Throughout the narrative, the ex-colored man denounces racial solidarity in lieu of class solidarity. He speaks of the damage that New York’s underground gambling scene imposes upon middle-class men: “I became acquainted with a score of bright, intelligent, young fellows . . . who had fallen under the spell of this under life. . . . I have sympathy rather than censure for these victims; for I know how easy it is to slip into a slough from which it takes a herculean effort to leap” (90). The narrator is able to sympathize with the misfortune of such men because he identifies with them through shared ideologies of respectability and social mobility. He acknowledges that it will take a “herculean effort” for these men to regain their social status; at the same time, he is indignant toward the lower class for their misfortunes and denies the enormity of their daunting struggle to improve their own conditions. Furthermore, he claims that the position of the elite class “grows tragic when the effort is made to couple them, whether or not, with the Negroes of the first class” (63). It is clear that, in this case, social class undermines racial solidarity. Robert Stepto reaches a similar conclusion when he suggests that the narrator “is instinctively an elitist for whom lower-class blacks are animal-like, ‘offensive’ and ‘desperate’ or ‘dull’ and ‘simple’; and those in the upper class are colored yet ‘refined’ and fairly interesting” (61). As Stepto illustrates, the ex-colored narrator reinscribes the humanity of the black middle- and upper-class, while incessantly dehumanizing the black lower-class.

The narrative illuminates the power of class ideology not only to destroy racial solidarity, but to transcend individual black identities altogether. The narrator's middle-class standards of respectability predicate an emphasis on cultivation; this leads not only to his rejection of the lower class, but also towards a rejection of his own black identity and cultural heritage. After traveling across Europe, he returns to the southern states with the intention of observing authentic black folk-music in its natural form, or what he refers to as its "primitive state," so that he can eventually return north to cultivate it into a marketable, mainstream sound. Therefore, he finds no intrinsic value in the music as an authentic cultural artifact, one that reflects his own cultural heritage; rather, he regards the music as attaining value only after the process of cultivation transforms it into high art. These sentiments are reiterated in his reference to old slave songs as "materials which no one had yet touched" (Johnson 141). He further suggests that "the Negroes themselves do not fully appreciate these old slave songs. The educated classes are rather ashamed of them" (141). By suggesting that the black elite disdain such cultural artifacts, the narrator essentially suggests that they prefer to deny or repudiate their own cultural heritage rather than be associated with the uncultivated lower-class.

The lynching scene provides the most vivid illustration of the narrator's repudiation of his black heritage. He describes the lynched man: "there he stood, a man only in form and stature, every sign of degeneracy stamped upon his countenance" (145). Thus, the victim, as a representative of the narrator's proscribed degenerate class, really is not a man or even a human being. Instead, he occupies the social status of an uncivilized beast. This revelation produces a tremendous amount of shame within the narrator as he finally realizes that, despite all of his respectability, cultivation, and class, the larger society will always confine him to that very same status, simply because he, too, is black. Stepto illuminates the depth of this sentiment by suggesting that "the Ex-Colored Man has

despised and feared this man ever since he laid eyes on his type in Jacksonville years before” (61). The narrator fears this man because he represents the lower, degenerate class. Therefore his own black identity inextricably links himself to that image of the black lower-class that he so strongly abhors.

Ultimately, the narrator’s decision to repudiate this identity and pass for a white man, reflects his attempt to validate his elevated social status. By assuming a white identity, the narrator protects his class identity while ensuring that he will never be relegated to an uncivilized, subhuman status. He confesses this motive: “I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be a Negro, I would avail myself of every possible opportunity to make a white man’s success” (Johnson 150). Here, he refers to success as a form of financial or material success, thus betraying his middle-class ideologies. In the end, however, the narrator expresses remorse for his decision to pursue class over race: “I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage” (163). This articulates his remorse for having allowed class-ideologies to motivate his attitudes and actions, as it has led him down a superficial path and destroyed his individual identity. He sadly states that he now stands in opposition to the black men who have achieved many great things for the race: “I feel small and selfish. I am an ordinary successful white man who has made a little money. . . . I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious” (163). Thus, the transcendence of class ideology has marked the tragedy of his life.

In *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, James Weldon Johnson highlights the instability of social class as a sovereign identification category. The ex-colored narrator’s decision to pursue class identity over racial identity ultimately alienates him, not only from a large portion of the black race, but more significantly from himself. On the other hand, had he chosen to assume a black identity, he would have placed many social, economic, and political limitations upon himself and his future. In this regard, both class and race create an insurmountable paradox. By highlighting this paradox, Johnson

invokes the Foucaultian concept of social power as a complex web of competing social and political discourse. In this manner, Johnson reveals that the ultimate tragedy lies not within the particular discourse that the narrator adopts but in the very fact that he must choose at all.

