EAPSU Online

A Journal of Critical and Creative Work

Published by the English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities

Volume 3, Fall 2006

ISSN 1548-1964

EAPSU Online:
A Journal of Critical and Creative Work

Table of Contents Volume 3 Fall 2006

Introduction

Kim Martin Long, Editor

Welcome to our third annual issue of *EAPSU ONLINE: A Journal of Creative and Critical Work,* published by the English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities. EAPSU is a regional professional organization whose members come from the English Departments and students of the 14 state universities in Pennsylvania, otherwise known as the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Slippery Rock, Shippensburg, and West Chester.

EAPSU has been in existence since 1980 as an organization dedicated to excellence in English studies, and we have prided ourselves in being inclusive. Our conferences showcase the best in many disciplines within "English": writing and literature, pedagogy and film, creative and critical. EAPSU sponsors an annual fall conference and co-sponsors a spring conference for undergraduate English majors. Three years ago the EAPSU Executive Committee voted to establish a peer-reviewed online journal, to supplement our conference and its Proceedings. We wanted to continue our practice of allowing just about anyone to present and participate in the conference; however, we also wanted a more competitive, higher-quality venue for scholarly and creative work. *EAPSU ONLINE* has helped us to accomplish this goal. We have received manuscripts from all over the world and believe that we are able to publish a variety of material that might not have an audience without us. Each submission goes through a blind review process and is sent to two readers initially for input; marginal essays or works are asked to resubmit with revision. So far, in the three years of our publication, we have published approximately 1/3 of the articles, stories, and poems sent to us. As we grow, we will surely become even more competitive.

This issue came together very organically. The essays here are not only "traditional" literary essays one might expect but also critical essays on thing such as politics and even, yes, the bathroom stall. The poetry is varied, and the two fictional pieces are very different from one another. I hope sincerely that you will find something here that touches you in some way, either rationally or emotionally.

I must tell you that I did ask Kazim Ali to allow us to use a previously published poem "Well" to open up this volume. Its meditative tone goes well with some of the other works here—Noel's poem about transition, Kristi's essay on the bathroom stall, and

Allen's poems, which also include water imagery—and it leads off this third issue with images of nature.

I hope you enjoy the diversity of these offerings. I'm sure that not everything will appeal to everyone, and that's OK. I hope you find something to stimulate you, make you think, or make you smile.

I wish to thank my editorial board for their help and the many, many readers (colleagues across the state and country) who gave their time to provide input on these works. Thanks to Alice James books for permission to reprint Kazim's poem. And thanks to Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania for allowing me to use server space for this project.

The Call for Submissions for Volume 4 should go out soon, with a deadline of mid-spring. Consider submitting your own work or passing this on to someone who should.

Well

Kazim Ali
Shippensburg University

The brook flowing slowly
Endlessly rowing through impassable dark

Urged on by a rattlesnake soundtrack
Plain blue, solo, artless

I am kept unto prayer
Returned again to unbelief

And when she was sent to me
The well

I sang *thou art my sister, my broad year*
My seed-ear, my leaf...

Nineteenth-century English and American Views of American Landscape: Romantic vs. Utilitarian

John E. Dean

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

The nineteenth-century English traveler viewed American landscape in a romantic light, imposing her picturesque perception or poetic imagination onto it in order to value or enjoy it. The American, on the other hand, was generally insensitive to his landscape. He saw in it the potential for commercial exploitation. The English valued the American picturesque, informed by the English countryside, while the Americans valued utility in landscape. American insensitivity to landscape was revolting to the English while the English lack of commercial imagination was criticized by Americans. For the purposes of this paper, landscape will be defined as both natural scenery and "land modified for permanent human occupation" (Stilgoe 3). Fanny Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* and Charles Dickens' *American Notes for General Circulation* exemplify the nineteenth-century English traveler's view of American landscape, while a collection of nineteenth-century American voices best expresses American ways of seeing their own landscape. Both Trollop and Dickens journey at least as far west as Ohio, and both comment on the American Midwestern, mid-Atlantic, and Northeastern landscapes, but their travels depart from one another beyond these places. However, both reach Niagara Falls which represents the roaring crash of ideologies between the English and Americans. Niagara Falls separated nineteenth-century England and America both physically and emotionally as the English focused on the falls' aesthetic sublimity, and the Americans saw in Niagara a power source to generate industry and tourism. This paper will discuss these different views of American landscape in general, and then will focus on Niagara Falls, where England and America collided in a mighty torrent of competing ideologies.

