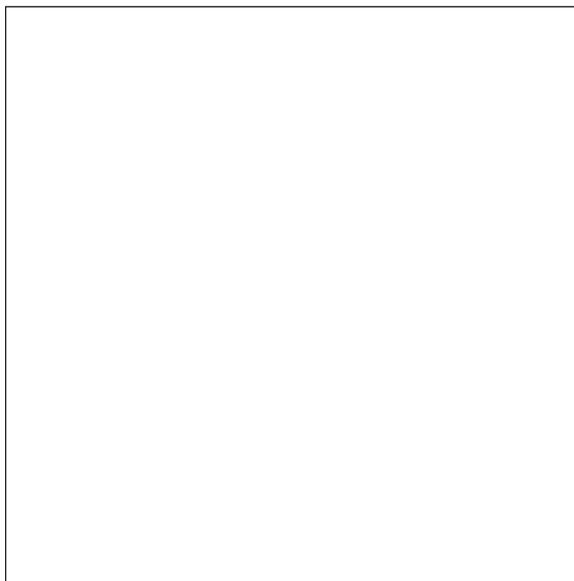


# SHAWANGUNK REVIEW



VOLUMES VIII AND IX

SPRING 1998



# SHAWANGUNK REVIEW

State University of New York at New Paltz  
New Paltz, New York

VOLUMES VIII AND IX

SPRING 1998

# SHAWANGUNK REVIEW

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## From the Editors

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With this issue, the journal takes on a new look and a new name: *Shawangunk Review*. This number, a double issue, includes graduate student papers presented at the Eighth and Ninth Annual Graduate Symposiums. See the introductions for each symposium: “The Academic Novel and Representations of the Academic Experience” (1996) and “Sense of Place in Literature” (1997).

We welcome to the staff of the *Review* Jason Taylor, our new managing editor in charge of production, typesetting and layout. We applaud his Herculean labors in getting this double-issue in print in time for distribution at the 1998 Symposium (“Twentieth Century Literary Theory,” April 15, 1998). And, for the cover illustration, acknowledgement and thanks to Lou Grant.

The editors of *Shawangunk Review* stress that, in addition to our primary mission of publishing the proceedings of our Annual Graduate Symposium, we welcome and encourage submissions concerning any area of literary studies: essays, explications, book reviews, scholarly notes and queries from any graduate student in English. We also announce these *important changes in editorial policy*, beginning with the next issue: we welcome submissions of poetry, and translations of poetry, from English graduate students and faculty. (See submission guidelines, page 82.) Faculty members are also invited to submit book reviews and scholarly notes and queries. The deadline for all materials (including 1998 Symposium papers) for the next issue is May 31, 1998.

We will continue to publish our “news and notes” columns, and we ask that readers continue to provide information regarding the many distinguished achievements of our former and current graduate students. For example, we would like to know the details of conference participation, publications, grants, and honors as well as news regarding progress of our MAs in Ph.D. programs, and reports about teaching and employment activities. Please submit items for this column to the editors. Also, we will include in future issues an “Abstracts of MA Theses” section. Degree candidates who have completed (or are nearing completion of) an MA thesis are encouraged to consult with their advisors and to submit a Thesis Abstract of approximately 150 words for publication in the *Review*.

# The Academic Novel and Representations of the Academic Experience:

## The Eighth Annual Graduate Symposium

### INTRODUCTION

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The Eighth Annual Graduate Symposium, “The Academic Novel and Representations of the Academic Experience,” took place on April 18, 1996. Under the direction of Professors A.M. Cinquemani and Stella Deen, an afternoon panel of three graduate students was succeeded by an evening panel of three alumni of our MA program, professors who have since their New Paltz days confirmed their vocations as students and teachers of literature. The self-reflexive theme of the conference was thus echoed by our selection of the symposium participants.

One might expect that literary portrayals of teachers and scholars would be authored by these same lettered individuals, and that their representations of academic life would be didactic, or worse, self-congratulatory. More hopefully, one might suppose their works to passionately endorse the life of the mind. Although Chaucer’s memorable clerk teaches and learns “gladly,” the tradition has more often produced self-critical and satirical portraits of the academic life, especially novels. Such literature has also traditionally interrogated the reputed gap between “life” and “learning.” The speakers of the Eighth Annual Graduate Symposium tended to close that gap.

The afternoon and evening sessions were lively and well-attended by students, professors, administrators, and friends. We were pleased to hear opening remarks from Vice President William Vasse for the afternoon session and from Professor H.R. Stoneback for both sessions. The Hopfer Alumni Center was the appropriate venue for the evening presentations. Three stimulating papers led us from theater to the novel to poetry. Dr. Irene Walsh Nunnari of Mount Saint Mary College read “Graziano and Holofernes: Two Academics on the Comic Stage”; Dr. Melinda Rosenthal of Millersville University discussed a novel by May Sarton in “Hello, Miss Winter: Life in *The Small Room*”; and Dr. Arnold Schmidt of California State University, Stanislaus followed with “Politics and the Academy:

Wordsworth, Cambridge, and the French Revolution.” A broad-ranging, lively discussion concluded the evening session.

Volume Eight of *Shawangunk Review* reprints the graduate student presentations of the afternoon session. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise*, Todd Niemczyk argues, undergraduate experience enjoins us to make moral choices that define us as human beings. Donna Baumler finds that in Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, academics are well-equipped both to practice deception and to confront truth by stripping away illusory appearances. John Langan discovers in David Lodge’s *Changing Places* more than comic entertainment about the foibles of academic life, but a metafiction conducting a worthwhile inquiry into the nature and value of novels.

STELLA DEEN

# *This Side of Paradise:*

An Academic Quest

TODD NIEMCZYK

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*This Side of Paradise* is Amory Blaine's quest for self-discovery. Centered at Princeton University, Amory's experiences, both in and out of the lecture halls, lead him into conflict between the idealistic and the materialistic world. Under the ideological spires of Princeton, this complex journey makes Amory vulnerable to the temptations of lust and greed and, ultimately, brings him to the precipice of maturity where he must choose whether to cave to temptation or hold fast to his struggling ideals of honor and righteousness. But not until after graduation does he make a final revelation about himself as a "personage" rather than an inconsequential "personality." Amory's mentor Monsignor Darcy says, "Personality is a physical matter almost entirely; it lowers the people it acts on ... it overrides the 'next thing.' Now a personage, on the other hand, gathers. He is never thought of apart from what he's done" (104). Darcy is describing the consequences of action—"the next thing"—which a "personality" does not foresee or for which he does not take responsibility. The personage knowingly and willingly accepts the effects of his or her actions.

"I want to go to Princeton," says Amory. "I don't know why, but I think of all Harvard men as sissies ... and all Yale men as wearing big blue sweaters and smoking pipes" (25). It is with this pride that Amory arrives at Princeton University, a wide-eyed freshman filled with dreams of grandeur. He sees himself as destined for glory, able to rise as high as Princeton's Gothic spires above everyone. This "egotism," in Fitzgerald's terms, is not necessarily a disadvantage but a seed from which Amory is able to grow. Amory's egotism is that of "supreme innocence" (Chambers 26) shared by all undergraduates who are determined to change the world. Romantic encounters, social clubs and college pranks underlie Amory's decisions about his choices between materialistic and idealistic success later in life.

He describes himself as a "boy marked for glory," longing for material wealth, but his success becomes more valuable. Fitzgerald writes a précis of Amory's experience through a popular genre of Amory's time: the quest

book.

In the 'quest' book the hero sets off in life armed with the best weapons and avowedly intending to use them as such weapons are usually used, to push their possessors ahead as selfishly and blindly as possible, but the heroes of the 'quest' books discovered that there might be a more magnificent use for them. (120)

The gallant hero chooses between superficial gain and a more magnificent use for himself: to benefit others. More precisely defined, the 'quest' becomes a discovery of selflessness and an eventual escape from materialistic values: values such as vanity and jealousy, which captivate him from the beginning of the novel.

Amory begins his quest with a mistaken sense of purpose. His freshman year is marked by envy of upperclassmen. His idea of success is to be admired and, even more importantly, to be envied by others. He desperately wants to be in the circle of power where he feels comfortable. He says to his friend Kerry Holiday:

"I know I'm not a regular fellow, yet I loathe anybody else that isn't. I can't decide whether to cultivate my mind and be a great dramatist, or to thumb my nose at the Golden Treasury and be a Princeton slicker."

"Why decide?" suggested Kerry. "Better drift, like me ..."

"I can't drift—I want to be interested. I want to pull strings, even for somebody else, or be Princetonian chairman or Triangle president. I want to be admired, Kerry." (47)

At this point Amory desires admiration for vanity's sake. Together with Kerry Holiday's drifting, Fitzgerald outlines two tempting evils to be defeated. Like every undergraduate, Amory must overcome the temptations of life rooted in materialistic pleasures and based on selfish values. These conflicts are inherent in the academic experience, and it is Fitzgerald's understanding of the Princeton milieu and his era that enables the conflict between material and spiritual values to be rendered. As a freshman, Amory sees Princeton as shrouded in a romantic aura:

From the first he loved Princeton—its lazy beauty, its half grasped significance, the wild moonlight revel of the rushes, the handsome, prosperous big-game crowds ...." (42-43)

Yet, despite the romance, he senses the "air of struggle that pervaded his class" (43). As a member of the freshmen class, Amory is kept out of the

circle of power that the clubs represent. Fitzgerald writes, “From the moment he realized this Amory resented social barriers as artificial distinctions made by the strong to bolster up their weak retainers and keep out the almost strong” (43). Amory desires to be “strong,” and Fitzgerald constructs a complex symbol using Princeton’s clubs. These clubs are a forum for the rich and are characterized by irresponsibility through their actions. Thus, when Amory is accepted into the popular Princeton social clubs, he is headed down the path of shallow material success. He begins to accept the materialistic mentality of the clubs, skipping class with club members, going to parties and embarking on trips to the Jersey Shore, New York and Philadelphia with no regard for the consequences. Amory seems to be fulfilling the quest hero’s mistaken mission: “to push ahead as selfishly and blindly as possible.”

When taken to the extreme, such basic undergraduate experiences become dangerous and lead to the possibility of failing out of college, but they are far from the negative chasms suggested by some critics. One such critic, John Chambers, argues that Amory’s “negative experiences” include posing as a literary intellectual, wasting time in social clubs, engaging in superficial romances, skipping class and wild, drunken nights. These actions are reminiscent of the drifting theme identified earlier; however, while perhaps detrimental to waking in time for class, a wild night is not always a bad thing. Such experiences are a necessary element in Fitzgerald’s conception of the quest hero. They are temptations that enable Amory to choose whether to continue being frivolous or to reform. Therefore, it is not Amory’s actions which are negative, but his impending failure if he fails to understand the consequences of his actions. Furthermore, it is impossible that Fitzgerald, writing as a 23-year-old man, should believe such youthful experience to be without value. Fitzgerald is not writing of wasted youth from a middle age perspective, as he did in *Babylon Revisited*. Amory’s experiences are not totally negative, as suggested by the following passage:

Long afterward Amory thought of sophomore spring as the happiest time of his life. His ideas were in tune with life as he found it; he wanted no more than to drift and dream and enjoy a dozen new-found friendships through the April afternoons. (72)

This paragraph seems an example of youth’s innocence rather than a display of lost purpose. Why not enjoy your ability to be free, lazy and dream before time’s advance snatches it from under your feet?

Yet Amory is keenly aware of such transient freedoms: “It’s just that I feel so sad these wonderful nights. I sort of feel they’re never coming again, and I’m not really getting all I could out of them” (81). It is true that Amory has taken his frivolity to the extreme and over-indulged in fun, thereby failing a class in conic sections, but more importantly, it is true that those wonderful nights of student life are never coming again, not even if he chooses to go to graduate school.

However, after failing the course, Amory understands the possibility of drifting into failure. Therefore, he begins to identify self-knowledge as the goal of his quest. In his experiences Amory must, as everyone must, decide what to take away, just as in the horrific death of Amory’s unexemplary friend Dick Humbird. The reckless drinking and drifting of Amory and his friends culminates in a car accident. Dick’s death is put into perspective by the crushed car and “heavy white mass” (86) that used to be so charming, yet ultimately shallow. Dick, the model of social grace and materialism, is transformed to something “horrible and unaristocratic and close to earth” (87). Fitzgerald draws a direct contrast between the once regal, pseudo-elegant Dick and his true self: a shallow soul. Furthermore, the “plaintive, tinny sound” (87) of a wind-rocked, gnarled fender gives Amory a haunting clue to his own possible fate if he is to keep taking his actions to the extreme. Given such a catastrophic event, it is no wonder that Amory is affected. He decides not to continue down Dick Humbird’s path as a frittering socialite, to eventually be reduced to a “heavy white mass” and nothing more.

Amory is saved from becoming a Dick Humbird and, through a “fortunate fall,” begins to understand himself. Although he failed a course, he tries to brush it off as inconsequential. However, he realizes that he will now be dropped from his clubs for insufficient grades. The great irony is that without this fall, Amory could never be saved. Through his failure, he is able to persevere and begin the true purpose of his quest: to use his talents for a more magnificent purpose.

While Amory’s journey is very similar to Fitzgerald’s “quest book,” it has also been compared to a morality play (Chambers 48). He must develop the ability to choose between good and evil. The character who instructs Amory in his experiences is a family friend named Monsignor Darcy. Through his interactions with Darcy, Amory begins to learn what is most important and more fully understands Darcy’s advice in an epiphany at his funeral. He sees how people depended upon Darcy. They felt safe with him and he, as a true

moral leader, in turn nurtured their security through his devotion to his ministry. Fitzgerald writes, “Amory suddenly and permanently rejected an old epigram that had been playing listlessly in his mind: ‘Very few things matter and nothing matters very much’” (266). The realization is simple yet profound. Everything does matter. Whether large or small, people’s actions reverberate across a web affecting everybody that touches it. Amory’s realization is monumental for any undergraduate, or for that matter, for anyone, and it is an exemplary discovery. Yet this is an undergraduate novel, and Amory learns from his mentor just as a student learns from a teacher. Through Darcy, Amory discovers that true greatness lies in sacrifice. He says:

He found something that he wanted, had always wanted and always would want—not to be admired, as he had feared; not to be loved, as he had made himself believe; but to be necessary to people, to be indispensable. (266)

Amory wants to be helpful, and give security, like Monsignor Darcy. He says the great men are “the congressmen you can’t bribe, the Presidents who aren’t politicians, the writers, speakers, scientists, statesmen who aren’t just popular grab-bags for a half-dozen women and children” (271). In speaking thus, he outlines the key difference between material and intellectual success. And while the university represents the ever approaching brink of maturity, it is also a time of self-discovery where youth’s ideals should not be tossed aside at the first glimpse of a dollar, but clung to like a lover. Amory approaches the spires of Princeton:

Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a revery of long days and nights; destined finally to go out into that dirty gray turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken .... Amory, sorry for them, was still not sorry for himself—art, politics, religion, whatever his medium should be, he knew he was safe now, free from all hysteria—he could accept what was acceptable, roam, grow, rebel, sleep deep through many nights ....(282)

This “new generation” symbolizes every undergraduate class. They relearn the “old creeds” as if they were new and written just for them, and they feel the uniqueness that rides shotgun to youth, yet unavoidable fears are always lurking in the “gray turmoil” of society. Whether driven by a fear of poverty or of unhappiness, students in each new class begin their quest “armed with

the best weapons” and hopes to discover a more magnificent use for their talents. Amory has reached an understanding of himself, at least to the point of accepting responsibility. He then throws his hands to heaven saying, “I know myself, but that is all” (282). While this conclusion may seem cynical, it is a victory for Amory. He now understands his goal in life and the possible means by which to achieve it. The tone of cynicism that arises from the “but that is all” is Amory’s understanding of the futility of trying to help others who don’t care to be helped: for example, the Dick Humbirds who are blind to the problems outside of their social circle and tax bracket.

One can only speculate about Amory’s success later in life. Whatever his medium—more than likely writing—he will instill the understanding learned in and out of the lecture halls of Princeton. Like the true knight, Amory has completed his quest. In a sense, Amory has found the Holy Grail. He desires to be indispensable and therefore will achieve immortality through those whose lives he will touch. Amory walks steadily towards Princeton’s spires:

The night mist fell. From the moon it rolled, clustered about the spires and towers, and then settled below them, so that the dreaming peaks were still in lofty aspiration toward the sky. Figures that dotted the day like ants now brushed along as shadowy ghosts, in and out of the foreground. The Gothic halls and cloisters were infinitely more mysterious as they loomed suddenly out of the darkness, outlined each by myriad faint squares of yellow light. (53)

The dreams, aspirations and mystery of Princeton still captivate Fitzgerald as well as Amory. And whether or not we choose to accept Amory’s philosophy, one thing is always sure. As Amory says, “If living isn’t a seeking for the Grail it may be a damned amusing game” (278).

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## Guts and Growth:

The Experience of Edward Albee's

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

DONNA BAUMLER

---

Edward Albee's play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, presents two couples who in many ways are parallel: the husband in each couple is a professor, and all four characters are very much part of the academic community in which they work and socialize. However, the dialogue that Albee has written for this play is not the refined, cultivated language that one expects from academics; no, the language hurled from the mouths of these players is caustic, and often base. The effect on the audience is one of shock. The action of the play, too, reaches the audience at a gut level: they are made raw and open and therefore ready to experience the issues faced by the two couples in the play: ambition, childlessness, and marital deception. That each couple is dealing with these issues causes the play to resonate with layered intensity. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* examines the way people coat themselves with deception and illusion and offers the idea that academics are particularly susceptible to this tendency. The academic experience provides the intellectual power, knowledge and privilege to hide under layers of illusion; but, contrarily, the play's ending shows that these academics are also equipped to peel away these layers in an attempt at renewal and growth.