#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Pisiak 105; Rottenberg 313.

---

#### Works Cited

- Andrade, Heather Russell. "Revising Critical Judgments of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*." *African American Review* (2006). JSTOR. Web. 17 November 2008.
- Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. 1912. USA: Filiquarian Publishing, 2007. Print.
- Pfeiffer, Kathleen. "Individualism, Success, and American Identity in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*." *African American Review* 30.3 (1996): 403-419. JSTOR. Web. 14 September 2008.
- Pisiak, Roxanna. "Irony and Subversion in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*." Price and Oliver 102-114. Print.
- Price, Kenneth M. and Lawrence J. Oliver, ed. *Critical Essays on James Weldon Johnson*. New York: Prentice Hall International, 1997. Print.
- Rottenberg, Catherine. "Race and Ethnicity in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *The Rise of David Levinsky*: The Performative Difference." *MELUS* 29.3/4 (2004): 307-321. JSTOR. Web. 17 November 2008.

- Smith, Valerie. "Privilege and Evasion in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*." Price and Oliver 88-101. Print.
- Stepto, Robert. "Lost in a Quest: James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*." Price and Oliver 43-69. Print.

## Edna Pontellier's Strip Tease of Essentiality: An Examination of the Metaphorical Role of Clothing in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

| Deidre Stuffer

*Deidre Stuffer is a senior at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, where she majors in English with a minor in Spanish and concentration in English writing. She is the current Secretary and Webmaster of the Alpha Delta Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. She also serves as a composition tutor at the Learning Resources Center, belongs to the Ben Franklin Society, and is a Green Scholar.*

---

Securing, adjusting, tucking in, fastening, and readjusting—why trifle with the demands and intricacies of nineteenth-century clothing? As Léonce Pontellier knows, “it’s just such seeming trifles that we’ve got to take seriously; such things count” (Chopin 49). Kate Chopin, in her mastery, can utilize something seemingly trivial and weave it into a meaningful tapestry. Clothing, which can be viewed as an emblem of a culture, is transformed in her novel *The Awakening*, and functions to reveal the psychological complexity of its wearer. It provides a metaphorical representation of dualities, the inner and the outer, demonstrating their disjunction. These layers explore Edna Pontellier’s restraint as a nineteenth-century Creole woman as she struggles to strip down to her true, essential identity. A large source of dissatisfaction for Edna Pontellier stems from the limited social roles available to women in nineteenth-century Creole culture. Ultimately, from Edna’s point of view, the only socially acceptable role for women is what Chopin terms as the “mother-woman” (9). Easily distinguishable, a mother-woman “idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (9). Edna views this ideal in her friend from Grand Isle, Adèle Ratignolle. Chopin describes her as the “one of them [that] was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm . . . the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams”

(9). Edna is physically distanced from the bodily component of the ideal; in comparison to Adèle, “[t]he lines of [Edna’s] body were long, clean and symmetrical . . . which made Edna Pontellier different from the crowd” (15). In regards to the ideal, Edna Pontellier quite literally does not fit the “rôle” (9).

The role females are to assume in Creole society is indoctrinated at a young age, explored through the outer projection of clothing. At Grand Isle, Edna Pontellier watches young children provide entertainment for a night—attention to two instances of female performance foreshadows the girls’ growing into the role. During an impromptu ballet performance, a little girl is the “mistress of the situation” (Chopin 24), parallel to how she will be mistress of the domestic sphere. In an intricate ballet costume, the girl is “properly dressed for the occasion” (24). The exercises in dance only aid the child in acquiring one of the expectations of womanhood, namely “grace” (24). Demonstrating another arena of female entertainment, a young set of twins entertain the guests on piano. Their clothes vividly depict the social expectations of their virtue. The girls are “always clad in the Virgin’s colors, blue and white” (23). The young girls are experimenting with the domestic pursuits of the mother-woman, pinned to their roles and its expectations by their clothing. While clothing projects outward social expectations, it also is an emblem of social class. In the later half of the nineteenth century, according to *Everyday Life in the 1800s*, it was treated as a career to adorn one’s self in the latest fashions, especially for women (105). Kate Chopin sensitively incorporates this element in *The Awakening*, employing a vernacular of economics in relation to dress. Edna’s father travels to the city to purchase an outfit so he can “make a creditable appearance” (Chopin 65). Léonce Pontellier, Edna’s husband, is a wealthy businessman; his taste is highly regarded because of his wealth. Edna’s father values Léonce’s opinion on clothing: “And [Léonce’s] suggestions on the question of dress . . . were of inestimable value to his father-in-law” (65). Clothing, specifically women’s attire, is noted as a demanding investment.