For the nineteenth-century English, landscape had value if it embodied the familiar beauty of the English landscape—the Lake District, the green, rolling hills, and the old ruins. The English traveler sought both wild, romantic scenery and the aesthetic variety provided by landscape gardening. Landscape artists were seen to improve the land by imposing variety onto it, thereby making it picturesque or worthy of a scene celebrated in art or in literature.

This aesthetic imposition, in turn, encouraged picturesque travel in nineteenth-century England. According to William Gilpin, an eighteenth-through-nineteenth-century English landscape artist, the object of picturesque travel was beauty (1). Gilpin explains that one seeks beauty "among all the ingredients of landscape—trees—rocks—broken-grounds—woods—rivers—lakes—plains—vallies [sic]—mountains—and distances" (1). For the nineteenth-century English, beauty was found not in the seemingly endless repetition of one landscape ingredient, but in a variety of ingredients put together. A large expanse of plain, for example, could only be beautiful if its monotony were interrupted by other natural features or by tasteful human improvement, such as the addition of gardens and cottages. Christopher Mulvey, in "British Writing on Post-Revolutionary America," asserts that Gilpin "provided ways of seeing" the landscape by "interpose[ing] the…picturesque between the Sublime and the Beautiful," and the English brought with them these ways of seeing across the Atlantic in order to "make the wilderness of America beautiful" (103). What the English often found in America was landscape for which they were not prepared to see.

Dickens exemplifies the nineteenth-century English traveler of the picturesque as Dickens imposes English ways of seeing onto the American landscape. His understanding of aesthetic beauty is informed by his familiarity with the English landscape, and his taste is bound with nineteenth-century English epistemology. We see this dependence on English landscape as a foundational reference as he writes, "These towns and cities of New England (many of which would be villages in Old England),"

contain “delicate slopes of land, gently-swelling hills, wooded valleys, and slender streams” (81). He later refers to the landscape near Liverpool, New York as a model of the picturesque: “The country, by the railroad, seemed as we rattled through it, like a luxuriant garden. The beauty of the fields (so small they looked!), the hedge-rows, and the trees; the pretty cottages, the beds of flowers, the old churchyards, the antique houses, and every well-known object” (248-249). The landscape, naturally varied, is further beautified by tasteful human development. Dickens sees similar improvement in Hartford, Connecticut: “The town is beautifully situated in a basin of green hills; the soil is rich, well-wooded, and carefully improved” (83). Such scenes may be worthy of being painted, as they evoke a positive aesthetic response to tasteful human improvement. However, Dickens does not demand improvement in landscape that is already naturally varied enough to be picturesque. He fully appreciates the natural beauty of the Susquehanna valley in Pennsylvania: “The scenery, which had been tame enough at first, was, for the last ten or twelve miles, beautiful…the river, dotted with innumerable green islands, lay upon our right; and on the left, a steep ascent, craggy with broken rock, and dark with pine trees” (159). He finds no improvement, however, in the Looking-glass Prairie, near St. Louis, and thus expresses his disgust with the landscape where he sees “stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water” all around him (197). He explains that the prairie’s “very flatness and extent, which left nothing to the imagination, tamed it down and cramped its interest” (201); and he finds the landscape “oppressive in its barren monotony” (202). Though this land may be as familiar to Dickens as a Scottish heath or the English downs, it lacks the tasteful improvement and natural variety of the picturesque (201-202).