The play's title alludes to a life of illusions. In an interview, Edward Albee revealed that the title came to him while he was in a bar "and saw 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?' scrawled in soap ... on this [bar room] mirror ... And when [he] started to write the play it cropped up in [his] mind again .... 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf' means who's afraid of the big bad wolf ... who's afraid of living life without false illusions .... [This struck Albee] as being a rather typical university intellectual joke" (Kolin 52).

Within the opening pages of the play, Albee introduces this idea along with the characters. The scene is "the living room of a house on the campus of a small New England college." The characters are Martha, "a large boisterous woman, 53, looking somewhat younger, ... ample but not fleshy," who is the college president's daughter; and her husband, George, who has

never quite lived up to the career expectations offered by their union. George, 46, is “thin” and his “hair is going gray.” Now past the midpoint of his career, it is clear that he will not become the history department head. Indeed, his thwarted ego has made him a professional failure. George is stagnant, and as the play reveals all of the characters’ private motivations, we learn that George’s professional stagnation results from his failure to pursue his own creativity. Albee therefore supplies an inverse formula whereby creativity equals growth.

George, rather than following his own heart and desires, always allows his father-in-law, through Martha, to dictate to him. George looks for professional success through his father-in-law. He clings to this system even though it has yet to prove fruitful. In one scene, Martha tells George to make her a drink, to which he replies:

GEORGE: Well, I don’t suppose a nightcap’d kill either one of us ...

MARTHA: A nightcap! Are you kidding? We’ve got guests.

GEORGE (Disbelieving): We’ve got what?

MARTHA: Guests. GUESTS.

GEORGE: GUESTS!

MARTHA: Yes ... guests ... people ... We’ve got guests coming over.

GEORGE: When?

MARTHA: NOW!

GEORGE: Good Lord, do you know what time it ... Who’s coming over?

MARTHA: What’s-their-name.

GEORGE: Who?

MARTHA: WHAT’S-THEIR-NAME!

GEORGE: Who what’s-their-name?

MARTHA: I don’t know what their name is, George ... You met them tonight ... they’re new ... he’s in the math department, or something ...

GEORGE: WHO ... who are these people?

MARTHA: You met them tonight, George.

GEORGE: I don’t remember anyone tonight ...

MARTHA: Well you did ... Will you give me my drink, please .... He’s in the math department ... about thirty, blond, and ....

GEORGE: ... and good-looking ....

MARTHA: Yes ... and good-looking ....

GEORGE: It figures.

MARTHA: ... and she’s a mousey little type, without any hips or anything.

GEORGE (Vaguely): Oh.

MARTHA: You remember them now?

GEORGE: Yes, I guess so, Martha .... But why in God’s name are they coming over here now?

MARTHA (in a so-there voice): Because Daddy said we should be nice to them, that's why. (8-10) [*ellipses Albee's, here and throughout*]

George begins to pout, and to cheer him up, Martha, recalling a joke from the party at her father's house, sings: "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf ..." (12).

Shortly thereafter, the guests arrive and the four are thrust together in their own private, drunken, post-party celebration. Martha and George's nasty arguments explode all over the stage and embroil their guests, Nick and Honey. After Nick and Honey are served their first of many drinks, Martha offers as a toast:

MARTHA: Cheers, dears. (They all drink) You have a poetic nature, George... a Dylan Thomas-y quality that gets me right where I live.

GEORGE: Vulgar girl! With guests here!

MARTHA: Ha ha, ha, HA! (TO HONEY and NICK) Hey; hey! (Sings, conducts with her drink in her hand. Honey joins in toward the end) Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf .... (MARTHA and HONEY laugh; NICK smiles)

HONEY: Oh, wasn't that funny? That was so funny ....

NICK (Snapping to): Yes ... yes it was.

MARTHA: I thought I'd bust a gut; I really did .... I really thought I'd bust a gut laughing. George didn't like it .... George didn't think it was funny at all.

GEORGE: Lord, Martha, do we have to go through this again?

MARTHA: I'm trying to shame you into a sense of humor, angel, that's all.

GEORGE (Overpatiently, to HONEY and NICK): Martha didn't think I laughed loud enough. Martha thinks that unless ... as she demurely puts it ... that unless you "bust a gut" you aren't amused. You know? Unless you carry on like a hyena you aren't having any fun. (24-25)

In this relatively mild sample, Albee makes one of many gut and scrotum references. Throughout the play, with increasing levels of viciousness, George is emotionally castrated by Martha's humiliating jibes. Most literary criticism of the play concentrates on Martha, the most outspoken and caustic character. The apparent generator of all the hostility, Martha is frequently called a castrator by the critics. Yet such critics fail to understand the formula for growth and for retaining one's own power through creativity which Albee is setting up. To concentrate on the castration theme is to miss the full thrust of the play. With mastery and shrewdness, Albee uses Martha to make the audience react at a gut level. Next, Albee mirrors this technique with gut and scrotum references in the text. These references act as flags

highlighting the play's important creativity and growth issues.

For example, rehashing George's failure to reach academic stardom for the benefit of their guests, Martha stabs: "some men would give their right arm for the chance" of being married to the college president's daughter. George replies, "Alas, Martha, in reality, it works out that the sacrifice is usually of a somewhat more private part of the anatomy" (28). Here critics point out that Martha is a castrator. But is Martha a castrator or is she merely playing by the intellectual rules for "Fun and Games" that George has set forth? George's academic training and his intellect hold the key to unlocking the play's subtle undercurrent theme. We react at a gut level, unaware of the devices that Albee uses to create illusions. Albee uses a sleight-of-hand: Martha is the focus of the play, but it is really George's academic intellect on which we should concentrate. It is not Martha who is the destroyer, but George, and his thwarted creative ego, who is the progenitor of that destruction. After one of their verbal battles, George mockingly tells Martha:

GEORGE: Why baby, I did it all for you. I thought you'd like it ... it's sort of to your taste ... blood, carnage and all. Why I thought you'd get excited ... sort of heave and pant and come running at me, your melons bobbling.

MARTHA: You've really screwed up, George.

GEORGE (Spitting it out): Oh for God's sake, Martha!

MARTHA: I mean it ... you really have.

GEORGE (Barely contained anger, now): You can sit there in that chair of yours, with the gin running out of you mouth, and you can humiliate me, you can tear me apart ... ALL NIGHT ... and that's perfectly all right ... that's O.K.

MARTHA: YOU CAN STAND IT!

GEORGE: I CANNOT STAND IT!

MARTHA: YOU CAN STAND IT!! YOU MARRIED ME FOR IT!! (152)

When one removes oneself from Albee's distraction, from the gut level of Martha as castrator, one may begin to appreciate the subtext of intellectual progeny put forth by George. Even as Albee creates illusions for his audience, George is in charge of creating illusion within his marital relationship, a role he took charge of in lieu of his academic ego. This role raises the subtle question of what creativity is and how it relates to an academic forum. The theme of illusion is difficult to unravel because of Albee's own style of illusion. However, there seem to be three fused layers: guts and children; guts and sex; and guts and power. All three of these help to define the play's mes-

sage of creativity.

The idea of children always elicits a gut-level reaction from the characters. The fusing of guts and children is perhaps the most important of the three, as the play's resolution turns on this idea. Throughout the play, we are led to believe that Martha and George have a son. However, as Martha and George often hurl retorts about their son at each other, the concept of their child begins to seem very eerie. Notice that the following scene is highlighted by a gut reference:

MARTHA: George's biggest problem about the little ... ha, ha, ha, HA! ... about our son, about our great big son, is that deep down in the private-most pit of his gut, he's not completely sure that it's his own kid.

GEORGE (Deeply serious): My God, you're a wicked woman.

MARTHA: And I've told you a million times, baby ... I wouldn't conceive with any but you ... you know that, baby. (71)

Albee, who allows Martha and George to have many nicknames for each other, has underscored the dysfunctional idea of pushing the lines by having Martha call George "baby," not once but twice in this short scene. Their relationship, when it stumbles on the topic of their son, is especially caustic and twisted. At the end of the play we learn the reason why: Martha and George's son is made up; he does not exist. He is a creation of their willful illusions. False birth becomes a symbol for false creativity.

Additionally, Albee has created cyclical tragedy; George's never-to-be-published novel about a child who kills his parents is ironically complemented by George killing off his made-up son. The play offers tragic elements; not only does Martha's father-fixation play *Electra* to George's "*Cedipus*," but their truth-seeking flaying lifts the skin and exposes the bone of inner truth to transcend the personal and the private. Their action therefore highlights and helps to purge the pity and fear in all of us. The dynamics of Honey and Nick as a couple underscore Martha and George's relationship in order to illustrate Albee's microcosmic/macrocosmic reality. Throughout the play, it is revealed that Honey and Nick have themselves woven a pattern of public and private lies.

Albee has drawn a parallel between the two couples: Honey and Nick are also childless. Apparently Honey, who vomits her guts out every time she faces the issue, cannot have children because she is slim-hipped; thus she physically symbolizes the sterility theme. This becomes further complicated when it is revealed that Nick—who is actually a biologist and whom George

kids about wanting to create babies in test tubes—cannot perform sexually for Martha, who later in the evening seduces him. As these facts are revealed, the audience begins to ask themselves, have Honey and Nick not created children because she is slim-hipped or because he is impotent? The realities and subterfuges of Honey and Nick are therefore skillfully layered onto the realities and subterfuges of Martha and George, all of which then develop thematically to create an artistic experience on a mirrored plane. This is an uncomfortable position that Albee wants the audience to feel at a gut level. And at this point, thematic questions begin to surface: what is true creativity, and is it an individual endeavor and can others be held responsible for killing creativity?

Creating fake babies becomes a metaphor for George's thwarted academic and literary aspirations. This metaphor is what blends guts and children with guts and sex—here alluded to with scrotum references—and then later, this metaphor is fused with the theme of guts and power. George tells Nick that within the small college “musical beds is the faculty sport” (34) and that Martha, who is changing into something more comfortable, is doing so for Nick: “Martha is not changing for me. Martha hasn't changed for me in years .... [A]nd you must not forget that Martha is the daughter of our beloved boss. She is his ... right ball, you might say” (46).

At one point, during the first act of the play, George reacts to a story of Martha's which depicts him in particularly bad light:

GEORGE takes from behind his back a short-barreled shotgun, and calmly aims it at the back of MARTHA's head. Honey screams ... rises. NICK rises, and, simultaneously, MARTHA turns her head to face GEORGE.

GEORGE: POW!! (Pop! from the barrel of the gun blossoms a large red and yellow Chinese parasol. HONEY screams again, this time less, and mostly from relief and confusion) You're dead! Pow! You're dead! (57)

Martha is so titillated by George's joke that she asks for a kiss, but when he refuses she later retaliates by saying to Nick:

MARTHA: You don't need any props, do you baby?

NICK: Unh-unh.

MARTHA (Suggestive): I'll bet not. No fake Jap gun for you, eh? (61)

Finally, to make this “guts” equation complete, Albee pairs guts with both professional and personal power. George allowed Martha's father to negatively dictate the publication of the novel he had written. Martha's father did not approve of the substance of George's novel in which a boy kills his

parents. By listening to Martha's father, George gave up his own power and sacrificed his creative offspring. The fact that he has not published has hurt his career. But in an ironical twist, George didn't publish in order to promote the possibility of nepotism. This irony underscores one of the play's most important messages: the value in academia of creation. Publish or perish. However, to genuinely create, one must be true to oneself. Therefore, part of Albee's equation becomes the importance of retaining one's personal and creative power.

Sadly, the aging George, having been fruitless, is now scared and wary of the upcoming professional generation symbolized by Nick. George tells Nick that "I will fight you, young man . . . one hand on my scrotum, to be sure . . . but with my free hand I will battle you to death" (68). These power plays enable George to pad his thwarted ego. Martha accuses George of not having the "guts to make anybody proud of him." This is a vulnerable point of entry through which to wound George, disappointed in himself because he unsuccessfully played his political achievement card rather than work on his own creative products. Martha recounts for Honey and Nick the beginning of her father's disapproval with George's professional performance:

MARTHA (To GEORGE who is at the portable bar with his back to her): You getting angry, baby? Hunh? (Now back) That's the way it was supposed to be. Very simple. And Daddy seemed to think it was a pretty good idea, too. For a while. Until he watched for a couple of years! (To George again) You getting angrier? (Now back) Until he watched for a couple of years and started thinking maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all . . . that maybe Georgie-boy didn't have the stuff . . . that he didn't have it in him! . . . I mean, he'd be . . . no good . . . at trustees' dinners, fund raising. He didn't have any . . . personality, you know what I mean? Which was disappointing to Daddy, as you can imagine. So here I am, stuck with this flop . . . (84-85)

Realities, in this world of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, are so harsh that the characters numb the truth with help from the bottle, and at this point they are in a destructive frenzy. George, as the creator of illusion and as the partner who begs to be whipped, begins, at this point, to lift those layers of illusions. And now, in the final act of the play, George, in perverse retaliation against Martha, destroys their most sacred of illusions and declares that while Martha was off seducing Nick, a Western Union telegram arrived which declared that their son is dead. He does this in front of Honey and Nick, and therefore Martha cannot deny the reality of what is in fact a false birth and death. This moment is the true creative offspring and destruction of the play

and offers the means of “Exorcism” for which the final act is named. It becomes clear that Martha and George can no longer maintain the illusion that the false creation of their son has afforded them. This illusion was created via their academic training and intellect, and it is by these same means that Albee gives them the strength to strip away the illusion: the academic experience of their life has taught them how.

Slowly, the layers of falsity that cover Honey and Nick are also lifted, albeit not with the intensity of George and Martha’s exposure. Throughout the play, Albee has correlated these two couples by revealing similarly held beliefs and deceptions. Their dialogue and language are rich with virility and creativity which, layered under their personal sets of realities, underscores the creativity theme. Because the false illusions are stripped away, the conclusion of the play hints at forthcoming renewal and growth. George is the creator of illusion, but he also destroys these illusions. Since these false illusions have been peeled away, true creativity and growth now have a chance. This is compounded by the fact that it is undoubtedly clear, at the end of the play, that Martha and George have a deep bond and truly love one another. The ending of the play therefore promises a life stripped of myths; Martha and George’s acceptance of the truth provides a loving “hint of communion” that suggests absolute change and growth in their relationship. Important truth-telling might be a flaying, but it may offer an enlightenment. To those willing to face a problem, the problem can be overcome; therefore the play’s tragic implications give way to a life-giving theme. We all create our own personal illusion, and for those people willing to lift layer off of layer, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* offers macrocosmic meaning; but to those who are willing to embrace the risk of being flayed to the bone, it invites exorcism. *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* teaches us that the power of the academic intellect allows us to hide away under layers of illusion, but it is more useful and loving to utilize this knowledge for growth and to peel away layers of illusion and reveal fundamental layers of truth. Albee underscores that knowledge begins at a gut level and is further formed on the level of intellectual training and reason. However, the true academic experience is one in which these two levels are combined in order to produce the creative offspring of truth.

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## “What Novels Are All About”:

The Aesthetic Concerns of David Lodge’s *Trading Places*

JOHN LANGAN

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Beneath David Lodge’s novel *Changing Places* is another book. On the surface, Lodge tells the very funny story of what happens when two college instructors, one American, the other British, trade positions during the first semester of 1969. Underneath that story, the book conducts an equally playful inquiry into the aesthetics of fiction. Reading it, one finds oneself confronted, almost unexpectedly, by familiar critical queries: What exactly is the relationship between life and literature? Does literature mirror life, or does it make it? Is literature, especially the novel, fit to address the complexities of human life, particularly in our post-modern age, or has it ceded that role to such other art forms as film? All this from what began as a comedy of manners—yet Lodge exploits the novel’s academic setting to the advantage of both his story’s comic effect and its critical inquiry. As his comparison of American and British professors, attitudes and campuses provides him with a plethora (if not an overabundance) of targets for his keen wit, so does the academic setting allow Lodge to include a greater range of novels, novel writers and theories of the novel in his consideration than he would have been able to were the subject of his novel, say, dentists.

It is difficult to write about comedy without reducing it to the level of formula and cliché, and this is a danger that seems to increase exponentially with the complexity of the comedy. Himself an accomplished literary critic and author of such non-fiction works as *The Art of Fiction*, Lodge weaves his knowledge of post-structural literary theory into the fabric of his novel. This adds a further challenge for interpreters of the novel, one potentially more lethal than that of sapping the joy from comedy, for Lodge’s use of the tenets of contemporary literary theory may encourage in us the misconception that he has written a novel about why novels are irrelevant: as it were, a self-deconstructing book. Indeed, the artful arrangement of *Changing Places* tempts one to avoid its dangers altogether and leave the book to casual conversation.

In fact, Lodge uses the possibilities inherent in the novel form to demonstrate its continued vibrancy, providing us with more than our fair share of amusement along the way. He does so through the comparisons he makes between characters and between academic institutions and through his use of certain recurrent textual motifs. It is my intent here to point out a few of the more obvious examples of both techniques and to suggest the manner in which they contribute to Lodge's greater purpose.