During this time period, a high class woman can possess “thousands of dollars’ worth lace [alone]” (McCabe qtd. in “Clothing” 105). Charles Harmon points out in his article “‘Abysses of Solitude’: Acting Naturally in ‘Vogue’ and ‘The Awakening’” that a woman is partly “defined by the commodities with which she surrounds herself” (58). Women’s clothing is a valuable investment that is an ostentatious demonstration of one’s status. Léonce Pontellier is highly materialistic, and Edna is comparable to such material in Léonce’s mind. “He greatly valued his possessions,” Chopin writes, “chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain—no matter what—after he had bought it” (47). At one point, when Edna suffers the physical damage of sunburn, Léonce “look[s] at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (4). Social class is an important aspect of appearance that attests to one’s property.

Similar to outward appearances, clothes also explore the element of ritual, and Edna uses clothing to fight against the social expectation of her domestic role. In a pivotal moment in her journey to self-actualization, Edna divests herself of her reception day. A nineteenth-century etiquette book by Richard A. Wells highlights disregard for the reception day as a social sin: “Let nothing, but the most imperative duty, call you out upon your reception day. Your callers are, in a measure, invited guests, and it will be an insulting mark of rudeness to be out when they call” (123). On Tuesdays, Edna is expected to be “attired in a handsome reception gown . . . in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving visitors” (Chopin 48). It is an important social ritual, the “programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before” (48). However, one day Edna does not follow the ritual and attends to her own interests all day instead of that of callers. This shedding of ritual is the first cause of alarm. Léonce detects this rebellion through Edna’s clothing choice: “Mrs. Pontellier did not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown; she was

in ordinary house dress. Mr. Pontellier, who was observant about such things, noticed it” (48). Edna’s disregard for the high class ritual manifests itself in her clothing selection. It is through clothing that she reveals inner opinion.

While clothing connotes the ostensible like social class, it functions to explore the human workings beneath the material as well. A contemporary review of the novel published highlights the nature of reality explored in *The Awakening*. The novel is adept at demonstrating how “realities do not show themselves on the outside of things where they can be seen and heard, weighed, measured and valued like the sugar of commerce, but treasured within the heart, hidden away, never to be known perhaps save when exposed by temptation or called out by the occasions of great pith and moment” (Deyo 164). Poignantly, the story is about “life and not the mask” (164). Clothing works to expose the inner and the outer, highlighting these dualities. The inner selves are described metaphorically through clothing-influenced diction. The treatment of Alcée Arobin’s clothing matches his very personality. He is not an exceptional character by any means, but he is ruled by the life of fashion and high society, rendered a reproduction of the vogue: “He possessed a good figure, a pleasing face, not overburdened with depth of thought or feeling; and his dress was that of the conventional man of fashion” (Chopin 71). Alcée Arobin is the standard, vacuous Creole dandy of the time period. The reserve of Robert Lebrun, Edna’s main love interest, at one point acts as a barrier. This reserve is depicted as a layer of clothing, almost as if it is something he literally wears: “She would have no regrets, nor seek to penetrate his reserve if he still chose to wear it” (98). When worn, clothing can penetrate one’s character and reveal it to the world. This is especially evident when Edna Pontellier throws a party to celebrate her move into the pigeon-house. Edna decides to be her own sovereign: After casting off her husband’s authority, Edna “resolved never again to belong to another than herself” (76). This decision radiates from her at the dinner party, and her resplendent

outfit emits her queenly regality and sovereignty:

The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her skin, without the glow, the myriad living tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh. There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone. (84)

Signaled by the flesh tone of the gown, Edna's inner truth and self is exposed.