Trollope, like Dickens, sees America through a nineteenth-century English lense. Her understanding of beauty in the Allegheny Mountains is informed by her English experience:

> I have never been familiar with mountain scenery. Wales has shewn me all I ever saw, and the region of the Alleghany Alps in no way resembles it. It is a world of mountains rising around you in every direction, and in every form; savage, vast, and wild; yet almost at every step, some lovely spot meets your eye, green, bright, and blooming, as the most cherished nook belonging to some noble Flora in our own beautiful land. (151)

In order for Trollope to find beauty in this scene, she must be able to describe it in familiar aesthetic terms.

Trollope often brings English landscape gardening to bear on her aesthetic judgment of America. She feels that the "'eternal forests' of America [are] detestable" because they lack the variety that English landscape gardening would offer: "The beautiful variety of foliage afforded by evergreens never occurs, and . . . even the sterile beauty of rocks is wanting" (37). Near Little Washington, Pennsylvania, she sees further lack of variety in "a country much less interesting; its character was unvaried for nearly thirty miles, consisting of an uninterrupted succession of forest-covered hills" (146). For Trollope, such a place is not beautiful because it contains only one of Gilpin's landscape ingredients. Perhaps if these hills included a castle or two, lakes, and crags, Trollope would describe the landscape as picturesque. She articulates this English way of seeing as she writes, "Often a mountain torrent comes pouring its silver tribute to the stream, and were there occasionally a ruined abbey, or feudal castle, to mix the romance of real life with that of nature, the Ohio [River] would be perfect" (31). However, in moving from Ohio into Kentucky, she notes that "the scene is greatly improved; beech and chestnut, of magnificent growth, border the beautiful river; the ground has been well cleared, and the herbage is excellent; the pawpaw grows abundantly, and is a splendid shrub" (37). The nineteenth-century English valued landscape only when it was tastefully varied and aesthetically pleasing. If landscape was not picturesque, due to its

natural monotony, the English wrote it off as non-English, and therefore, dull and monotonous.

Whereas in the nineteenth-century the English valued natural aesthetic variety and tasteful human improvement in landscape, Americans, in general, valued landscape's potential for utility and commercial exploitation. Americans saw land as a resource to be used rather than protected. Trees were chopped down for building, burning, and fencing in property. Soil was turned over for planting. Any natural beauty that was too difficult to tame might be made accessible to tourists, as hotels and shops were built around such sites; and roads or railroads would bring tourists to wild landscapes through cleared forests.

In the same way that the English criticized Americans for their land use, Americans criticized the English for their lack of commercial imagination in viewing landscape. Trollope demonstrates this American criticism of the English as she quotes a Yankee traveler near the falls of Mohawk, New York who sees unused potential in the landscape: "'[W]hen the English gets a spot of wild ground like this here, they have no notions about it like us; but the Englishmen have sold it, and if you was to see it five years hence, you would not know it again; I'll engage there will be by that, half a score elegant factories—'tis true shame to let such a privilege of water lie idle'" (289). For Americans, unused land represented unrealized or wasted potential, and the nineteenth century saw a quickening of previously wasted land put to use in supporting industry. In Lockport, New York, Trollope is shocked at how quickly industry is overtaking the natural landscape as she visits a new factory built on land that has not yet been completely cleared: "As fast as a half a dozen trees were cut down, a factory was seen to struggle with rocks" (293). Industrial expansion in America was in a close race with the destruction of nature. Trollope mourns the loss of natural landscape replaced by machinery in the name of American improvement.