The novel's extended comparison between the American professor, Morris Zapp, and his English counterpart, Philip Swallow, is perhaps the most obvious comparison in *Changing Places* to open to deeper significance, to a second, theoretical level. As we read about their respective misadventures, we realize that each man represents a fundamentally different critical stance towards literature. These stances are conveyed by their professional approaches to their chosen subject, which are, to put it mildly, diametrically opposed. Swallow, we are told,

was a man with a genuine love of literature in all its diverse forms. He was as happy with Beowulf as with Virginia Woolf, with *Waiting for Godot* as with *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, and in odd moments when nobler examples of the written word were not to hand he read attentively the backs of cornflakes packets, the small print on railway tickets and the advertising matter in books of stamps. (17)

This indiscriminate love of all things written forms the root of Swallow's professional problem: unable to focus on a specific field of study long enough to write anything about it, he has never completed a single critical article, "so reluctant to choose one item to the exclusion of others that he ended up empty-handed" (17). Thus, but for a department chair who wishes to send Swallow out of the country so that the chair might not be embarrassed about promoting a much younger man over him, Swallow would remain doomed to a professional life essentially static.

No such problems bedevil the American Morris Zapp, who

had published articles in *PMLA* while still in graduate school; ... who had published five fiendishly clever books (four of them on Jane Austen) by the time that he was thirty and achieved the rank of full professor at the same precocious age. (15)

A fervent Austen scholar, Zapp displays a single-minded, almost frightening devotion to his subject: he is engaged in

an ambitious critical project: a series of commentaries on Jane Austen which would work through the whole canon, one novel at a time, saying absolutely everything that could be said about them ...[S]o that when each commentary was written there would be simply nothing further to say about the novel in question. (44)

The root of Zapp's devotion lies in a desire "to put a definitive stop to the production of any further garbage on the subject" (44), and in his more "Faustian moments he dreamed of going on, after fixing Jane Austen, to do the same on the other major English novelists, then the poets and dramatists, ... inexorably reducing the area of English literature available for free comment" (44-45). A portrait of the professor as control-freak, Zapp is a man who likes answers; they "separate the men from the boys" (45).

Philip Swallow, on the other hand, is in love with questions. A "superlative examiner of undergraduates: scrupulous, painstaking, stern yet just," Swallow is "much feared by his colleagues" in those meetings where new Department-wide test questions must be formulated "because of his keen eye for the ambiguous rubric, the repetition of questions from previous years' papers, the careless oversight that would allow candidates to duplicate material in two answers" (17). When a colleague sneeringly suggests that Swallow should publish his test questions, Swallow is "taken with the idea," envisioning

a critical work of totally revolutionary form, a concise, comprehensive survey of English literature consisting entirely of questions, elegantly printed with acres of white paper between them, questions that would be miracles of condensation, eloquence and thoughtfulness, questions to read and re-read, questions to brood over, as pregnant and enigmatic as haikus, as memorable as proverbs; questions that would, so to speak, contain within themselves the ghostly, subtly suggested embryos of their own answers. (18)

In short, Lodge tells us, "both men were characteristic of the educational systems they had passed through" (15). Those systems Lodge presents as polar opposites, whose implications radiate out to the writing, reading and analyzing of literature. Either literature is a site of questions, or a source of answers. Either we read novels (and, by extension, write and study them) to participate more deeply in life, to engage in a search for some deeper meaning we may never find, or we read to engage in abstract linguistic exercises which admit to definite solution. Of course, we are not wrong in thinking that the reality probably lies somewhere in between those two extremes, but together, those views start us thinking about the way literature achieves its

effect upon us. Does a novel involve its reader more intensely in external events, or does it allow her/him to escape from them?

The novel's theoretical investigations are similarly advanced by its discussion of the two universities to which its protagonists go. This comparison extends the scope of the critical inquiry from matters personal to matters cultural. Rummidge University, England,

had never been an institution of more than middling size and reputation, and it had lately suffered the mortifying fate of most universities of its type (civic redbrick): having competed strenuously for fifty years with two universities chiefly valued for being old, it was, at the moment of drawing level, rudely overtaken in popularity and prestige by a batch of universities chiefly valued for being new. Its mood was therefore disgruntled and discouraged. (14)

The State University of Euphoria at Plotinus, though having "perhaps reached its peak as a center of learning, and ... already in the process of decline," because of "the quality of ... [its] ... senior staff, and the magnitude of its accumulated resources" still has "many years before its standing would be seriously undermined" (14). It is "one of America's major universities," having made itself so by a

ruthless exploitation of its wealth, ... buying the most distinguished scholars it could find and retaining their loyalty by the lavish provision of laboratories, libraries, research grants and handsome, long-legged secretaries. (13)

Located in Euphoria, "that small but populous state ... between Northern and Southern California with its mountains, lakes and rivers, its redwood forests, its blond beaches and its incomparable Bay, across which the State University at Plotinus faces the glittering, glamorous city of Esseph" (13), the American University certainly seems much better located than Rummidge, "a large, graceless industrial city sprawled over the English Midlands at the intersection of three motorways, twenty-six railway lines and half-a-dozen stagnant canals" (13). How Euphoric State, as it is known, and Rummidge, "two universities so different in character and so widely separated in space should be linked" by "the exchange of visiting professors in the second half of each academic year" can be "simply explained" (13). Both schools have as the

chief feature of their designs ... a replica of the leaning Tower of Pisa, built of white stone and twice the original size at Euphoric State and of red brick and to scale at Rummidge, but restored to the perpendicular in both instances.

The exchange scheme was setup to mark this coincidence. (13)

Faced with such an abundance of details, let us select one on which to focus: the replica of the leaning Tower of Pisa, the feature that unites the two schools. The original Tower is a good symbol for the Classical world, and since it is “the chief feature” of the “designs” of the two universities, we might see it as a symbol for that world’s learning. In this case, the fact that its replica is the chief feature of both universities would suggest that they are engaged in carrying on the noble traditions of education. But the specifics of each Tower belie this symbolism. For one thing, the Tower has been righted, indicating that changes (“improvements” one feels tempted to say) have been made to the original. For another, that each Tower should be made of material typical of the architecture of its respective location (the “civic red-brick” of England and the white stone of American national monuments) suggests the nationalization of the original, its remaking from the elements of each culture. Finally, the size of each Tower tells us something of the ambitions of each educational system: for the British, the desire to appear humbly conforming to the Great Tradition even as they not-so-subtly change it, and for the Americans, the desire not only to change it, but to enlarge it, make it bigger and better.

Since our concerns here are literary, we might step further in our analysis of the Tower as symbol and replace Classical education with Classical literature as the Tower’s referent. Our observations about the changes the two successors have wrought on the original would carry over to literature and its study—the English seeing themselves as part of a tradition extending from Homer, Virgil and Dante; the Americans seeing themselves as not just part of a tradition but its culmination, improving on the old masters. As the comparison between Zapp and Swallow asked us to consider the role played by our individual ideas of literature in our relation to it, the differences between Rummidge and Euphoric State ask us to consider the role played by cultural attitudes and traditions. To what extent do national traditions impact the writing and reading of fiction? Do we allow the great writers to rewrite us, or do we rewrite them? Lodge’s numerous references, overt and implied, to other novelists throughout *Changing Places* clearly indicate this as a matter of concern for him; indeed, it is a concern we see demonstrated before we have even begun the book, in its Dickensian subtitle, “A Tale of Two Campuses.” The subtitle calls to mind that writer and his work and sug-

gests that Lodge is writing a novel about revolutionary times, which in writing about the 1969 American college campus, he certainly is (albeit with tongue in cheek). But the subtitle also invites us to compare the way Lodge handles his subject matter to the way Dickens treated his. With it, Lodge places himself within the tradition of English fiction and invites us to decide to what extent the book that follows conforms to or departs from its predecessors.

No discussion of *Changing Places*, especially of the book's critical underside, would be complete without at least a mention of A.J. Beamish, another route down which Lodge pursues critical questions. Beamish is the author of *Let's Write a Novel*, a small paperback "published in 1927, as part of a series that included *Let's Weave a Rug*, *Let's Go Fishing* and *Let's Have Fun With Photography*" (87). Philip Swallow requests the book from his office in England when he learns that his teaching assignments in America will include "English 305—an advanced course in the writing of extended narrative" (66), for which he is completely unqualified and unprepared. Morris Zapp, who eventually finds the book in Swallow's office, opens it and reads, "Every novel must tell a story" (87). Furthermore, Zapp discovers, "there are three types of story, the story that ends happily, the story that ends unhappily, and the story that ends neither happily nor unhappily, or, in other words, doesn't really end at all" (87). "Aristotle lives!" Zapp thinks, and goes on to read Beamish's advice that the "best kind of story is the one with a happy ending; the next best is the one with an unhappy ending, and the worst kind is the story with no ending at all. The novice is advised to begin with the first kind of story. Indeed, unless you have Genius, you should never attempt any other kind" (88). Conservative advice to say the least, we may think, particularly when we reach the end of *Changing Places* and realize that it ends inconclusively. Is this a novel of "the worst kind"? Does its author possess "Genius"? Of course, Beamish's advice has been included for comic effect, and we trust the novel that contains the advice before we trust the advice itself. All the same, one wonders if Lodge's motives for including Beamish's words can have been as simple as comic effect. He has done so much with Zapp and Swallow, not to mention Rummidge and Euphoric, we cannot help asking if more might lie behind A.J. Beamish.

We have time to contemplate an answer to that question: before *Changing Places* ends, we encounter A.J. Beamish's advice twice more. The first time is in the novel's third, epistolary chapter, when Swallow's wife Hilary writes to

him that she has received *Let's Write a Novel* from Morris Zapp and that it is "a funny little book... There's a whole chapter on how to write an epistolary novel" (130). Although we do not receive Beamish's wisdom on the subject directly, that his book contains a chapter on how to write the epistolary novel suggests his approval of the form. He and Lodge seem to be in agreement, until, that is, we read Hilary's remark that "surely" this approach to narrative hasn't been practiced "since the eighteenth century" (130). While there is no way to say with absolute surety that Hilary does not mean to praise Beamish's boldness in reviving an older narrative form, it is unlikely. Rather, she calls attention to the epistolary novel as an outdated form insufficient to the demands of contemporary life. Needless to say, she does so within a letter. Again Lodge presents an approach to the novel only to call it into question even as he questions the questioning. The theoretical ground on which we are standing begins to feel somewhat shaky.

In the same way, when Beamish makes his last appearance in the book, it is to advise Philip Swallow that, "Flashbacks should be used sparingly, if at all. They slow down the progress of the story and confuse the reader. Life, after all, goes forwards, not backwards" (186); as one might expect, his advice comes at the end of the extended flashback that opens Chapter Five. Beamish, we finally understand, is presenting not only a "how-to" view of the novel but a theory of fiction that reduces it to the fundamental of linear narrative. "Life ... goes forwards": things follow a certain order which art must reflect, and Beamish opposes anything that would muddy that reflection. Yet, the more we read of it, the more the increasingly non-linear *Changing Places* calls into question Beamish's basic view, making us ask whether such linearity is true to the complexities of life as we experience it, or a relic of the artistic past (particularly the Nineteenth Century novel).

While it would be a mistake to draw too close a connection between A.J. Beamish's view of fiction and the views of Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp, such a comparison proves momentarily useful. However "fiendishly clever" Zapp's answers may be, however pregnant and enigmatic" Swallow's questions, both men nonetheless seek to reduce literature to something more manageable, to all question or all answer. Each wants to capture literature, to control it, as witnessed by Swallow's imaginary comprehensive book of questions, Zapp's books of answers. In their ambitions, they are at least kissing cousins to Beamish, if not closer kin. And as is the case with Beamish, the example of the novel in which their respective theories are advanced

gives the lie to the two of them.

This is not to imply that there is no place for literary criticism (or English professors) in David Lodge's world, any more than his novel's critical playfulness is meant to imply that the novel is extinct. This is to say, however, that the example of *Changing Places* itself demonstrates the continued possibilities of the novel as artistic form and, in doing so, exposes the limitations of any and all attempts at critical comprehensiveness. For David Lodge, the basic point of fiction is not only story but the way story is told. That telling gives us more than plot alone could; it expands the story, gives it a depth it otherwise might not possess. In the book, Lodge does his level best to maintain the middle ground among the shifting and contradictory theories and opinions about fiction he and his characters explore, the better to leave his own options open. While his characters inhabit a very real and changing world, that world is presented to us in a very artful manner. Based on the example of *Changing Places*, one could venture that, for Lodge, the novel treats the real world, but does so in its own way. This way is marked by self-consciousness, by the novel's awareness of itself as artifice. This makes the form particularly well-suited to our self-conscious age and suggests that the true test of a novel's realism may lie not so much in its representation of physical details, but in its use of narrative technique to construct a structural analogue for the complicated state of human consciousness. In other words, the most realistic novels are those whose complexities reflect our own. In Lodge's view, fiction is a form complex enough to contain advice it questions.

As we reconsider *Changing Places*, we realize that its title, which had seemed to refer to the changing universities and even to their changing locations, is ultimately a reference to the novel as an aesthetic form. Not only is the novel a site where changing goes on, where the events of everyday life are reshaped by the novelist into art, but every novel is itself a changing place, opening as we read it to reveal hidden depths. As the novel David Lodge has written answers many of the questions it raises about the nature of fiction through its own example, so it suggests that its example is typical of the form in general. We have mentioned its Dickensian subtitle; as we return to the novel's first two chapters, we see that they are written in an imitation of Dickens's witty, conversational style, with a certain amount of the shrewd social observation of Jane Austen (the subject, Lodge quickly establishes, of both men's study) thrown in for good measure. The third chapter consists of a series of letters, a novelistic form which, Hilary Swallow reminds us, has its

roots in the Eighteenth Century. Chapter Four is a collection of newspaper articles, ads and headlines—a tip of the hat to James Joyce and John Dos Passos. The fifth chapter returns us to Dickens and Austen, and the sixth is a movie script. Somewhat out of order, Lodge has taken us through the novel's origins, its great practitioners, its modernist moments, and its post-modernist future, or the lack thereof.

This ability of the novel to recapitulate its history within itself as part of a process of self-interrogation further reaffirms its value. This is, in the end, the significance of the novel's inconclusive ending. Our first time through, we may read it as an admission of defeat on Lodge's part. But as we come to understand more and more of the novel's hidden concerns, as the book beneath the book comes increasingly into focus, we realize that it ends *in media res* because there is still more to say. The open-endedness of the novel reaffirms the possibilities of the form. The questions Lodge has raised will not be answered in any one book; indeed, they lie behind the writing of all novels. Better not to pretend to answer them; better to write another novel.

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# Sense of Place in Literature:

## The Ninth Annual Graduate Symposium

### INTRODUCTION

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The Ninth Annual Graduate Symposium, "Sense of Place in Literature," was held on April 29, 1997, under the joint direction of Professors Daniel Kempton and H.R. Stoneback. It was a lively and well-attended symposium, with well over one hundred New Paltz students, faculty and administrators in the audience. We were pleased to welcome President Roger Bowen and Dean Gerald Benjamin, as well as visiting faculty and students from other institutions, members of the college community and persons from New Paltz and throughout the Hudson Valley region, as well as—from out-of-state—the parents of one of our graduate student speakers.

In the section that follows, we present the proceedings of this symposiums, seven papers covering a wide range of American and British writers, incorporating a rich and diverse array of approaches to the currently very fashionable, and always difficult and engaging, topic of "Sense of Place." John Langan, in "A World Beyond Our World," deals with sense of place in D.H. Lawrence's *St. Mawr*. In "Watching the Land Watching Her," Susan Piperato treats sense of place as "sense of self" in the neglected classic American novel *The Time of Man* by Elizabeth Madox Roberts. David Goodman, in "But If You Have Had It You Know," articulates Hemingway's "sixth sense" of place. In "Blues Made and Used Right on the Spot," Jennifer Benton analyses Zora Neal Hurston's sense of place in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The Proteus chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* is examined in Terry Conaway's "The Decomposition of Place." Todd Niemczyk, in "The Eye of the Ancient Immortal Umpire," meditates on the *deus loci* (the spirit of place) and sense of place in Faulkner's "The Old People." And Jason Taylor, in "Tenuous Connections," deals with the struggle for sense of place in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*. All of these fine papers elicited enthusiastic response from the audience and lively question-and-answer sessions ensued. Ian S. MacNiven, the distinguished visiting speaker at the evening program, participated in the afternoon graduate student sessions and contributed to the discussions. Professor MacNiven, along

with other visiting faculty from other institutions, offered concluding and summary observations about the “extraordinary quality” of the papers by our MA students—“far better,” it was said, than what they had been hearing at various national and international conferences.

Ian MacNiven’s evening address, “Place as Agent and Actor in Literature,” delivered to a standing-room-only audience which overflowed into the hallway, offered a wide-ranging survey of the functions of place in literature from many periods and cultures. As the author of the forthcoming authorized biography of Lawrence Durrell and numerous works on Durrell and D.H. Lawrence (two of the preeminent literary commentators on and practitioners of “place-writing” in the twentieth century); and as President of the D.H. Lawrence Society and the Lawrence Durrell Society, MacNiven was uniquely positioned to inform his engaging lecture with certain key Laurentian and Durrellian insights concerning the *deus loci*, the spirit and sense of place. More than two hours after he began, the extensive question-and-answer and discussion period was brought to a close, and another highly successful symposium ended.