The metaphor of clothing is also involved in a deeper, figurative discussion in *The Awakening*. Life is described in terms of clothing itself, complete with its repercussions. As a moral voice that the narrator uses as a cloak to speak through, Dr. Mandelet is aware of the "inner life which so seldom unfolds itself to unanointed eyes" (68). Much conflict in the story stems from incorrect interpretation of the fabric of inner life. Léonce Pontellier cannot comprehend Edna's transformation, and he attributes her observable changes to mental instability; however, the narrator exposes the truth to the audience: "That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (55). Outwardly, we assume roles like we put on clothes. Edna's transformation involves divesting herself of these roles and disposing of them. She does not entirely comprehend the tumultuous change in her, but she allows it to envelop her as it "unfolded" (76). This discussion of clothing and how it pertains to life allows for ownership, seen in Léonce's treatment of Edna as a valuable; it can be deceptive, such as with roles and enforcing of social restraint; and it also subjects life to metaphorical wear and tear. Clothing fades and runs thin with wear, and it is something that ultimately can be put away. In the pain of her awakening, Edna feels the drapery of oppression. Robert's absence strips "the brightness, the color, [and] the meaning out

of everything” (44). Such conditions render life “a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing” (44).

Given the dual nature of clothing (and of the inner and outer life), Edna Pontellier is a victim to the difficulty of reconciling these boundaries as she emerges into a fully cognizant being. The truth of being a free spirit, which enlivens Edna, is her shroud. In *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Friedrich Nietzsche contemplates the dual nature of truth. Just like the duality clothing provides, truth can serve to enliven and doom. “Something might be true,” Nietzsche comments, “while being harmful in the highest degree. Indeed it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure” (49). What Edna is unable to voice, Dr. Mandelet’s experience gives words to: “youth is given up to illusions. . . . Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost” (Chopin 105). This echoes Nietzsche, who says that “youth in itself has something of forgery and deception. [The soul] tears itself to pieces . . . and takes revenge for its long self-delusion” (43). Edna struggles to separate herself from the limited role she has known, the mother-woman, to emulate the life of an artist, one who is self-sustained by the fabric of one’s existence. Edna accepts the pain of truth’s realization: “The years that are gone seem like dreams—if one might go on sleeping and dreaming—but to wake up and find—oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life” (Chopin 105).

At the very end of the novel Edna emerges, truly becoming the artist as she divests herself of social expectations and the garment of her life. To be an artist, one must “possess the courageous soul that dares and defies” (109). Edna defies her mother-woman role at the very end, feeling that her husband and children “need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul” (109).

By heading to the beach, Edna knows that all along to be fully in control of herself she must “give up the unessential” (108). Edna’s drowning, her suicide, is a daring act of defiance that establishes her as an individual. Independence, Nietzsche says, “is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong. And whoever attempts it even with the best right but without inner constraint proves that he is probably not only strong, but also daring to the point of recklessness” (41). Edna’s final act signifies her independence according to Nietzsche’s philosophy. Edna casts off the garment of life in a reckless and unrestrained action, swimming out into the sea until exhaustion overtakes her. At the beach, Edna finds her faded, old bathing suit. At the water, however, when “absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her” (Chopin 108). Edna is sensually reborn in preparation for her undertaking, the cloak of her illusions pulled from her eyes: “She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known” (109). Edna listens to the seductive call of the sea, allowing its velvet embrace to enfold her. In Edna’s drowning, Dianne Bunch acknowledges that it “becomes death-defying and death-affirming; through death, [Edna] erases the borders between her interior and exterior boundaries” (49). Edna commits herself to the sea, swimming on and on, no longer prey to the outer realities—she has stripped naked, down to her true inner and essential self.

The tension between the dualities, the inner and outer, is aptly enacted through clothing. Kate Chopin takes the mere fashion of her time and weaves it subtly through *The Awakening*, treating clothing as a versatile medium to explore the social and the psychological. The detail of the clothing highlights issues of social class, social expectation, restraint, and in some cases it also alludes to the private mental processes. Through clothing and its vocabulary, Edna Pontellier displays and spurs transformation: she breaks social convention; she exposes her true self; and she

even tries on men, one day Alcée Arobin, the next Robert Lebrun. Edna Pontellier divests herself of the layers of her life—social status, possession through marriage and motherhood, expected social roles—until she stands gloriously naked, resplendent in the essential: her true nature.