American improvement demanded that natural land be cleared of trees, plants, rocks and hills in order for housing, shops, roads and factories to be placed there. Little thought was given to preserving the surrounding natural landscape. Fanny Kemble, in *Fanny Kemble's Journals*, describes the aesthetically unpleasant country dwellings in Branchtown, Pennsylvania:

> No natural beauty seems to be perceived and taken advantage of, no defect hidden or adorned, proximity to the road for obvious purposes of mere convenience seems to have been the one idea in the selection of building sites. (82)

The American urgency for commercial growth outweighed the want to preserve or to create beauty in landscape.

In settling the wilderness, Americans felt an urgent need to overcome the natural objects that got in the way of expansion. They had so many forests to slash through that they thought of trees as formidable obstacles to be conquered. Billy Kirby, the woodsman in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, feels that trees are "a sore sight at any time, unless I'm privileged to work my will on them" (219). Americans believed that in clearing land for habitation and commercial exploitation, they were rescuing the land from the wilderness. John Nowlin, in his 1834 narrative *The Bark Covered House*, writes, "Father's farm was rescued from the wilderness and consecrated to the plow and husbandry through sweat and blood" (180). American settlers were at war with the landscape. John Wesley Powell refers to American pioneers as an "army of men…enlisted and trained, and they march on campaign—not for blood, but for bounty; not for plunder, but for prosperity" (256). Americans were quickly winning this war. In 1826, Timothy Flint, an inhabitant of Cincinnati, Ohio said that Cincinnati "has been won from the wilderness within forty years" (30). The landscape was a threat until it could be subdued and utilized. Even then, Americans did not make reparations for

the damage they had caused to the land. Downing explains the American way of seeing the landscape:

> The pioneer, who subdues the native forest, is apt to be of the opinion, that he sees something too much of nature; as his whole business is to root out the woods and shrubbery which she has planted. He feels no gratitude to her for the plantations, which it costs him so much labor to remove; least of all, can he be brought to think it an improvement, when his successful warfare is over, to replace the trees with others, and to sink art in nature again. ("Rural Architecture" 7)

If the landscape got in the way of American progress, it was destroyed and left to rot.

Adding to Downing's picture of the destructive American pioneer, Dickens describes "one of the very many descendants of Cain proper to this [American] continent, who seem destined from their birth to serve as pioneers in the great human army; who gladly go on from year to year extending its outposts" (206). Dickens later gives an emotional reaction to the devastation left by American territorial expansion: "The eye was pained to see the stumps of great trees thickly strewn in every field of wheat. . . . It was quite sad and oppressive, to come upon great tracts where settlers had been burning down the trees and where their wounded bodies lay about, like those of murdered creatures" (171). Trollope offers a vision of the American hacking his way through the forest as he expands the American territory:

> At either end of this space the forest again rears its dark wall, and seems to say to man, "so far shalt thou come, and no farther!" Courage and industry, however, have braved the warning, and "the stumps of the trees, which had been cut away to open a passage, were left standing three feet high." (26, 27)

These scenes of destruction were typical in nineteenth-century America because many Americans saw undeveloped land as wasted land. In Andrew Jackson's Second State of

Nation address, he asks, "What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute?" (qtd. in Pearce 57). America was in a hurry to expand its territory and improve the land for utility alone.

Of course, not every nineteenth-century American believed that territorial expansion and developing industry at the expense of the natural landscape were improvements. In 1849, an American writer noted, "We have destroyed our forests with recklessness, and posterity must face the consequences" ("Vegetation" 231). Thomas Cole, in Elliot S. Vessell's *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, writes that he "cast 'maledictions' onto the 'tree-destroyers' who were 'cutting down all the trees in the beautiful valley on which I have looked so often with a loving eye'" (102). In 1903, just four years into the following century, Colorado's Governor Peabody is quoted in the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* as saying that as he watched the violence in the waters of the Niagara River, he realized that they are "like the American people of the present day, who are tearing, and pushing, and crowding restlessly forward to the accomplishment of one end—the acquisition of material wealth" ("Best Things" 724). He goes on to worry about the future America: "And then I fully realized and understood the true selfishness of our natures in the reckless rush for a share of this world's goods for the enjoyment of to-day and the immediate present, without giving a thought or care for the future" (724).