H.R. STONEBACK

## “A World Beyond Our World”:

D.H. Lawrence’s Sense of Place in *St. Mawr*

JOHN LANGAN

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D.H. Lawrence famously described his life as “a savage enough pilgrimage.” This pilgrimage took him around the globe as he searched for a new way of life to replace what he increasingly came to see as the dying civilization of Western Europe. Lawrence’s writing reflected his ideas from the beginning, and as his personal grail grew more clearly defined to him, so it was portrayed more clearly in his writing. The short novel *St. Mawr* (1924) offers a good example of the way Lawrence’s art incorporates his ideas. In particular, it helps us understand Lawrence’s mature conception of sense of place. When he was younger, Lawrence had subscribed to the notion that every place had a certain energy peculiar to it which influenced the people living there. “There is,” he had written, “no doubt some peculiar potentiality attaching to every distinct region of the earth’s surface” whose “influence” affected its inhabitants (*Symbolic Meaning*, 20). Europe’s energy had become depleted, and what was left had gone bad, and this played into Lawrence’s reason for leaving England. He wanted to find a place whose energy was still fresh and from whose influence he could benefit.

Sense of place as a geographic reality persisted in Lawrence’s thought, but as he grew older, those three words assumed another meaning. Sense of place came increasingly to refer to an attitude one maintained within oneself. This attitude consists in knowing one’s self and one’s place in the world. Rather than penetrating inward from the outer world, sense of place emanates from the self outward into the world around. In *St. Mawr*, artist Cartwright describes such an attitude through the metaphor of vision; one must learn, he says, to see things “in full,” to see “the things that can’t be seen” as well as the things that can be (54). This seeing “in full” allows one to see the deficiencies of the modern world, as well as the possible cures to those deficiencies. In *St. Mawr*, Lawrence’s mature conception of sense of place is set next to his original ideas, and, by the end of the novel, it supersedes them.

*St. Mawr* tells the story of Lou Witt, a young American heiress, and her awakening to the corruption of 1923 Europe. That corruption consists in a

relentless subversion of any and all values in favor of ease and pleasure, and it runs rampant through Lou's own monied class. Like Lawrence's, Lou's awakening takes her on a voyage, in her case, across the ocean to a remote farm in the mountains of New Mexico. Lou's dawning awareness is linked to the stallion St. Mawr, which she buys for Rico, her husband, but ends taking with her to America to protect him from her husband. St. Mawr becomes a barometer registering the dangerous moral climate of Europe as well as a compass pointing to the possibility of another way of life.

Although she is an American, Lou has no true sense of home any more, only "the lurking sense of being an outsider everywhere" (3). Having lived here and there in Europe according to the ebb and flow of her inclinations, Lou finds the United States "the strangest of strange lands" (4) when she does return before her marriage. Lou's sense of alienation is related to her having had "her own way so long that by the age of twenty-five she didn't know where she was. Having one's own way landed one completely at sea" (3). Connecting "having one's own way"—and nothing but—to "not knowing where [one is]" joins a sense of place to a sense of perspective, to being able to moderate one's own desires in relation to the world around. When one has too much of one's own way, one is "completely at sea," in a place that is not a place but is a shifting, formless fluid whose lack of any fixed points of reference makes its navigation difficult. A sense of perspective puts one, as it were, on solid ground.

Into Lou's shapeless world comes the great red stallion St. Mawr. Lou is struck by the horse immediately: "He was of such a lovely red-gold colour, and a dark, invisible fire seemed to come out of him" (12); touching his coat, she feels "the vivid heat of his life come through to her" (13). The appearance of St. Mawr awakens Lou's sense of place; something about the horse, his very vitality, allows and encourages her to see "the things that can't be seen" about him. Lou feels that the "wild, brilliant, alert head of St. Mawr seemed to look at her out of another world," as if the horse were a messenger sent to prompt her to consciousness (14). Other details reinforce St. Mawr's otherness: his Welsh name, his refusal to sire any offspring, his reputation as a difficult and dangerous horse to ride.

St. Mawr is contrasted with Lou's husband, Rico. Rico is clearly uncomfortable with St. Mawr and cannot control him very well. Eventually, he attempts to sell the horse to a neighbour who intends to geld St. Mawr, a potentially fatal operation for an adult male horse. Lou comes to see her

husband as representative of everything in the modern world she loathes, of the corruption of contemporary Europe, and St. Mawr as representative of an alternative to it. The two of them are locked in a subtle yet definite “battle” (19). “St. Mawr,” Lou realizes, “drew his hot breaths in another world from Rico’s ... Perhaps,” her thought continues, “the old Greek horses had lived in St. Mawr’s world” (19). The horse’s world is “an older, heavily potent” one (20), one in which actions have weight, meaning and significance. St. Mawr is not just alive; he lets “Life ... rush” into him (49). Rico cannot control the horse because he is too far removed from St. Mawr’s “heavily potent,” heroic world. As St. Mawr’s world and what it represents becomes more attractive for Lou, her distance from Rico increases.

The crisis for Lou’s life in England, as well as for her nascent sense of place, comes when Lou, Rico, and a group of their friends and relations take a riding trip to the Devil’s Chair, a natural stone formation overlooking the border between England and Wales. This is no ordinary place. The site of the stone formation is “one of those places where the spirit of aboriginal England still lingers, the old savage England, whose last blood flows still in a few” (63). Wales is contrasted with England: looking westward, Lou finds Wales “neither impressive nor a very picturesque landscape,” yet the sight of it has a “strange effect on the imagination” (64). Lawrence’s early idea of sense of place as an actual geographic quality comes into play once more, as the spirit of the “old savage England” stirs Lou. Lou compares her life and the lives of those around her to those of the area’s ancient inhabitants. The comparison goes badly for her and her companions. Like St. Mawr, the ancient people lived in a world of potency. In comparison, Lou, Rico and their companions are phantoms: “We don’t exist,” she tells Rico (64). The “influence” of the Devil’s chair, the literal sense of this place, catalyzes Lou’s personal sense of place, resulting in a change in her vision. Looking east through The Needle’s Eye, “a hole in the ancient grey rock like a window,” she sees “England ... in shadow” (65), a shadow spreading toward Wales. Even Wales will not escape corruption forever.

The vision that begins with the image of England in shadow develops into a “vision of evil” as Lou rides for help for Rico, who, in an arrogant attempt to master St. Mawr, pulls the horse over on top of himself (68). The “whole world,” Lou realizes, is full of rapidly spreading evil, an evil that consists in subversion. “Undermine, undermine, undermine,” the refrain runs in Lou’s mind (70). It is not subversion of one thing to replace it with another,

but the undermining of everything to replace it with nothing: “Believe in nothing, care about nothing: but keep the surface easy, and have a good time” (70). There is no cure for this disease; all one can do is “depart from the mass, and try to cleanse [oneself] ... Retreat to the desert, and fight” (71). Only in the desert, the place to which countless generations of holy men and women have retreated from the evils of the world, can one prepare a defense. There, free from distraction, one can realize that goodness lies in “creative destruction” (71). Humanity must imitate the example of nature which “destroys as it goes, throws down one tree for the rise of another ... [destroys] the stiff old thing to let the new bud come through” (71). Nature is savage, as savage as the aboriginal Englishmen, and one must appropriate that savageness for oneself if one is to have a meaningful life.

After this, Lou chooses to leave Rico and England for America, specifically, Texas, where her family owns a ranch. She takes St. Mawr with her. Before she leaves, though, she has a final vision of corrupt England. Looking out a window at the English countryside, Lou sees “the wet, close, hedged-and-fenced English landscape. Everything enclosed, enclosed, to stifling” (90). Nature’s “creative destruction” has been confined, the “stiff old thing” preserved long after it should have made way for “the new bud.” “The very apples on the trees,” Lou thinks, “looked shut in, it was impossible to imagine and speck of ‘Knowledge’ lurking inside them” (90). The Garden of Eden has been tamed and as a result exhausted, and as a result of that exhaustion, the Garden has degenerated. This Garden is the opposite of the desert: there what cannot survive is allowed to die out; no attempt is made to maintain it. Compared to the domesticated English landscape, the desert is a vivid expression of nature’s creative destruction.

A crucial change has occurred in Lou’s sense of place. It has become an active faculty. At the Devil’s Chair, Lou received the landscape’s impressions. Here, she projects her impressions onto the countryside. Where the Devil’s Chair was a place full of “the spirit of aboriginal England,” the domesticated “hedged-and-fenced English landscape” is a place whose qualities Lou “imagines.”

Arriving in Texas, Lou feels “exhilarated” by the landscape: “from the hot wide sky, and the hot, wide, red earth, there *did* come something new, something not used up” (129). St. Mawr feels the change, too, and within a few days begins to make “advances” toward a “long-legged, arched-necked, glossy-maned Texan mare” (130). Lou’s happiness is short-lived, however;

she realizes that while the Texans are different from the English, they are not necessarily any better. Lou thinks that the ranch's cowboys "inwardly ... were self-conscious film heroes" (131). Even the ranch's boss "[existed] ... purely in his imagination of the sort of picture he made to her, the sort of impression he made on her" (131). American life, Lou concludes, is "life enacted in a mirror. Visually, it was wildly vital. But there was nothing behind it" (130). The same "nothing" manifests itself in the love of appearances, in the mirror which shows pretty images, but whose depth is illusory. Thinking that a change of scenery would help her was a mistake. Lou's exhilaration at Texas's sense of place is undercut by her realization that its people suffer the same corruption as those she left behind. In the face of that universal corruption, the geographic sense of place by itself is inadequate. As Lou once saw England as unreal, so does she see America. Lou thinks, "One moved from dream to dream, from phantasm to phantasm" (130), and wonders, "What was real? What under heaven was real?" (131). Lou's retreat has not taken her far enough.

Accordingly, Lou retreats further still, and purchases a small farm high in the mountains between Texas and New Mexico. Lou leaves St. Mawr behind at the ranch; although it was the stallion which first prompted Lou to consciousness, she has outgrown its uses. Lou resolves to withdraw to her small farm, and it is there that the book gives us a final understanding of spirit of place. Lou's esteem for nature's "creative destruction" is modified and expanded by the realization that "man is himself when he is fighting on and on, to overcome the sordidness" of "the lower stages of creation, and win to the next stage" (153). The "sordidness of the lower stages of creation is their resistance to order, a natural principle of chaos that humanity must overcome. In this process, humanity must destroy, but it is destruction in the service of building something. Nature resists this attempt at ordering, "working forever against man's attempt at a higher life, at further created being," in a spirit of "antagonism" (153). Despite Nature's opposition, however, humanity must not lose sight of its goal; when it does, it loses its "inward vision and its cleaner energy" and falls "into a new sort of sordidness" (153). That "new sort of sordidness" is the cultural equivalent of nature's own sordidness, a chaotic state from which higher movement is all but impossible. It is this state into which "the whole world," as Lou saw in her vision of evil, has fallen. As far as people go, it does not matter where Lou goes; all of humanity has lost its bearings, its sense of place, and is "at sea." The only

way out of this state, as Lou had realized in the same vision of evil, is for those individuals who have been fortunate enough to recognize humanity's fallen state to "win from the crude wild nature the victory and the power to make another start" (154). On her small farm, high in the mountains, this is what Lou resolves to do.

By the end of *St. Mawr*, Lou has gained that which she lacked at the book's beginning, a sense of place. Her sense of place flows out to and is symbolized by the mountains around her. The mountains in which she will live represent her solid awareness of her self and her relation to the world. The more distant mountains, whose stark beauty Lawrence evokes, represent the new "start" for which she will strive. Lou has learned to see, she has found her solid ground, and she knows where she is.

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# Watching the Land Watching Her:

Ellen Chesser's Sense of Place in  
Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*

SUSAN PIPERATO

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"The land surround[s]" all of us (275), wherever we are, as the hills of back-country Kentucky surround Ellen Chesser, the heroine of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 1926 novel, *The Time of Man*, who watches her life evolve within the context of a landscape at once "secure and ... placed, all beautiful and near" (28), yet "lying away in all points, never to be measured in all its strength to surround and enclose and obliterate" (275). Our relationship with the land, for Roberts, does not flow one way; it is utterly and essentially mutual. The road may not rise up to meet you, nor the wind keep always at your back. But if you truly know the spirit of a place, and if that spirit accepts you, it will tell you so by giving you tokens. Not everyone receives gifts from the spirit of a place, and even fewer realize they have been so honored. But for Ellen Chesser, who haunts all who are fortunate enough to track down a copy of the *The Time of Man*, Roberts's now out-of-print first novel, the tokens received from the land are multitudinous—and Ellen Chesser always knows exactly what they mean. Each of her tokens is a tool that allows her to transcend what is, essentially, a hard life full of mundanities.

For Ellen Chesser, the tokens presented by the land—whether they be peacock feathers reminding her of her own beauty; wildflowers, seeds, berries and apples recalling her right to be alive, to reap her share of the earth; or scattered stones speaking to her of her place within the continuum of time—signify far more than, as Robert Penn Warren writes, both the "naive wonder and the deeper wonder of selfhood" (xxvii). Instead, as Warren says, "there is a sense of life as ceremony, as ritual even in the common duties, as an enactment that numinously embodies the relation of the self to its setting in nature, in the human community, and in time" (xxvii).

It can be difficult to elucidate sense of place, even for someone who has experienced what Lawrence Durrell describes as a "quiet inner identification" with a landscape (158). Yet sense of place is integral not only to literature but to living, for as Eudora Welty tells us: "From the dawn of man's

imagination, place has enshrined the spirit" (123). The experience of sense of place, then, depends upon a willingness not only to live with a fully open heart and mind within a particular landscape, but to allow oneself to be imbued with a place, to be guided and shaped, perhaps even sent forth by it. "As soon as the least of us stands still," Welty says, "that is the moment something extraordinary is seen to be going on in the world," for "the act of focusing itself has beauty and meaning" (123). It is only by "sit[ting] quite still," as Durrell writes, "in the landscape diviner's pose" that we can engage with the true spirit of a place, discovering ourselves through its "enduring faculty of self-expression" (158). In his instructions for gaining insight into landscape and character, Durrell reveals the conceptual core of sense of place, and what makes a novel such as *The Time of Man* a quintessential literary example of it:

You do not need a sixth sense for it. It is there if you just close your eyes and breathe softly ... you will hear the whispered message, for all landscapes ask the same question in the same whisper, "I am watching you—are you watching yourself in me?" (158)

The question that landscapes whisper to us all is one that Elizabeth Madox Roberts, as well as Ellen Chesser, clearly heard and answered with a quiet but emphatic "yes."

Roberts saw *The Time of Man* in terms of soil to be tilled, tended and harvested. Thinking of her prose as fertile ground and practicing what one critic calls a kind of "soil mysticism" (Stoneback *HT* 233) helped Roberts not only to make the Kentucky backcountry real, but to transfer her own sense of place to the character of Ellen Chesser. An early note on the novel reads:

The most that I care to do is to present the sweet soil, the dirt of the ground, black ground, bitter and full of odor, full of worms, full of decay which is change, not evil—and the other one, white sun, light, these two forever mingled and mystically braided together in life—all life—which is Ellen. (Slavick 759)

*The Time of Man* begins on the road, thus establishing it as an epic tale. "We are on our way a-travelen," Ellen's tenant-farming father declares to the farmer whose land their wagon happens to break down on, "We are a-looken for a good place to settle down" (5). But this epic journey is a distinctly spiritual one, covering little distance but spiraling first outward in concentric circles containing, as one critic writes, "the hearth ... the community ... the

land ... and finally the enveloping sense of the home-place” (Stoneback 245), then turning inward toward Ellen’s crucial realization that, as Roberts believed, “life is from within” (Warren xxiii). Ellen’s longing for a home, for a place within the landscape from which her being and her life can radiate outward, finds expression early on in her friendship with the gypsy woman Tessie, whose wagon her tenant-farming parents are following. It is Tessie who provides Ellen with a sense of place, and of selfhood, based on the idea of home, of finding at last within “a place vaguely set among trees, the consummation of some deeply-lying dream” (315):

... she would be by Tessie’s fire hearing Tessie talk about a house. Tessie was always wanting a house, a house with vines up on the chimney, a brick house with a gallery, a stone house with a fountain, a little brown house with white on the windows and doors, a house by the seaside, a house on a street. Tessie was always talking. “And I would have, if I could, a slated roof, red up there in the sun ... Me a-comen down in the morning dew with a flower basket on my arm. Me a-cooken breakfast and a-setten out the pretties ... I’d have a room in my house for Ellen ...” (30-31)

In the novel’s first section, described by Roberts in her working notes as a “Genesis” in which Ellen Chesser “comes into the land” (Warren xxv), Ellen is introduced as a fourteen-year-old girl, whose family’s plans to move on to a better place fall by the wayside with their broken wagon. While her father negotiates a job with the local farmer (a scheme which Ellen hopes will pay for the wagon’s repairs, enabling them to catch up with Tessie), Ellen waits in the wagon in the rain, responding to her mother’s complaints with her dream of attaining her own home-place:

Ellen wrote her name in the air with her finger, Ellen Chesser, leaning forward and writing on the horizontal plane. Beside her in the wagon her mother huddled under an old shawl to keep herself from the damp, complaining, “We ought to be a-goen on.”