---

### Works Cited

- Bunch, Dianne. "Dangerous Spending Habits: The Epistemology of Edna Pontellier's Extravagant Expenditures in *The Awakening*." *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures* 55 (2001-2001): 43-61. *MLA International Bib. Web*. 8 April 2009.
- Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening: An Authoritative Text, Biography, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Margo Culley. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 3-109. Print.
- "Clothing and Fashion." *Everyday Life in the 1800s*. Ed. Marc McCutcheon. 1993. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2001. 105-126. Print.
- Deyo, C. L. "The Newest Books." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 1899. Rpt. in *The Awakening: An Authoritative Text, Biography, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Margo Culley. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 164-165. Print.
- Harmon, Charles. "'Abysse of Solitude': Acting Naturally in 'Vogue' and 'The Awakening.'" *College Literature* 25.3 (1998): 52-66. *JSTOR. Web*. 26 March 2009.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966. Print.
- Wells, Richard A. "An Etiquette/Advice Book Sampler." Rpt. in *The Awakening: An Authoritative Text, Biography, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Margo Culley. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 122-130. Print.

## Jurors

---

**Christopher Flynn** is Associate Professor of English at St. Edward's University. He is the author of *Americans in British Literature, 1770-1832: A Breed Apart*, several critical articles about eighteenth-century British literature and Romanticism, and is the editor *Defoe's Review*, an online edition of Daniel Defoe's early periodical, *A Review of the Affairs of France and Great Britain*. He has also published poetry and creative nonfiction in various journals.

**Donika Ross** received her M.F.A. from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin. She is a Cave Canem Fellow, and a former fellow of the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Indiana Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Folio*, *Tempe Tupu!*, and *Best New Poets 2007*. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in English at Vanderbilt University.

**Shannin Schroeder** is an Associate Professor at Southern Arkansas University, where she teaches creative writing and world literature and directs the Writing Center. She is the author of *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas*; in fact, most of her scholarship is in magical realism. She is on the editorial board of the *Philological Review* and has peer reviewed for such disparate journals as *Comparative Literature* and the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.

**Sidney Watson** is Associate Professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University where she teaches courses in American literature, Film, and Western Civilization. She is a co-sponsor of Chi Delta Chapter and is Vice President/President-Elect of Sigma Tau Delta.

## Retraction: *The Rectangle*, Volume 83, 2008

It recently came to our attention that the short story entitled “Broken Silences” (*The Rectangle*, Vol. 83, 2008, pp. 84-91) and attributed to Michael Ferrier is, in fact, the work of Matthew Vollmer. Originally published in *Fugue* (Summer, 2004) as “Second Home,” the story has recently been reprinted in Mr. Vollmer’s first collection of stories, *Future Missionaries of America* (MacAdam Cage, 2009). Sigma Tau Delta regrets the misrepresentation of “Broken Silences” as the work of Matthew Ferrier and apologizes to Mr. Vollmer. As an honor society, we accept in good faith the works submitted for publication in our journals; unfortunately, in this instance we were deceived.



# SIGMA TAU DELTA

INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY

[www.english.org](http://www.english.org)

## Subscriptions Information

*The Sigma Tau Delta Review* is published annually. Subscriptions include a newsletter and both journals, *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* and *The Sigma Tau Delta Review*. Please e-mail the national Sigma Tau Delta Office for enquiries: [sigmatd@niu.edu](mailto:sigmatd@niu.edu)

## Submission Information

---

The Sigma Tau Delta Journals publish annually the best writing and criticism of undergraduate and graduate members of active chapters of the Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society.

These journals are refereed, with jurors from across the country selecting those members to be published. The journals have had illustrious head judges including: Jane Brox, Henri Cole, Jim Daniels, Maggie Dietz, W.D. Earhardt, CJ Hribal, Kyoko Mori, Lisa Russ Spaar, and Mako Yoshikawa, to name a few.

The best writing is chosen in each category from around 1,000 submissions. Not only do these publications go to over 10,000 members worldwide, of an over 17,000 member organization, but they also honor the best piece of writing in each category with a monetary award. There is also an annual reading at the national conference from *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* by any of the published writers who can attend.

All undergraduate and graduate members of active Sigma Tau Delta chapters are invited to submit their original work. Chapter sponsors, faculty members, alumni (including members of the Alumni Epsilon chapter), and honorary members are not eligible to submit.

*The Sigma Tau Delta Review* (founded in 2005) is an annual journal of critical writing that publishes critical essays on literature, essays on rhetoric and composition, and essays devoted to pedagogical issues. Manuscripts should not exceed 3000 words, but exceptions may be made for essays of stellar quality. Submission by a single author for each issue of the journal should not exceed two essays. Critical essays must follow the Modern Language Association style guidelines as defined in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (latest edition).

For complete submissions information, guidelines, and link to submissions: [www.english.org/sigmatd/publications](http://www.english.org/sigmatd/publications)