The nineteenth-century American juxtaposition of utility and the preservation of beauty was seen most clearly at Niagara Falls, which was both a powerful energy source and a universal symbol of the sublime. Further, Niagara Falls symbolized the uniqueness of America. John Quincy Adams told Americans, "You have what no other nation on earth has; at your very door there is a mighty cataract—one of the most wonderful works of God…. Does it not resemble our country—our vast, unmeasurable,

unconquerable, inexplicable country?" (233). Only twenty-four years after the beginning of the Revolutionary War, nineteenth-century America still defined itself against England. America looked to Niagara Falls as a symbol of separation and individuality as the falls separated America from England both literally and symbolically. When Americans spoke of Niagara Falls, then, they spoke of themselves. They utilized the falls' energy while, at the same time, extolling its natural beauty.

Niagara Falls was a place unlike any in England, so in describing the falls, the English had to move beyond their ordinary perceptions and use the language of the romantics. Christopher Mulvey explains that the English traveler "fondly imagined what the great poets would make of the scene" (107). Trollope uses the familiar language of the romantics to understand the aesthetic value of Niagara Falls as she writes that "the shadowy mist that veils the horrors of its crash below, constitute a scene almost too enormous in its features for man to look upon. 'Angels might tremble as they gazed'" (297). Here, she is "thinking of Byron's line in Don Juan" (Sington, "Notes" 297). Dickens also employs the romantic sublime in describing Niagara Falls, yet he focuses less on its terrible and threatening aspects, and more on Wordsworth's idea of feeling "A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused, / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns / …and in the mind of man" ("Lines" 94-97, 99). Dickens' language is informed by this uplifting romantic vision as he writes of viewing Niagara Falls from Table Rock: "Then, when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing, the first effect, and the enduring one…was Peace. Peace of Mind: Tranquillity [sic]: Calm recollections of the Dead: Great Thoughts of Eternal Rest and Happiness: nothing of Gloom or Terror" (220). However, Dickens later remembers this scene and applies the terror of the sublime in stating, "But always does the mighty stream appear to die as it comes down, and always from its unfathomable grave arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist which is never laid: which has haunted this place with the same dread solemnity since

Darkness brooded on the deep" (221). Though many Americans, including Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, also experienced the sublime in nature, most Americans were concerned with utility rather than leisure contemplation.

The American focused less on Niagara's sublimity, and more on Niagara's use value. He applied his arguably narrower imagination to the ways in which he could exploit the scene for industry and tourism. This marked indifference to beauty is important because it shows that the nineteenth-century American did not spend his limited leisure time in the pursuit of the sublime or the picturesque. Instead, he spent it focusing on what he considered to be useful pursuits. One could fairly assume that a nineteenth-century American, seeing some aspect in the American landscape he had not seen before, would describe the scene using utilitarian language. He would likely highlight which forces in the landscape might be harnessed for commercial use, and which natural areas would need to be cleared for construction. American restlessness and lack of leisure time sublimated any interest in the sublime.

Trollope argues that Americans do not know how to enjoy their leisure time, so when they visit Niagara, they do not know how best to experience the falls. They look at sketches of the falls rather than at the falls directly behind them. In describing the American leisure class visiting Niagara, Trollope writes that "the effect of fine scenery" is wasted upon these people, "for it is exactly when amongst it, that the most strenuous efforts at elegant nonchalance are perceptible among the young exquisites of the western world" (300). She explains that Americans' lack of leisure time in their commercial lives is the reason for their not properly appreciating Niagara's beauty.