“If I had all the money there is in the world,” Ellen said, slowly, “I’d go along in a big red wagon and I wouldn’t care if it taken twenty horses to pull it along. Such a wagon as would never break down.” She wrote her name again in the horizontal of the air. (9)

Wherever the Chesser family was headed when the wagon failed does not matter. Survival is their way of life and is to become Ellen’s art. She will spend her life pursuing a house with no leaks and good land, placed in “some better country” (396). Some places provide luck; others meager resources

and spiteful people. But Ellen accepts each place as home. At first she sits tight, writing her name in the air; but later on, having come to understand her connection to the land and its people, she repeatedly declares herself alive and fully present within the moment. "I'm Ellen Chesser and I'm a-liven," she calls out to a gravestone (102); "I'm Ellen Chesser," she declares in the wake of a lost lover, "And I'm here, in myself" (Stoneback 248). She goes on creating herself and the story of her life according to the wondering and wandering she does within the scope of each new tenant-farming home-place. Clothed from one year to the next in one, maybe two, thin, faded, sometimes louse-ridden dresses, Ellen never even longs to escape poverty. Even with all the money in the world she would not stop her journeying to the home-place of her dreams.

Having established Ellen at the start of her journey, Roberts next sows the seeds of turmoil within her as her notes indicate: "But the land rejects her. She remembers Eden (Tessie)" (Warren xxv). Ellen screams at her parents that she must go find Tessie, whose talents for shining forth, telling stories over a campfire, and dancing her way along a clothesline, represent for Ellen both "the freedom of the road" and "the desire for a home, a certain and enduring place" (Stoneback 238). Ellen comes to embody Tessie's desire for home as well as her art for living; she may curse the new land for rejecting her, just as the men whose property lines she trespasses curse her, but Ellen never shuts herself off from the land or refuses to be guided by it. Only motion, down a road, over the hills, or in the whirl of a dance, takes Ellen home, giving her the sense she had once, traveling through Tennessee, where she saw "a little house ... off in bushes and trees, a lamp a-shinen out one the windows, after sundown" (98). Wandering all day outdoors, trying to escape her parents and the sorrow of losing Tessie, Ellen draws into herself the land's strength. Over time she develops

a rich sense of the land, all the land about, as filled with an ever-increasing people, gathering into her knowledge incessantly. People were coming into the land, filling the country all about, and her life ran more quickly, leaping from day to day, as her knowledge spread beyond the farm ... spread even farther and caught at the farms in the glen where names and faces were now known a little. (108)

The sense Ellen attains of each new farming place allows her sense of who she is to well within her like a spring. Gradually her father, an archetypal Celtic Green Man, signifying irrepresible life, entrusts her with his sacred knowledge of the land:

“No plow iron ever cut this-here hill afore, not in the whole time of man,” Henry said.

“The time of man,” as a saying, fell over and over in Ellen’s mind. The strange men that lived here before our men, a strange race doing things in strange ways, and other men before them, and before again ... Wondering and wondering, she laid stones on her altar.

“Pappy, where do rocks come from?”

“Why, don’t you know? Rocks grow.”

“I never see any grow. I never see one a-grownen.”

“I never see one a-grownen neither, but they grow all the same. You pick up all the rocks offen this-here hill and in a year there’s as many out again ...”

“I can’t seem to think it! Rocks a-grownen now! They don’t seem alive. They seem dead-like. Maybe they’ve got another kind of way to be alive.”  
(87)

The last section of *The Time of Man*, described by Roberts as “flowering out of stone” (Warren xxv), begins with Ellen’s marriage to Jasper Kent, another Green Man. Now Ellen is as autochthonous, as much an earth deity as her two men, father and husband: “Her body and mind were of the earth, clodded with the clods; the strength of her arms and her back and her thighs rose out of the soil” (250). On the eve of her spring wedding to Jasper, in a reenactment of a-Maying-in, the Celtic fertility rite in which couples made love outdoors on May 1st to invoke fertility, Ellen and Jasper sleep together on the dolomite cliffs wrapped in Ellen’s cloak, talking of their future. Ellen speaks home while Jasper pledges to find “rich soil, all cleared, land worth a man’s sweat. And all my work will be for you all day” (304). He praises her: “The moon makes your eyes big and deep and your mouth, it’s sweet like honey drops” (304). Neither follows the other in conversation, but their talk forms a shape in the reader’s mind like a prayer or a dream, merging the grit of their life with hope and desire until they themselves merge. Sinking “slowly down to the stone and to the leaves lying upon the stone,” Ellen dreams that “Jasper was in her own body and in her mind, was but more of herself” (305) as the “great bulk of the rock arose to take her. Dolomite stones shut over her and she was folded deeply into the inner being of the rock and she was strong with a strength to hold up mountains” (305). Despite the hardships to come, both in marriage and in barren land, Ellen endures and blossoms, becoming, like Tessie, “a bright shiny woman” (378).

But back before marrying Jasper, while walking her heifer from one rented farm to the new one where she will meet and court him, Ellen discovers her center within the “rugged and brush-grown ... sparsely inhabited but little farmed” land (237), among the “stony rises and bluffs of torn stones” (237),

St. Lucy's monastery, with its octagonal tower made from the stones of the land on which it stands:

Here and there were stony rises and bluffs of torn stones, and ... a gray tower appeared, rising out of the hills ... The tower was of stone like the stone of the hills, an eight-sided tower with eight high indentures in its crown topped by eight stone crosses. The tower would be St. Lucy, for "Beyond St. Lucy" had been the legend by which she had walked all day through the roads and lanes. She would live, she reflected, somewhere down within that rugged stretch of land. She would sink down into the land, turning through the hills as the road went; she would go into the place. (237)

St. Lucy's octagonal form, symbolizing universality and the manifestation of the feminine, becomes Ellen's symbol. Like St. Lucy, she stands at the heart of the landscape of her family's life. "Who does the cooking," her children make a game of asking: "Mammy does!" It is to Ellen that each child tells his or her dreams, each reflecting an aspect of herself: Hen longs to farm, Nannie yearns to understand the universe, Joe wishes for an easy life, Dick thirsts for knowledge, and Melissey hopes never to grow old, and Chick, who dies a sickly baby, thrives nonetheless on touch and light and laughter.

Having drawn strength from the rocks and stones she has wondered about "a-growen," built into altars, cleared from her gardens, walked barefoot over, slept on, and pledged herself to her husband on, Ellen stands out among her kind as St. Lucy rises above the landscape. The tower's eight white crosses correspond to the eight members of Ellen's family, her own crowning glory. Ellen is so well sustained by the land's spirit that even after suffering the Chick's death and Jasper's infidelity, she herself remains a source of spirit, an Eve and an earth goddess, praised by Luke Wimble, the fruit tree peddler, as belonging to and springing from the land:

You're a bright shiny woman, Ellen Kent ... The apple tree, it blooms with a little pink in the white and the peach is all pink. The dogwood is like a star in the forest and the redbud is a sunset against a hillside. Then there's honey and that's the fruit of the bee, the flower of the bee-gum, you might say, and there's kinds of that, bee honey and ant honey, did you ever hear it said? ... Windflowers are little white sheep on a mountain pasture, and all the time you're as shiny as a dogwood tree in spring, Ellen Kent ... You're worth all the balance and to spare ... Today I says to myself while I dug the holes for the Sharons and the Elbertas in Arland Booker's orchard, I says, "She's got the honey of life in her heart." (380-381)

Like St. Lucy's tower, Ellen rises up, sudden, implacable and invincible, at

the novel's end to stop the "many great hooded shapes, men" (390) who whip Jasper over a barn he did not burn. She breaks through the hooded men's circle, shaming them, in an inversion of Mary Magdalene's appearance before Christ. But the stones sensed within this scene are associated with Ellen and the strength she has drawn from the land, for no one would dare cast any at her. She curses the men "with a blasting prediction that they would never forget this night, that they would remember it in dying, and she called out their names" (391). In the dead of night she nurses Jasper and loads the family into the wagon, traveling under the stars toward "Some better country. Our own place maybe. Our trees in the orchard. Our own land sometime. Our place to keep" (396). Having given herself up to the land, and allowing herself to have been sprung from it, Ellen has come full circle.

Roberts, like Ellen Chesser, watched the landscape, both from within it and from a distance, to see herself reflected in it. But what she chose to use from that experience for her art and how she chose to present the world she watched are what make her novel more than simply a poetic evocation of location. From Sherwood Anderson, who claimed to stand "humble before it" (Stoneback 226), to Ford Madox Ford, who believed that with Roberts "the whole complexion of ... [southern] literature changed—the local became universal" (Simpson 751), to William Faulkner, to Robert Penn Warren, who wrote, during a 1963 revival of her work, that "in 1930 it was impossible to discuss American fiction without reference" to Roberts (Warren xxi), each reader of *The Time of Man* has been overcome by it, not leastwise due to Roberts's tremendous ability to transcend her own material, to create a sense of place with such emotional and spiritual power that her work sweeps far beyond regionalism into art by causing to "shimmer," within her own little corner of the world, "the entire universe, the burden of human experience, and the tremulous web of Nature" (Stoneback HP ix). In the 1950s critic Donald Adams described *The Time of Man* as "both indigenous and universal, and its insights are both original and profound ... it is one of those books, like *Moby Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter*, which stand alone" (Stoneback HT 228).

There is a great need for *The Time of Man* to be back in print, and not only for its literary value; it is rich with material to satisfy scholars of women's studies, mythology, and folklore. One shudders to think of the jacket blurb that might be contrived for a reissue of *The Time of Man* into the popular market—perhaps promoting it as a spiritual self-help volume, as a lesson

in reintegrating wonder into our lives and letting every moment shine. But how many of us care where we are, let alone look to see ourselves reflected in the places that surround us? What we urgently need in this age of placelessness is to read and reread *The Time of Man*, with its moving celebration of what Stoneback calls “... that numinous sense of place to which some of us still attach the highest value, near the end of a century that has all but abandoned such knowledge” (Stoneback *HP* vii-viii). And in finding and honoring sense of place as the basis for knowing who we are, we need to reclaim *The Time of Man* as part of our literary heritage because it is, quite clearly, one of the very finest and yet most neglected masterpieces of the twentieth century.

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# “But If You Have Had It You Know:”

## Talking Around Hemingway’s (Sixth) Sense of Place

DAVID R. GOODMAN

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Since the prominent mythos surrounding Hemingway perpetuates the image of a macho man traveling the world in search of adventure, it seems unlikely his fiction could achieve a sense of place in traditional terms. Hemingway has no Faulknerian postage stamp of land through the particulars of which to explore the universal. Instead, he has the extensive and varied landscapes of France, Africa, Spain, Cuba, Italy, and America. How can his writing achieve the profound rootedness crucial to sense of place when his expatriatism and his traveling suggest such intense deracination? Recently re-reading two of his posthumously published short stories, “A Train Trip” and “The Porter,” I stumbled upon an unlikely answer. Both stories contain grammatical ambiguities through which Hemingway blends the past and the present, mixes the physical and the emotional, and thus invokes the reader’s complicity in place composition.

Young Jimmy Crane is the protagonist in both stories. He and his father pack up their cabin in Michigan and board a train that will eventually pass along the Hudson River from Albany into New York City. Early in the trip Jimmy narrates while looking from the train:

I felt funny with so much new country. I suppose it really looked just the same as the country where we lived but it did not feel the same. I suppose every patch of hardwood with the leaves turning looks alike but when you see a beech woods from the train it does not make you happy; it only makes you want the woods where you live. But I did not know that then. I thought it would all be like where we lived only more of it and that it would be just the same and give you the same feeling, but it didn’t. We did not have anything to do with it. (561)

You will notice that the word “it” is being used in two ways in this passage, as a pronoun and as an expletive. The pronominal use refers to an antecedent, that which has come before, and the expletive use postpones the meaning

until we read further and the sentence supplies one. “Expletive” comes from the Latin *explere*, meaning “to fill out,” and that is what we do as readers. The first “it” is pronominal and clearly refers to the noun “country” in the preceding sentence: “I felt funny with so much new country. I suppose it really looked just the same as the country where we lived. . .” (561). The second, however, is more tricky; for while this “it,” like the first, refers backward to the new country, it also anticipates the different feeling Jimmy has: “. . .but it did not feel the same” (561). Similarly, the third “it” could refer to either the beech woods or the feeling it gives Jimmy or both. Six subsequent uses of “it” only intensify the ambiguity. Is Jimmy referring to the woods or to the seeing of the woods or to the feeling he gets seeing the woods? Hemingway begins by linking the pronominal “it” exclusively with landscape and the expletive “it” exclusively with feeling, but quickly breaks this pattern. His usage of nine “its” in seven sentences, with each referring to either one of three types of landscape or one of two qualities of feeling, creates a collage of experience in which shifting antecedents and what we might call “postcedents” slip by smoothly in Jimmy’s stream of consciousness. It becomes difficult to assign the pronominal “it” a specific antecedent or the expletive “it” a specific meaning as possible interpretations rapidly accumulate.

Jimmy compares the new country to the country he knows, hoping to alleviate that “funny” feeling that comes with new and unfamiliar places. “We did not have anything to do with it,” Jimmy says, acknowledging that the price of comfort in a place is an investment of self in that place. Jimmy wards off the emptiness of dislocation and disconnection in the new land he sees from the train by remembering his home by the lake and the good feeling it gives him.

The process Jimmy goes through is analogous to our process of first reading the text. Unfamiliar with the territory, we rely on our own antecedent experiences in order to make sense of, “to fill out” like an expletive, what we see before us. Our associations with, for example, the woods and train rides are memories that blend with our immediate estimation of the context and style in which Hemingway is using them. As Jimmy calls on the past for comfort in the present, so we rely on our pasts to find a measure of connection to the story as we read. And it is a connection Hemingway strives for actively through the use of this grammatical strategy. Of course, because of its subtlety, we will recognize it only subliminally. But this is just the level at which Hemingway wants to engage us. Despite our certainty about whether

an “it” is a pronoun or an expletive, the assignation of one definite antecedent or the anticipation of a single meaning is impossible. Hence we negotiate between the two types of “its,” unaware that we are making sense of the passage almost intuitively, getting its drift without having to resolve the ambiguity.

However, the ambiguity only amounts to a simple layering of meaning. The “it” stands for something physical and something emotional simultaneously. Yet, however simple the ambiguity is, the effect is quite complex, as Hemingway appeals to and then transcends the five senses to create a place in fiction. Consider an earlier passage in “A Train Trip” in which Jimmy, preparing to leave the house in Michigan, surveys the kitchen in order to “say goodbye”:

There were two kitchen tables, one that we ate on and one we did dishes on. They were both covered with oilcloth. There was a tin bucket for carrying lake water to fill the reservoir and a granite[-ware] bucket for well water. There was a roller towel on the pantry door and dish towels on a rack over the stove. The broom was in the corner. The wood box was half full and all the pans were hanging against the wall.

I looked all around the kitchen to remember it and I was awfully fond of it.

“Well,” said my father. “Do you think you’ll remember it?”

“I think so.”

“And what will you remember?”

“All the fun we’ve had.” (558)

Note the pronominal uses of “it” in the first line after the paragraph: “I looked all around the kitchen to remember it and I was awfully fond of it” (558); both refer to “kitchen,” as does the father’s use of the word in the next line. But then consider Jimmy’s answer to his father’s question, “And what will you remember?” Jimmy shifts the meaning of “it” as his memory of the kitchen, first an inventory of physical features, merges with the emotional experience of communion with his father: “All the fun we’ve had” (558). To perceive the emotional dimension of place implied here but never elaborated, we need an intuitive sense, a sixth sense. The grammatical subtleties arouse something just beneath our consciousness, but it is not pronounced enough to hinder our reading. Further, the style and rhythm of Jimmy’s recollection cloaks such minute inconsistencies. We are far too busy forming our impressions of Jimmy’s experience to be concerned with “its,” and our connection to the text, especially concerning the composition of places, remains primarily emotional. Hence our complicity is invoked at the most

fundamental level. It is the sixth and most vital sense necessary to the study of sense of place. The sight, sound, smell, taste and touch are all important, but the reader's emotional participation with the narrative, here induced by Hemingway's alchemy, is indispensable to the transmission of place experiences in literature.

Because the events of both stories are narrated recollectively, the importance of what Jimmy does remember is heightened. The associative passages become our closest link to the experience; they are Jimmy's sublimation of the inexplicable ratio of physical and emotional variables that not only makes a place remain with us, but allows us to share it with others. It is the stream of consciousness style that makes such transmission most effective, and Hemingway often employs it when landscapes or other places are described at length. Consider Jimmy's observations at the end of "The Porter":

It was very beautiful coming along the Hudson but it was the sort of thing I did not know about and it made me wish we were back at the lake. It gave me the same feeling that the engravings in the book did and the feeling was confused with the room where I always looked at the book and it being someone else's house and before dinner and wet trees after the rain and the time in the north when the fall is over and it is wet and cold and the birds are gone and the woods are no more fun to walk in and it rains and you want to stay inside with a fire. I do not suppose I thought of all those things because I have never thought much and never in words but it was a feeling of all those things that the country along the Hudson River gave me. (578)

Grammatically speaking, Hemingway equates the feeling Jimmy gets along the Hudson not with the feeling the room in Michigan gives him, but with the physical room itself: "The feeling was confused with the room . . ." (578). Yet this is "confused" in a positive sense, from the Latin *confusus*, meaning "to pour together." An inventory of physical details is "confused" with an intersection of intuitive associations. We must treat the room like the expletive "it," a place-holder which Jimmy fills out with memories. He does not think of those things that fill out the place in his memory as he looks from the train; through his intuitive sense-making, he feels them. Similarly, we are not meant to contemplate grammatical anomalies but to experience their impact as we supply meanings for what is on the page. That impact, as Jimmy suggests, is a thinking that takes place not in words but in feelings. Only through recollective narration do the room's sense-of-place evocations

get listed, with phrases about time, temperature, and weather arranged as rough sensory approximations of precise feelings. These feelings, recalled via Jimmy's memory of the room in Michigan, are used to alleviate the unfamiliarity of the emotions evoked by the Hudson landscape. Thus Hemingway inextricably binds place and feeling. The subtlety of his grammatical ambiguity forces us to mimic Jimmy's shifting from place to feeling, from present to past, as we interpret the writing with our senses and our intuition. And so while the complex grammatical architecture may not be obvious, its purpose is abundantly clear: to move us ineluctably towards the recognition of complicity, Hemingway's sixth sense of place.