Dickens gives an account of how Americans behave when visiting Niagara Falls, which he calls "Nature's greatest altar" (222). There is a guestbook in a cottage on Table Rock, and on the wall nearest the book, a request is posted: "'Visitors will please not copy or extract the remarks and poetical effusions from the registers and albums kept here'" (222). Dickens reads this book and is shocked to find it "scrawled all over with

the vilest and the filthiest ribaldry that ever human hogs delighted in" (222). It is assumed that he is describing the writings of Americans, whom he and other English writers traveling through America have often associated with hogs. Rather than attempting to write beautiful poetry, these Americans have yet again defiled the landscape by their perceptions and treatment of it.

John Locke articulates these utilitarian pursuits in stating that as "all the Fruits" that Earth "naturally produces…being given for the use of Men, there must of necessity be a means *to appropriate* them some way or other before they can be of any use" (*Property*). In other words, anything existing in nature exists only to be of use to humans. For Americans, Trollop and Dickens would argue, such use applies solely to utility. Matthew Arnold, in *Civilization in the United States*, argues that nineteenth-century American views of usefulness are short-sighted because they ignore what is "interesting" in civilization (1-2). Arnold implies that though America may have wonderful businesses and social institutions, it does not attempt to be interesting. In order for a thing to be interesting, it must not simply be useful; it must excite the higher imagination. Niagara Falls excites the higher imagination of the nineteenth-century English, but for Americans, the falls excites the lower commercial imagination.

Nineteenth-century Americans often praised their own resourcefulness in harnessing the falls' power instead of praising its beauty. The 1896 *Zion Herald* states:

> The utilization of unused forces is the crowning characteristic of the nineteenth century. No power is allowed to run to waste. There was a time when the vast resources of electric power in the Falls of Niagara—power sufficient, it is assumed and asserted by men of science, to light the streets and drive the cars and turn the mill wheels of America—were wasted and lost; but that power is now being harnessed and yoked for service. This splendid economy of the forces of nature is revolutionizing social and commercial life. (732)

Much of the American imagination is one of ingenuity rather than of aesthetic or romantic beauty.

On the other hand, many nineteenth-century Americans worked to restore natural landscape so that America could again appreciate its beauty. The Niagara Falls Preservation Movement, for example, secured government parks on either side of the falls in 1887. The purpose of these parks was to restore natural landscape and to keep industry at bay. Just seven years into the twentieth century, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the leader of this movement, suggested a rethinking of nineteenth-century American utilization of Niagara Falls. He called for the conversion of "a conspicuous manufacturing district that has grown up under stimulus of the narrow commercial individualism of the nineteenth century into a harmonious element in the scene of impressive natural grandeur of the sake of which the public goes to Niagara Falls" ("Function" 359). He goes on to pose the question whose answer often separates the American from the English: "In what way can Niagara be made of the highest service to mankind?" (359). The English would answer that this service is to offer a sublime experience. Americans would be divided between an appreciation of Niagara's beauty, and the falls' potential for generating tourism and industry.

Most nineteenth-century English travelers blamed the Americans for "bad taste and aesthetic insensitivity that were destroying the landscape" (Elizabeth McKinsey "To Be Rendered Useful" 154). Anna Jameson is shocked to see the American treatment of Niagara Falls:

> The Americans have disfigured their share of the rapids with mills and manufactories, and horrid red brick houses, and other unacceptable, unreasonable sights and signs of sordid industry. Worse than all is the round tower, which some profane wretch has erected on the Crescent Fall. . . so detestably impudent and mal-a-propos,…such a signal yet puny monument of bad taste. (qtd. in McKinsey 154)

If Niagara Falls represents the emotional center where nineteenth-century America and England meet, the emotions of the two countries had risen to a tumult that was as violent as the cataract of the falls.