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# Blues Made and Used Right on the Spot:

Sense of Place in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

JENNIFER BENTON

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Zora Neale Hurston spent a lifetime observing folkways and the ways of folks; as a trained anthropologist, she recognized the value of recording the detail that lends itself to the authentic documentation of place, people, and events. While her peers at Barnard, where she studied anthropology from 1925 to 1927, looked to Africa and Europe for the foundation of their observations, Hurston spent the decade between 1927 and 1937 studying the backroads and byways of rural Florida: “I want to collect [folklore] like an old broom,” she declared in a letter to her mentor, anthropologist Franz Boas. Her desire to record and preserve African-American folklore through first hand observation formed the basis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, her 1937 novel about life in small town rural Florida.

In 1934, she wrote to the critic Carl Van Vechten:

The major problem in my field as I see it is the collection of Negro folk material in as thorough a manner as possible, as soon as possible. In order for the collection to [be] exhaustive, it must be done by individuals feeling the materials as well as seeing it objectively. In order to feel it and appreciate the nuances one must be of the group. (Manning 62)

What little fieldwork had been done until that point came from outside observers who, despite the best of intentions, were not in the position of truly participating in black, small town life, whereas Hurston, a member of the community, was intimately qualified to “feel the material” on a personal level while her scientific training enabled her to evaluate it objectively. Hurston, who was born in Eatonville, Florida, one of the few all black towns in existence in America, used her scientific training, her “spy-glass of anthropology” (Akward 79), to lend objectivity to the memories of her childhood and her fieldwork.

Hurston knew intimately the people about whom she wrote, and she chose to celebrate them as individuals; unlike many of the Harlem Renaissance writers who produced protest novels with heavily driven political

agendas, Hurston focused on the life of the individual and the significance of that life. Richard Wright, the leading black author of the 1940s, did considerable damage to Hurston's reputation as a novelist when he slammed *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for having "no theme, no message, no thought." He publicly accused Hurston of catering "to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy ... [by] exploit[ing] the phase of Negro life which is 'quaint'" (Gates and Appiah 17). Wright mistakenly identified Hurston's novel, as have many critics since, both black and white, as belonging to that brand of "picnic regionalism," which Donald Davidson, in *The Attack on Leviathan*, defines as writing "which is generally nothing more than a simplified and condescending urban idea of regional culture" (3). Wright, in his zeal to expose the very real racial divide in America, missed the delicate beauty of a novel that sets aside issues of race and instead celebrates the love between two migrant workers on the Florida muck.

In 1928, two months after she left Barnard, Hurston landed in Polk county, Florida, where "de water taste lak cherry wine" (Hemenway 111). A place filled with people whom Hurston described as "singing, laughing, cursing, boasting of last night's love, and looking forward to the darkness again. They do not say embrace when they mean they slept with a woman" (Wall 139). Here, she would demonstrate that "the greatest cultural wealth of the continent" existed in the black South (Hemenway 113).

Hurston tirelessly explored the juke joints of the Everglades Cypress Lumber Company and the turpentine camps near Longman, Florida. Her biographer, Richard Hemenway, describes the camps as

natural repositories of folk tradition—[containing] isolated pockets of laborers, their families, and their camp followers .... The Longman camp included family men, fugitive murderers, honest workers, knife-wielding good-time girls, Christian mothers, hard-living gamblers and jack-leg preachers. (111)

With notebook in hand, Hurston wandered into this charged atmosphere; in the now legendary story of her initiation into the camp she claims that when she appeared she created suspicion among the residents and was called on to "prove" herself. Maintaining that she was a bootlegger's girlfriend on the run, she stood up on a piano and traded versions of "John Henry" with several of the locals. Apparently her repertoire was impressive enough that they put aside their suspicions, and Hurston gained admission into the life of the camp where she spent the next two months collecting material and

befriending “Big Sweet, ‘the job’s fiercest woman’” (Hemenway 111). The result, Hemenway asserts, “[was] the most concentrated collecting of her career, from folk tales to sayings to songs to jokes” (111). She witnessed the unending debates that “never ended because there was no end to reach. It was a contest in hyperbole and it carried on for no other reason” (59). Hurston captured this verbal energy and brought it to pulsating life in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Place has no formal definition; indeed, in an attempt to define regionalism, Robert Penn Warren offered suggestions of what it is not. His prohibitions include a warning against employing “quaintness, local color, and folklore,” which, he maintains, “when separated from a functional idea are merely a titillation of the reader’s sentimentality or snobbishness” (148). How then can we reconcile Hurston’s use of local tales and folklore, which provide her novel with a sense of tangibility, of immediacy, with Warren’s interdiction against it? Perhaps the answer lies in the fine balance that she strikes between Warren’s prohibition and Allen Tate’s assertion that “no literature can be mature without regional consciousness . . . without locality” (283). I would argue that Hurston’s exploration of Polk County, of the turpentine camps, the sawmills, the farms, and the lives of the migrant workers, provides a sense of place as real and as tangible as that of any novelist in the Southern Renaissance canon: by creating characters whose existence depends on both the functional idea of folklore and a regional consciousness based on locality, she delivers a novel that successfully walks that mighty fine line between exploitation and preservation.

The novel follows Janie Crawford through two disastrous marriages to older men who prize her for her beauty, at first, and then her ability to work. In response to her growing loneliness, she turns deeply inward, searching for meaning in a life that offers her no solace and it is only after the death of her second husband that she is able to begin to come to terms with the possibilities of freedom; it is at this juncture, when Janie is widowed, that Tea Cake appears. A much younger man who teaches her to play checkers, takes her fishing in the middle of the night, and escorts her to church picnics, much to the chagrin of her neighbors, he offers her a chance at life that she never knew existed. On the surface Tea Cake seems to be looking for an opportunity, like the others who value Janie for her money, her store, her beauty and her availability; however, it soon becomes clear that Tea Cake is looking for a playmate, a woman who will live life with him on his terms, and it is to this

invitation that Janie responds. Shut up too long behind a store counter with a man who had forgotten how to love her properly, Janie embraces Tea Cake, and together they embark on an adventure in the Florida Everglades that will take her “tuh de horizon and back and ... [afterward she] kin set ... in [her] house and live by comparison” (182). It is with and through Tea Cake that Janie Crawford finds her sense of place—it lingers somewhere between her love for him and the journey that they share together in the wild freedom of the Florida muck.

Tea Cake first describes the muck as “down in de Everglades round Clewiston and Bell Glade where dey raise all that cane and string beans and tomatuhs. Folks don’t do nothin’ down there but make money and fun and foolishness” (122). The muck, through Tea Cake’s description, becomes larger than life. When they arrive at the camp, everything “to Janie’s strange eyes ... in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Ground so rich that everything went wild .... People wild too” (123). Janie and Tea Cake go to the Everglades as migrant workers during the planting and picking season and it is with an eye on this influx that Hurston writes an aching description of the rag-tag army of humanity, “the hordes of workers [that] poured in” to work the fields:

Day by day now, the hordes of workers poured in. Some came limping in with their shoes and sore feet from walking. It’s hard trying to follow your shoe instead of your shoe following you. They came in wagons from way up in Georgia and they came in truck loads from east, west, north, and south. Permanent transients with no attachments and tired looking men with their families and dogs in flivvers. All night, all day, hurrying in to pick beans. Skillets, beds, patched up spare inner tubes all hanging and dangling from ancient cars on the outside and hopeful humanity, herded and hovered on the inside, chugging on the muck. People ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor. (125)

Hurston captures the moment of seasonal migration into the camps and juxtaposes the desperation and poverty against the frenetic energy of the immensely rich cultural night-life that grew up around the camps:

All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, signing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants. (125)

Articulating that crucial moment between the daily struggle for a hard-won existence and the cultural celebration of people who work and play on the muck, Hurston creates a tribute to the laborers of the land while simultaneously providing Janie and Tea Cake with a modern Eden—a place free from the artificial constraints of town life where the worth of a human being is based solely on his or her ability to work the land.

Time on the muck reflects the agrarian ideal, and as in many Southern Renaissance novels, it takes on a pace that reflects the old way of life: planting and picking are done by hand, according to the season and the sun. Comparing her life in Eatonville where “clerkin’ . . . waz hard” Janie observes, “heah,” on the muck “we ain’t got nothin’ tuh do but our work and come home and love” (127). She and Tea Cake achieve an idyllic domesticity living poor, working hard, and taking part in the life going on around them: “outside of the two jooks, everything on that job went on around those two” (127). It is on the muck, in the rich black soil, that Janie and Tea Cake “regain something as close to the agrarian ideal as a modern Southern writer could imagine, a community in which all members have a well-defined role and are fundamentally at harmony with the luxuriant world surrounding them” (Manning 66). It is through Tea Cake, on the richness of the muck, that Janie experiences a feeling of contentment and confidence that is the culmination of her pubescent daydreams under the blooming pear tree and her symbolic entrance onto the porch of life where she discovers her voice, where she could “listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to and she got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest” (128).

Their first season in the Everglades ends as simply as it began with people going away “like they had come—in droves,” but Tea Cake and Janie “decide to stay since they wanted to make another season on the muck” (133). The summer passes quietly with Janie seeing “people and things she hadn’t noticed during the season” while she and Tea Cake listen to the “compelling rhythms of the . . . drummers” (133). It is during the quiet of the summer, in the peaceful fecundity of the land, that Janie’s love for Tea Cake and her sense of personal identity merge: Tea Cake, she confides, “kin take most any lil thing and make summertime out of it . . . Then we lives offa dat happiness he [make] till some mo’ happiness come along” (135). It is Tea Cake’s ability to make a season of fruition out of small things that gives rise to Janie’s fulfillment: her newly found sense of self unites with sense of place on the land to

create an emotional climax—without one the other ceases to exist because it is on the muck that she finds emotional harmony for the first time in her life. As Eudora Welty tells us in her celebrated essay, “Place in Fiction”:

Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place. Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else. (122)

It is in the wild freedom of the Florida Everglades that the feelings between Janie and Tea Cake take root and begin to blossom; without the love between them, the richness of the land is diminished and without the fertility of the land, the intensity of their relationship is attenuated.

The second season begins when “sun was cooler and the crowds came pouring onto the muck again” (139). During the season, Tea Cake and Janie become more attuned to the spirit of the life around them, holding dances behind their house with the “Saws” (146) and working in the fields. A storm, however, destroys the dike, forcing an exodus from the Eden of the muck, and they seek refuge in the “dirty, slouchy place” (160) of Palm Beach; once they leave the haven of the Everglades and go out into the hostile world, the idyllic nature of their relationship is shattered since the peaceful fragility of their existence is tied to the *deus loci*, the spirit of the place. “The *deus loci* is a pastoral god,” writes one critic:

Or more precisely, he an earth god, a hearth god who does not emigrate to the city, who, like some local wines, does not travel well, who seems not to survive in the modern, urban, industrial world. (Stoneback 116)

They quickly retreat from the chaos of Palm Beach where Tea Cake “feels lak uh motherless chile” (164), and by the next morning they are back on the peaceful quiet of the muck. During their journey to the city, in flight from the flood, Tea Cake, while attempting to save Janie from a wild dog, is bitten and soon after their return to the muck goes insane from rabies.

It is with Tea Cake’s death that the muck ceases to have meaning for Janie, as “the muck meant Tea Cake and Tea Cake wasn’t there. So it was just a great expanse of black mud” (182). The richness of the land and the existence of Tea Cake are inexorably linked in Janie’s mind and heart; it is his presence on the muck that gives the land meaning as the spirit of their relationship is mirrored in the fertility and community, the *deus loci*, of the

land. Appropriately, the only thing she takes away from their house is a packet of seed that she “meant to plant . . . in remembrance” (182). If Tea Cake symbolizes the richness of the land for her, then planting the seed will symbolize Tea Cake as “he was always planting things” (182), and with every season of growth he will remain alive in more than her memory.

Edgar E. MacDonald, in *The History of Southern Literature*, discusses Hurston’s achievement as a novelist:

Hurston’s achievement is primarily in her use of language and voice, her authentic description of black folkways and oral traditions. With naturalness, yet precision, she tapped the richness of community and created fictional folk whose spirit, humor, style, and speech expressed the vitality of a Southern black heritage for literary works. (Rubin 307)

MacDonald is correct; however, Hurston does something far more complex than simply use language and voice to record a way of life: in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* she creates a sense of place as real and as vivid as any in modern literature. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston uses the cultural experience of a lifetime to achieve a sense of place that remains undiminished; it is Hurston’s acutely sensitive documentation of the spirit of love and life on the muck that earns her a place in the canon of the Southern Renaissance. Hurston enables her readers to understand and feel the breathtaking significance of Tea Cake and Janie—two poor migrant workers on the Florida muck.

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# Decomposition of Place in the “Proteus” Chapter of *Ulysses*

TERRY CONAWAY

---

Who will go drive with Fergus now,  
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,  
And dance upon the level shore?  
Young man, lift up your russet brow,  
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,  
And brood on hopes and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood  
Upon love's bitter mystery;  
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,  
And rules the shadow of the wood,  
And the white breast of the dim sea  
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

—*William Butler Yeats*

From the early myths of Poseidon to poems such as those of Yeats, the ocean has symbolized many conflicting qualities, ranging from unpredictable malevolence to nurturing protection. The shore itself constantly suffers as the area of negotiation between the land and the water. When surrounding an island, the sea seems to offer tranquil isolation and protection, yet the inhabitants often feel both trapped and vulnerable to invaders from other shores.

This paradox is well illustrated by Ireland, which is surrounded by the sea, with the St. George Channel and Irish Sea, to the east, separating the island from England and Scotland. Historically, however, the sea has also provided an accessible route for attack— by Vikings, by Scots, and, most disastrously, by the English. Control of Ireland by England, and the oppressive measures employed to maintain dominance, have produced a centuries-old atmosphere of grim resentment and paralyzing apathy. In the nineteenth century, English anti-industrial policies were largely responsible for the devastation of the Potato Famine, when over a million people died, and created a bleak and stagnant economy with opportunity for little more than mere subsis-

tence. By 1900, as a result of emigration and of death from starvation and illness, the population of Ireland was reduced by nearly half. In 1904, one young Irish emigrant was James Joyce.

Perhaps the intensity of the critical feelings which led Joyce to leave Ireland, and to live the rest of his life in self-imposed exile, sharpened his sensitivity to the specific details of his home country. All the action of Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*, takes place on June 16, 1904, in or near Dublin, the quintessential Irish harbor city, divided by the River Liffey, which flows into "our mighty mother" (3.30-1), the sea. Although *Ulysses* contains parallels to the *Odyssey* epic, as well as allusions to theology and to much of Western literature, the novel is firmly and decidedly rooted in a very particular place.

The third chapter, "Proteus," explores the mind of a young man, Stephen Dædalus. As he observes specific features of the debris and people on the beach, Stephen's thoughts cycle through increasingly abstract and philosophical realms, yet always return to the physical present. The evaluation of Stephen's observations as he walks on Sandymount flats near high tide reveals an identity of protean complexity but one that is distinctly Irish.

In Greek mythology, Proteus, son of Poseidon, is a sea-god whose magical attribute is his ability to change his shape. To anyone who manages to hold on to him, whether he changes into water, beasts, or fire, he must tell the truth. In the Proteus chapter of *Ulysses*, the wrestling contest seems to take place within Stephen; his fragile sense of himself as an individual is pitted against the constraints of country, religion and parents. He battles his own ever-changing thoughts as they are affected by the tidal flats and by the sea's "nearing tide" (3.3) itself. Past and present, actual and imagined influences of the sea transform Stephen's thoughts, but the primary focus for his attention is the area between the land and the sea. The young man is profoundly affected by the images which represent the action of the sea upon the things of the land, as he wrestles with all the outer influences which have affected his life.

This Irish beach, with which he is intimately familiar, provides the field of combat upon which Stephen struggles against his conflicting senses of duty and loyalty, his guilts and fears. The debris and itinerants of the shoreline trigger his thoughts and represent all things in flux, rolled over by unseen gods, scoured by the wind, and pulled by contradictory forces. The edge of the sea is in nearly continuous motion, and the primary motifs of Stephen's thoughts reveal themselves through his perception of the beach as

a place of corruption and stagnation, of invitations to suicide, and of death. That he also discerns some positive signs of life, the possibility for acts of personal will, demonstrates the essential mutability of the exchange between sea and land. If Stephen can hold on throughout the self-transformation of his own ebbing and swirling dark thoughts, he may detect some possibility for life and light; he may discover his own truth.

To an optimistic mind, first thoughts of the ocean may bring up a crisp, salt-tinged breeze, but any actual approach to the shore is more likely to include the fetid smells of liquid marsh mud, of damp organic matter, particularly that of drying rotted fish. In the late morning, Stephen Dædalus walks along the high tide line of the Sandymount strand, at the mouth of the Liffey, where the river joins the sea. Stephen's mind is awash in memories and mental associations as the sands and rocks are lapped by the incoming tide. Stephen's unusually keen mind, given a classical education by Jesuit priests and fed additional material by his curiosity, provides a crowded labyrinth of possible meaning for all he sees, feels and hears on the beach.

Stephen pays attention to the specific debris, people and characteristics of the place, "thought through my eyes. Signatures of all I am here to read" (3.1-2). While he reflects on Aristotle and Bøehme, on intellectual theories concerning the objectivity of sight, Stephen's perception of each item of detritus is also noticeably colored by his critical mind and dour mood; each physical object on the shore is transformed by his individual intellect and by his despondency.

All that Stephen hears, feels, and sees along the flats is assigned meaning within a sensibility deeply influenced by the Jesuits. Throughout the chapter, Joyce may be using, as an invisible framework, an inversion of the meditative exercise described by St. Ignatius as "composition of place." In such a contemplation, "the composition will be to see with the sight of the imagination the corporal place . . . a Temple or Mountain where Jesus Christ or Our Lady is found" (Loyola 32). Stephen himself, however, not Christ or Mary, is the dominant figure of his meditations. Through his mental associations and emotional reactions, Stephen's identity is both formed by and participates in composing, his interpretation of place. Despite the fact that Stephen makes no mention of Loyola's technique until chapter nine, everything he imagines which has to do with contamination, with feeling trapped, and with alienation may be said to apply to the second part of the spiritual

exercise: imagining the “soul ... imprisoned in this corruptible body ... in this valley, as exiled among brute beasts” (Loyola 32). “Brute” is from the Latin, meaning stupid, and Joyce constantly emphasizes Stephen’s superior intellectuality. In addition, Stephen repeatedly interprets sights and smells as corrupt, and he clearly feels both trapped by and estranged from other Irishmen, Catholics, his family, and even his friends.

Religion seems to have made the natural appetites of life shameful; as Stephen understands the teachings of the Church, most feelings lead to sin, and, indeed, even thoughts themselves may be sins. For Stephen, God seems to exist, not as a source of comfort or spiritual energy, but merely as a cruel absence. Stephen’s experience of the Church heightens his awareness of corruption, of sin, of shame, but offers no consolation. As Stephen walks on the beach, he reveals, but seems not to examine, his nearly paralyzing sense of entrapment, his inability to act.

Throughout his perambulation, Stephen is continuously aware of the specific physical aspects of the beach which trigger his reactions, the distinct sounds as he steps, “crush, crack, crick, crick” (3.19). A bit later, “his boots trod again a damp crackling mast, razorshells, squeaking pebbles” (3.147-8), and still later, “wet sand slapped his boots ... his feet beginning to sink slowly in the quaking soil” (3.265,268). In a decisive turning from the water, “he lifted his feet up from the suck” (3.278). The words “sink” and “suck” express both the physical sensation of the sand’s pulling and the emotional sense of feeling trapped.

Visually, Stephen’s attention is first drawn to the deposited refuse, “seaspawn and seawrack ... that rusty boot” (3.2-3). “Bluesilver” is glimpsed amidst “snotgreen ... [and] rust” (3.3); his perception of colors is translated into an expression in words of infection and decay. He sees two old women step “flabbily, their splayed feet sinking in the silted sand” (3.30-1); again, the sand is entrapment. Perhaps an effect of Loyola’s exercise, evidence of pollution attracts his attention most easily. He reflects on the odor of the beach: “unwholesome sandflats ... exude sewage breath” (3.150,152). The shore is contaminated by the generous human contribution of raw sewage into the Liffey and, thereby, into the sea—evidence of both stupidity and corruption.

Later, when Stephen notices that the “bloated carcass of a dog lay, lolled” (3.286) on a bed of seaweed, the language suggests not only the irony of land animal on water-grown bed, but the insensitivity of people to both death

and decay. Beyond the dead dog lies “the gunwale of a boat, stuck in sand” (3.287), symbolizing even more accurately Stephen’s sense of feeling trapped and stultified, since the boat is mired not in water but in tiny particles of sand. He muses, “these heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here” (3.288-9), extending the influence of paralysis to words themselves and offering another example of imprisonment.

Such feelings intensify his perception of Ireland as paralyzed victim, of the shore as a location tempting to potential suicides, and as a place littered with reminders of death. Thoughts of the Vikings, “in quest of prey, their bloodbeaked prows riding low” (3.300-1), lead Stephen to consider Dublin in times of “famine, plague and slaughters” (3.306). The “lost Armada” (3.150) failed twice from an Irish perspective, as a Spanish victory over England would have broken British domination. He continually thinks of Irish leaders in terms of their losses (3.241-4, 314-6), betrayed by the people and by the Church. Considering the burden of his heritage, he broods, “their blood is in me, their lusts my waves” (3.306-7), and he connects the influence of the place to the inevitable movement of the sea swells.

Stephen’s awareness, as he walks, of the “squeaking pebbles” (3.148) brings to his mind the despair of Gloucester in *King Lear* and Edgar’s deception to calm his old father (Gifford 51). Stephen also associates the rocks with Horatio’s fear that Hamlet, “hearing Elsinore’s tempting flood” (3.281), will be convinced by the ghost/father to commit suicide (Gifford 58). The Jesuit preoccupation with self-mortification might easily influence someone of Stephen’s temperament and lack of faith to consider death as a possible solution. In fact, the idea of self-destruction accompanies Stephen from early in the chapter. Echoing Blake (Gifford 58), Stephen wonders if he is “walking to eternity” (3.18) and later, more specifically, if he is “walking out to Kish lightship” (3.267). He parodies his own death, “at full stretch over the rocks” (3.437). Stephen’s despondency seeps up from his own fears and shame and saturates all aspects of his surroundings. The pebbles, rocks, and encroaching sea are converted within his mind, not into symbols of survival or continuing cycles of life, but into reflections on aggression, failure, and death.

Occasionally, Stephen finds some images on the tidal flats which he interprets less cynically. The dead dog is countered by a live one, whose very bark “runs” (3.310), who seems unperturbed as he sniffs the canine carcass (3.349). Stephen, on the other hand, becomes quite perturbed by thoughts

of the local “man drowned nine days ago” (3.322), imagining “his human eyes scream to me out of his horror of his death” (3.28-9). In spite of his terror, however, Stephen still expresses a wish to save someone, were he given the chance. “I would want to. I would try” (3.324), he affirms, revealing sympathy rather than disgust and a flickering spark of individual will.

Encountering the various physical aspects of the shore, Stephen often perceives the active wind in marked contrast to the stagnant objects at the edge of the sea: “airs romped round him, ripping and eager airs” (3.55) and “wind of wild air of seeds of brightness” (3.266-7). When he has another glimpse of the two old women, Stephen thinks of the faithful “two maries” (3.297) and of the women saving Moses (3.298), examples of exemplary rather than corrupt action. He asserts “pain is far” (3.443), and he creatively records the water rhythm in his words “long lassoes ... water flowed full, covering greengoldenly lagoons of sand” (3.453-64). Stephen seems in this instance to almost cheerfully interpret the greenish-yellow colors which were previously those of contamination. Anticipating the summer solstice in five days, he announces “the longest day of all the glad new year” (3.491-2) and even seems to find a measure of joy in the prospect of an increased amount of daylight.

The chapter begins with the phrase “ineluctable modality of the visible” (3.1), referring to Aristotle’s aesthetic theory, which considers the accuracy of our visual perception (Gifford 44). The word “ineluctable,” however, also implies a struggle discolored by futility. In the myths, battles with Proteus are won by sheer persistence. In spite of Stephen’s penchant for “morose delectation” (3.385)—the “sin of letting the mind dwell on evil thoughts” (Gifford 61)—he does manage to hold on. If no clear prophecy emerges from Stephen’s ever-changing interpretations of his experiences on the shore, he seems nevertheless to undergo a change of heart. Stephen moves from his morbid thoughts of the corpse’s “leprous nosehole” (3.481) to affirm, in a particularly Joycean fashion, his choice of life over suicide by leaving “the dry snot picked from his nostril on a ledge of rock, carefully” (3.500-1).

The apparent “seachange” (3.482) within Stephen prompts him to walk away from the approaching tide, but, ever ambivalent, he looks back over his shoulder (3.503). Stephen’s attention is drawn to the image which closes the chapter, that of a ship, “high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed upon the crosstrees” (3.505). While Stephen is unable to view the three cross-like

symbols as redemptive, he does seem to find in the ship some hope for renewal. The vessel sails toward Dublin, the wrong direction to signify escape, but still, harnessing the wind and water, it moves, emphasizing the possibility of action. Stephen exhibits more self-mockery than remorse, but a catharsis nevertheless occurs. Having survived this battle between his developing identity and the pressures of history, church, and family, Stephen has discovered his protean truth. If not exactly “dancing on the ... shore” but “dishevelled [and] wandering,” Stephen is, at least temporarily, not trapped, as he walks intentionally away from the sea.

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# “The Eye of the Ancient Immortal Umpire”:

Sense of Place and Spirit of Place  
in William Faulkner’s “The Old People”

TODD NIEMCZYK

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No writer has been more celebrated for rendering sense of place than William Faulkner. And whether sense of place is considered in conjunction with the Southern Renaissance, regionalism or even local color, Faulkner’s sense of place remains transcendent. Faulkner is the master writer of place—place resonant with the past, with a sense of history, a sense of family and community. Faulkner goes beyond the usual Southern Renaissance notions of place to create the terrain of the *deus loci*, the numinous spirit of place. And “The Old People,” whether considered as a short story or as a chapter of *Go Down, Moses*, is an all too neglected masterpiece showcasing the *deus loci*. In this work Faulkner powerfully renders sense of place and magically evokes the spirit of place.

The preeminent Faulkner scholar Cleanth Brooks said:

A writer of our own time and place can make an important, special contribution. A great literary artist such as Faulkner helps the rest of the country and the rest of the world understand us better. The region becomes humanized when a writer treats it in his work.” (59)

I would take Brooks’s comment a step further. At times, Faulkner’s South, our South, becomes not only humanized but spiritualized. It is not inhabited by man but by spirits as well. Nowhere is this idea more evident than in “The Old People” from *Go Down, Moses*. “The Old People” is one of Faulkner’s most compelling chapters in the vast, place-imbued Yoknapatawpha Chronicle.

Many critics simply say that “The Old People” serves as a splendid precursor to Faulkner’s famous hunting story “The Bear.” Critic William Van O’Conner, for example, states: “Immediately preceding ‘The Bear’ is ‘The Old People,’ which develops the wilderness theme ... ‘The Old People,’ then, is a preliminary probing of the subject of the wilderness and man’s relationship to it” (126-127). Van O’Conner’s opinion can scarcely be dis-

puted, but he, like many other critics, is too eager to move on to “The Bear” and, in doing so, deprives Faulkner, and Isaac McCaslin for that matter, of their sense of place.

For Faulkner, his “sense of place” was his life—his apocrypha.<sup>1</sup> From the time when Sherwood Anderson remarked to the young writer in New Orleans “You’re a country boy; all you know is that little patch up there in Mississippi where you started from” (Brooks 47), Yoknapatawpha County became the setting for his writing. Fittingly enough, the apprentice Faulkner would far exceed the master Anderson in celebrating his “postage stamp of soil.” This idea magically looms over us in “The Old People” like “tremendous gums and cypresses and oaks,” yet to fully comprehend Faulkner’s vision—his Eden-like Big Bottom and all its pleasures and temptations—we must be like young Isaac McCaslin in every sense.

However, in order to become Isaac, we as readers must put aside all pre-supposed ideas and fears. We must think to ourselves, “When was the last time I walked through the woods? Was I afraid? And why?” We must fully acknowledge Cass McCaslin’s knowledge of our past history as human beings—the things “that had been tamed out of our blood so long ago that we have not only forgotten them, we have to live together in herds to protect ourselves from our own sources” (*GDM* 161). Cass is saying that we have lost our bond with nature. It has been corrupted throughout history going as far back as the Garden where man was cast out of paradise and forced to face his destruction. But for Isaac, and most of the McCaslins too, this sacred bond is reformed each November during hunting season. They return to, what for Isaac especially, is an Eden.

The question Faulkner is then addressing is much deeper than man’s fleeting relationship with nature. Through his sense of place, Faulkner also conveys his sense of history, his sense of nature and his passion for each. Brooks is astute at forming this connection. He asks:

How are history and nature related? We can learn a great deal about any writer’s conception of reality by noticing how he relates them—if, in fact he can find any relation between them. In more recent decades, with the breakup of the Christian synthesis, nature and history have tended to fall apart, and some of our writers stress one at the expense of the other, or simply convert one into an aspect of the other. (149)

Brooks’s discussion of the Christian synthesis is integral to Faulkner’s sense of place. He, as a good Southern boy, was familiar with the church and with

Adam's fall. In "The Old People" Isaac lives in the wilderness like Adam before the fall "in a happy rapport with nature" (149). If analyzed in this respect, "The Old People" then becomes much more than a prelude to "The Bear." It represents Adam's paradise before the fall. It is mankind's communion with nature before he "invented fire, tools, and a technology, and began to prey on nature" (149) in the postlapsarian world of town and city. This is not to argue against the inevitable behemoth "progress," but simply to reaffirm Faulkner's view in "The Old People" that man is indeed part of nature, "made in the image of God" and not "merely the wisest of the beasts" (149). To understand Faulkner's sense of place, we must see man expressing his natural role through hunting. Simply put, it is man's role in nature to be a hunter, but we must remember the importance of hunting to mankind's history. We must remember the sanctity of the hunting ritual and how the hunters not only had a deep love of their prey but also deemed the animals their brothers, another member of their cosmos not to be exploited but to be respected but nonetheless hunted.

This idea is logically concluded in "The Bear" when Ike, after seeing "Old Ben's dried, mutilated paw" on Lion's grave, yearns to make things right. He realizes that Old Ben was a part of nature like himself. He thinks of nature and its "immutable progression and, being myriad, one: and Old Ben too, Old Ben too; they would give him his paw back even, certainly they would give him his paw back: then the long challenge and the long chase, no heart to be driven and outraged, no flesh to be mauled and bled" (*GDM* 313). Ike is certainly expressing a desire to return to the Eden of "The Old People," but we also must remember something else. This epiphany is not the pseudo cry of remorse from an evil hunter who realizes his error in hunting innocent animals, as many critics—who have never been in the woods—would have us believe, but it is an acceptance of man's condition as an animal capable of destruction. It is in our nature to hunt Old Ben just as it is in Old Ben's to defy us, and Ike realizes, as Brooks observes, that "the time for returning Ben's paw is almost as remote as eternity itself" (152). We must remember that Ike continues to hunt and, having accepted man's condition, it is not the drawing of blood that horrifies him, but "his vision of the Delta 'deswamped and denuded and derivered' all for the purpose of economic exploitation. The scene that Ike contemplates with horror is one not of man lovingly wedded to nature but of his violent rape of nature" (152). This underlies Ike's decision to have no children, for Ike's covenant with nature is

so strong that he will not bring forth heirs to inherit, to ravish the land, which is his alone through a legal deed. In this way, Ike is consumed with the tie between history and nature so clearly identifiable in *Sam Fathers*.

This tie is clearly seen in “The Old People” when young Isaac hunts with the old Indian. Listening to Sam talk, he imagines the past:

... those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted ... until at last it would seem to the boy that he himself had not come into existence yet, ... that although it had been his grandfather's and then his father's and uncle's and was now his cousin's and someday would be his own land which he and Sam hunted over, their hold upon it actually was as trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book in Jefferson which allocated it to them and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and *Sam Fathers'* voice the mouthpiece of the host. (165)

This passage underlines place as it intersects with the past, the past as Faulkner often noted, that is never past. It is also important to note Isaac calls *Sam Fathers* the “mouthpiece of the host.” In other words, *Sam Fathers* embodies the Big Bottom, and in doing so he embodies Faulkner's verities too.<sup>2</sup> In essence, *Sam Fathers* is nature; *Sam Fathers* is history. He is a disciple of the woods and literally he is “The Old People.” Having descended from the original inhabitants of the Bottom, Sam is the son of a Chickasaw chief. His history is Faulkner's sense of place, and just as Sam is the mouthpiece of the woods, he is the mouthpiece of Faulkner's verities regarding Isaac as well. It is from Sam that Isaac learns the woods. As a young boy Sam “taught the boy to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward” (164). Sam teaches the boy as a father would a son, and when he feels he has taught Isaac all he can know, he returns to the Bottom to live alone with nature. He tells Isaac: “I done taught you all there is of this settled country ... You can hunt it good as I can now. You are ready for the Big Bottom now, for bear and deer. Hunter's meat” (167). This marks Isaac's rite of passage into Sam's world and also reiterates the importance of the ritual of the hunt and its tie with nature.

Yet year after year, he returns from the Bottom unable to form a kinship with the land. He describes the

unforgettable sense of the big woods—not a quality dangerous or particularly inimical, but profound, sentient, gigantic and brooding, amid which he had been permitted to go to and fro unscathed, why he knew not, but dwarfed and, until he had drawn blood worthy of being drawn, alien. (169)

However, Isaac's time does come, and Sam marks his face with hot blood of the deer so now, as "the wilderness watched them pass," it was "never to be inimical again since the buck still and forever leaped ... forever immortal" (171). To us, Ike's ideals may seem confusing—how can a dead deer be immortal? The answer of course is in the covenant formed between nature and Isaac—a covenant underscored with blood. For Isaac has passed the ritual of the hunt. He has killed "hunter's meat" yet, more importantly, Sam had not only marked him " ... as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people" (175). It is then on his way back to civilization after the hunt that Isaac feels one with nature: "He stopped breathing then; there was only his heart, his blood, and in the following silence the wilderness ceased to breathe also, leaning, stooping overhead with its breath held, tremendous and impartial and waiting" (175). The personification of the wilderness is no accident, and it skillfully shows both Isaac's and Sam Fathers's intimate relationship with nature and history.

However, this kinship intensifies. On their way home a large buck is seen off the trail. The hunting party dismounts and Walter Ewell, whose rifle never missed, takes a small buck, but Sam instructs Isaac to remain in the thicket. It is then that he sees the great buck. This fourteen point phantom buck is the spirit of the woods—majestic, wild, unafraid—and Sam Fathers salutes it holding up his hand. He says, "Oleh, Chief ... Grandfather" (177) in respect to the animal. Thus witnessing such an event, Isaac is forever a part of Sam's world. He is now a part of something larger than life. He is now part of the ongoing cycle of nature. That night he describes his experience to Cass, feeling as if he doesn't believe him. However, Cass understands full well the implications of what has touched Isaac. He says:

Think of all that has happened here, on this earth. All the blood hot and strong that has soaked back into it ... And the Earth is shallow; ... And the Earth don't want to just keep things, hoard them; it wants to use them again. Look at the seed, the acorns, at what happens even to carrion when you try to bury it: it refuses too, seethes and struggles too until it reaches light and air again, hunting the sun still. (179)

Yet for young Isaac the profound wisdom of his cousin is still too much. He yearns for physical proof of the buck until his cousin asks:

“Suppose they don’t have substance, can’t cast a shadow—”

“But I saw it!” the boy cried. “I saw him!”

“Steady,” McCaslin said. “Steady. I know you did. So did I. Sam took me in there once after I killed my first deer.” (180)

We now see that Cass McCaslin was also initiated by Sam Fathers. The importance of not only seeing but believing in the phantom buck is crucial to understanding Faulkner’s sense of the past—his sense of history—all of which comprise his sense of place. Such a passing on of tradition is commonplace in the South, and while Faulkner captures the importance of such events as Isaac’s initiation into manhood, he does so much more.

Brooks tells us that “Every region needs its special spokesman to draw aside from the eyes of its people the veil of familiarity and routine everydayness, and to help them realize fully who they are” (60). Indeed, the power of Faulkner not only reminds Southerners of who we are, but should remind everyone, universally, not only who they are, but also what they have become, what they might become. This is precisely why, for many critics, “The Old People” is quickly labeled as a “great wilderness romance,” and no deep, sustained attention is given to what lies behind such a literary label. Behind Faulkner’s story there is magic. Readers of the story must ask themselves as Isaac did: Is the great buck real? Do we believe in the really old things like pain, suffering and grief, passion and magic? These are the feelings that made us, as human beings, immortal—part of nature—not merely the wisest of the beasts but able to leave lasting contributions, able to leave a history. I am reminded of the words of Robert Penn Warren: “. . . the dream of the future is not better than the fact of the past, no matter how terrible. For without the fact of the past we cannot dream the dream of the future” (Watkins 155). What Warren tells us is true, and Faulkner knew it well. Through his magic, the magic of writing, he captures the magic that is the past, at the intersection of place and history, and for his sake and ours, we must believe in the great Buck. “For the great literary artists deal not in fraud but in truth. Such an artist makes us see with a gaze that does not stop at mere exteriors, but penetrates the inner meaning of a scene or event, and the meaning of events involves history and how they came to be” (Brooks 60). So we too must penetrate to the inner meaning and, as Cass McCaslin says, stop living together in herds to protect us from our own sources. I don’t want

to live in a dead, machine-made world, clustering in suburbia afraid of nature, afraid of mankind itself; so it is OK, it is necessary to believe in Faulkner's magic. It is all around us now. Think about it. Before the SUNY New Paltz campus was built there was virgin forest. Before us the Lenape and Esopus and Wappingers Indians lived here. Before everything there was the land, and certainly every area was inhabited by a magic spirit—by a phantom buck or some other form of *deus loci*. We can grieve their loss or their apparent disappearance before the onslaught of what some are pleased to regard as progress, but we must seek and revere the spirits that remain. And before the last tree is felled, the last forest paved, perhaps we should all raise our hand and repeat with Sam Fathers, his salute to place and nature, to past and community: “Oleh, Chief, Grandfather.”

#### NOTES

1. To fully understand Faulkner's sense of place, it is imperative to realize the depth of his place—his Yoknapatawpha County. This fictional land has been the setting for the majority of his work including 14 novels and at least 20 short stories. In this sense, Faulkner's sense of place is literally his apocrypha.

2. When speaking of Faulkner's verities, it is helpful to refer to his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “the old universal truths . . . love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.” These ideals are inherent to his work and are embodied in characters such as Isaac McCaslin and Sam Fathers who have a deep, profound tie with the land—a deep, profound sense of place.

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## Tenuous Connections:

The Struggle for Sense of Place  
in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*

JASON TAYLOR

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*Howards End* is a novel full of houses. Throughout the work, the places where a character lives shape the quality of his or her life. In keeping with a convention of sense-of-place literature, life in the city—in an urban home—is condemned as unstable and temporary, and rural life—in a country home—is praised because of the possibility for connectedness with the land and more enduring values. However, the houses in the novel are not presented in a straightforward city-is-bad/country-is-good hierarchy. Curiously, the most rural country house in the novel—Oniton Grange in Shropshire—fails to provide relief from the city's ills, while at the eponymous Howards End, which is in fact in the suburbs, people achieve the benefits of a true connection with place. An examination of this paradox shows Forster's conception of place to be far more than a simple celebration of the pastoral.

The houses in the novel will be easier to discuss if we review the main characters. The Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen (Emma Thompson and Helena Bonham Carter in the Merchant-Ivory film), live at Wickham Place, a townhouse in London which is to be demolished and replaced by an apartment building. Mrs. Wilcox (Maggie Smith in the movie) has Howards End, her beloved country home in Hertfordshire. Mr. Wilcox (Anthony Hopkins in the film) has homes all over the place: Wickham Mansions and Ducie Street in London, Six Hills and Oniton Grange in the country, and he makes plans to remodel a house in Epsom and build a house in Sussex. Leonard Bast, the poverty-stricken clerk with whom Helen has a brief affair, lives in a shabby tenement.

Throughout the novel, Forster's distaste for the city is obvious. London "seem[s] Satanic," its streets are "oppressing" and its spirit finds a "grievous darkness within" (66). The city is like turbulent water, unsettled, in a constant state of change. Wickham Place sits behind a "promontory" of flats, fated to "be swept away in time"—as by a tide—"as humanity pile[s] itself

higher and higher on the precious soil of London” (5). In another neighborhood, “bricks and mortar” are “rising and falling with the restlessness of the water in a fountain” (36). As Margaret complains:

“I hate this continual flux of London. It is an epitome of us at our worst—eternal formlessness; all the qualities, good bad and indifferent, streaming away—streaming, streaming forever. That’s why I dread it so. I mistrust rivers, even in scenery.” (143)

This unstable, negative aspect of city life is spreading, turning once rural areas into Suburbia. In the two years between chapters 12 and 13, the city’s “shallows” have “washed more widely against the hills of Surrey and over the fields of Hertfordshire” as “nature withdrew” (84). Urbanization is a danger, and its spread is relentless.

It seems logical, then, that life in the country should provide an antidote and that one should get as far away from the city as possible. Of all the homes portrayed in the novel, only Oniton is completely isolated from the city; the Grange, we are told, is “a genuine country-house” (174) in Shropshire, located in “a market town—as tiny a one as England possesses—[which] had for ages served that lonely valley and guarded our marches against the Kelt” (164). This appears to be a perfect opposite to London, unchanging and strongly connected to the past. Margaret, fed up as she is with “continual flux,” is captivated by the location. Walking outside on her first night in Shropshire, she actually strokes the turf—a concrete attempt to connect with nature—and announces:

“I love this place. I love Shropshire. I hate London. I am glad this will be my home. . . . what a comfort to have arrived!” (171-2)

This is where we encounter the paradox. Oniton Grange seems to be a country house that can function as an antidote to the city, but there is substantial textual evidence that suggests that life at the Grange would not provide a solution to the problems of life in London. In fact, Forster’s descriptions of Oniton show it to have many qualities in common with the eternally formless city.

To begin with, consider Oniton’s setting. The surrounding hills are “curious . . . rather than impressive” with features that only “hint at wildness” (166-7). The grounds and the house sit on a “river-girt peninsula” (167) surrounded on three sides by the Severn, which is variously described as

“whispering” (169), “murmuring” (189), “nibbling” (197) and “steaming like a kettle” (205). In the morning, mists enshroud the house—which is itself grey—and the ruins of the ancient castle.

Notice how each of these images echoes the language that Forster uses to describe the city. Blocks of flats are “promontories” rising like hills above the older houses (10). The “grey tides” of London sweep into the suburbs (84), and the “streaming” flux of the city causes Margaret to “mistrust rivers” (143). Like the river at Oniton, London is in “continuous flow” and is always making noise so that “human beings hear each other speak with greater difficulty” (85). In the city, the air is a “clot of grey” (63); at Oniton, “a fine mist” covers the peninsula each morning and reduces the castle mound to a mere “outline” (171). Taken together, these parallels work to shorten the symbolic distance between London and the Shropshire hills. Suddenly, Oniton is not so remote after all, for here, too, we find much of the “formlessness” that is “the epitome of us at our worst.”

Howards End, the other country house in the novel, is in suburban Hertfordshire, physically a great deal closer to London. Unlike Oniton, this setting does not share the formless qualities of the city; Howards End provides genuine antidote to the dangers of urbanization. Hertfordshire is described as “England at its quietest, with little emphasis of river and hill” (155). It is England “meditative” (155), and “reticent” (166). Howards End is the only location in the work that is not described in terms of water and motion. Instead, everything is quiet and still. “We never discuss anything at Howards End,” Mrs. Wilcox recalls (60). She, it seems, understands what Forster calls “the periods of quiet that are essential to true growth,” periods which Margaret mistrusts “with a Londoner’s impatience” (61). Consider the terms with which Mrs. Wilcox invites Margaret to leave London with her and journey to Howards End:

“You are coming to sleep, dear, too. It is in the morning that my house is most beautiful. You are coming to stop. I cannot show you my meadow properly except at sunrise. These fogs ... never spread far. I dare say they are sitting in the sun in Hertfordshire, and you will never repent joining them.” (67)

The motion, the noise and the mists that we have seen in Oniton and in London are all conspicuously absent at Howards End.

This contrast between motion and stillness can be extended. Note that both country houses feature a symbol of ancient times. At Oniton, there is a ruined castle that harks back to times of war, when battles were being fought

over England's borders. At Howards End, there is a magnificent wych-elm that has magic healing powers: ancient "country people" stuck pigs' teeth in its trunk believing that "if they chew a piece of the bark it will cure the toothache" (55). Within the action of the novel, Oniton is still a scene of battles and confrontations; in one 24 hour period, Henry Wilcox is confronted by Helen (over the welfare of the Bastis), his former lover Jacky (regarding their illicit affair) and Margaret (attempting to salvage their engagement). Similarly, Howards End is still a place of healing; it is here that Leonard Bast journeys to resolve the issue of his intimacy with Helen, and, at the novel's end, both Helen and Henry are nursed back to health under the shade of the ancient tree (268).

The beneficial stillness of Howards End does more than promote healing; it also promotes what Forster calls "connection." This is the opposite of "flux," the fragmented lifestyle pursued by people in the city and at Oniton, characterized by furious, arbitrary motion. "Connection" involves getting back to basics, and there is something elemental about Mrs. Wilcox's house. Take, for example, Margaret's first visit to Howards End, when she is struck by arbitrary nature of the room names:

Dining-room and drawing-room—right and left—were guessed only by their wall-papers. They were just rooms where one could shelter from the rain ... Drawing-room, dining-room and hall—how petty the names sounded! Here were simply three rooms where children could play and friends shelter from the rain. (158)

The very rooms at Howards End refuse to conform to the social conventions associated with city life. With delightful irony, Forster applies these conventional labels to the farm's exterior. The meadow, for example, is "one of those an open-air drawing rooms" with a boundary hedge that forms "a sort of powder-closet for the cows" (215). At Howards End, then, distinctions between interior space (the realm of human beings), and outside space (the realm of nature) are blurred, resulting in an extremely fertile environment for contemplation, an environment which is lacking at Oniton, in spite of its greater distance from London. As the narrator remarks in a celebrated passage:

In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect—connect without bitterness until all men are brothers. (212)

In Hertfordshire, unlike any other location in the novel, there is the potential for an individual to “connect” and “live in fragments no longer” (147). Here, where one can cultivate a true sense of place, one finds the antidote to the problems of city life. The narrator shows Margaret feeling this when she first arrives at Howards End:

The sense of flux which had haunted her all the year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty .... (161)

The degree to which Forster values the connections made possible by sense of place is shown throughout the work. Early in the novel, Mrs. Wilcox asserts that “to be parted from your house, your father’s house . . . is worse than dying” and that people should be able to “die in the room where they were born” (64-5). Two years later, Margaret comes to realize that “places may ever be more important than people,” announcing, “I quite expect to end my life caring most for a place” (102), and asserting that “some place—some beloved place or tree” can have the power to “struggle against life’s daily greyness, against pettiness, against mechanical cheerfulness, against suspicion” (112). Shortly thereafter, the narrator speculates that “historians of the future will note how the middle classes accreted possessions without taking root in the earth, and may find in this the secret of their imaginative poverty.” (118)

In sense of place, then, Forster sees a solution to the unsettling flux of city life. The place itself, however, must have a special quality: the lack of motion and lack of noise that fosters contemplation and makes it possible to “see life steadily and see it whole.” Howards End has the quality, and yet the novel is not optimistic about the future.

By the close of the work, the Schlegel sisters have cultivated a true sense of place. They have decided to turn Howards End into their permanent home and put a halt to the motion of their continuous flux. Helen and Margaret are trying to put down roots. They are raising the child that resulted from Helen’s affair with Leonard Bast, and they intend to leave him the property. Their hope is to give the baby the chance to “die in the room where [he was] born.” The novel ends, however, with a suggestion that they will not be able to enjoy their newfound rootedness for very long. “London’s creeping,” Helen reminds us, observing that only eight or nine meadows remain to separate them from the “red rust.” She and her sister are both

afraid that the flux-free life that they have achieved is going to be “melted down.” Margaret tries to be optimistic, reflecting:

“This craze for motion has only set in during the last hundred years. It may be followed by a civilization that won’t be a movement because it will rest on the earth. All the signs are against it now, but I can’t help hoping, and very early in the morning in the garden I feel that our house is the future as well as the past.” (268)

But the imagery in this final section makes her words seem naive. The last chapter opens with a description of a mower (machine-symbol of industry and city) cutting the meadow (symbol of nature) which surrounds Howards End. Significantly, Forster describes the mower as “encompassing with narrowing circles the sacred centre of the field.” Like the red rust of the city, the mower is closing in on the one spot where people can still “connect” and achieve a true sense of place. Let us consider, now, the novel’s closing words: “The field’s cut!” Helen cried excitedly—“the big meadow! We’ve seen to the very end, and it’ll be such a crop of hay as never!” She has just said that she is afraid of the creeping city, but now she is not at all worried that the “whirring blades” have cut out the “sacred centre” of the meadow. Instead, she boasts about the size of the crop.

Ultimately, Forster leads us to a view of Howards End as the last remaining island of connectedness in the midst of a sea of urban-induced flux. The farm is England in microcosm, belonging—as the narrator describes at the end of chapter 19—“to those who ... have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls with all the brave world’s fleet accompanying her towards eternity” (138). But just as the mower cuts the Howards End meadow with ever-narrowing circles, so we are left with the feeling that this armada, this “brave world’s fleet” is not going to make it. Long before it reaches eternity, we fear, it will be swallowed by a spiraling whirlpool. There is an answer in sense of place, but the places are all disappearing.

#### WORKS CITED

Forster, E. M. *Howards End*. New York: Bantam Books, 1985.

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As the journal of the English Graduate Program, *Shawangunk Review* publishes the proceedings of the Annual Graduate Symposium. In addition, the editors welcome submissions from any graduate student in English concerning any area of literary studies: essays, explications, book reviews, scholarly notes and queries. Beginning with the next issue, English graduate students and faculty are invited to submit poetry and translations of poetry, and faculty members are invited to submit book reviews and scholarly notes and queries.

MANUSCRIPTS should be original material on literary biography, history, theory and methods, analysis and interpretation, and critical syntheses that may emerge from courses or seminars taken at the college. Manuscripts should be prepared in the preferred style published by the Modern Language Association in its *MLA Handbook*. All manuscripts should include an abstract of 50 words or less and biographical information of four to six lines that indicates the author's professional, research and literary interests. Please submit three copies.

BOOK REVIEWS are invited that relate to specific courses or to literary interests having general appeal to the graduate student body. Book reviews should be scholarly in orientation and approximately 1,000 to 1,500 words in length. Please submit two copies.

ORIGINAL POETRY OR TRANSLATIONS of one to five pages may also be submitted for consideration. Please submit two copies.

ABSTRACTS OF MA THESES should be approximately 150 words in length. Degree candidates who have completed (or are nearing completion of) an MA thesis are encouraged to consult with their advisors in preparing an abstract. Please submit two copies.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR are invited to promote scholarly discussion and debate.

The deadline for all submissions is May 31, 1998. Manuscripts and other submissions should be sent to *Shawangunk Review*, Department of English, State University of New York, New Paltz, New York, 12561.



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