Nineteenth-century American industry took away some, if not much, of Niagara Falls' beauty. The English resented this. Though many Americans valued beauty over industry, Trollope, Dickens, and most of the English believed that the Americans' restless expansion, which had left the American landscape littered with quickly-built factories, mills, housing, and abandoned refuse, demonstrated a complete disregard for aesthetic beauty. The rift of taste between England and America in the nineteenth century was as massive as the Niagara, and each side held strongly to its own way of seeing landscape. It may be that the nineteenth-century English imagination, which often imposed the picturesque and sublime onto the American landscape, will never come together with the American imagination of utilitarian ingenuity. Perhaps the damming of the Niagara River, above the falls, which generates hydroelectric power and works to keep the falls from receding back to Lake Erie, is a contemporary testament to each country's need for metaphysical separation from the other.

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"The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour": Richard Jefferies and the Great Depression of British Agriculture

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> Change and decay are the salient components of the years of depression; neither alone adequately compares and contrasts the rural Britain of the 1870's with that of the 1900's, when a greener but more dilapidated Britain had arisen. It had become a sea (not a desert) of generally extensive farming with islands (not oases) of intensive methods – an agrarian geography of sharpened differences and heightened contrasts. (Perry 141)

In 1870 British agriculture was nearing the end of two decades of prosperity and as a result of increased world supplies, cheaper international produce and poor seasons, the British countryside was forced into a period of depression. For Richard Jefferies, a writer on rural matters, or as he describes himself, "a student of nature and human life" (quoted in Salt 31), the agricultural 'great depression' provided a wealth of material for his essays, pamphlets and novels. Jefferies' texts reveal the author's infatuation with the aesthetic qualities of the British countryside, qualities that become contaminated by the 'great depression', as Jefferies' writing becomes divided between the beauty and the grim realities of life on the land. Jefferies famously wrote: "The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour" ("One of the New Voters" 128), a statement which stresses the continual conflict which runs throughout his writing, a complex opposition between man and nature, which texts such as *The Open Air* (1885), *Hodge and His Masters* (1880) and *The Story of My Heart* (1883) engage.

Merryn Williams remarks of Jefferies: "Nature to him was the source of everything good, without which human beings could be neither moral nor happy, and this feeling accentuated the contrast between the beauty of the countryside and the degradation of the labourers' everyday lives" (35).

In Jefferies' writings labourers are commonly depicted as either "Hodge" (the stereotypical English labourer) or his "Master" (the farmer or landowner), and the education, labour, migration and inconsistencies between the two are highlighted. Perry describes the agrarian geography of British farming as sharpened differences and heightened contrasts (141), yet the same terms may be applied to the style and content of Richard Jefferies' writing. These accentuated contrasts between man and nature, Hodge and Master, and the depiction of the "great depression" will be central to this study, whilst the purpose, reliability and relationship of Jefferies' writings to that of his contemporaries and historical accounts will be considered.

For Richard Jefferies "the wheat is beautiful," but in the period of the "great depression," nature as a whole had a more sinister influence upon life on the land and as an enthusiast of the beauty of nature these negative influences from the natural world create conflict and disorder within his writing. Although a major contributing factor of the "great depression" was competition through cheaper international produce, further hardship was brought to the British farmer through seven years of poor weather from 1875 onwards. In *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* Perren documents these influences:

The long-term decline in cereal prices was masked by a run of bad seasons and poor harvests from 1875, culminating in one of the wettest years on record for 1879. When the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, took a walk in one storm that year and came upon a group of his farmers he asked if "the dove had left the ark yet" (7). Jefferies recurrently describes the "untraceable maze of beauty" ("Wild Flowers" 64) and splendour of the agricultural landscape, but through the "great depression" he is

forced to consider the threat from this beauty." In "Wild Flowers" he establishes a unity between man and nature. He writes: "So it has ever been to me, by day or by night, summer or winter, beneath trees the heart feels nearer to that depth of life" (62), yet in *The Story of My Heart* an obstruction has been placed between the two:

> There is nothing human in nature. The earth, though loves so dearly, would let me perish on the ground, and neither bring forth food or water. Burning in the sky the great sun, of whose company I have been so fond, would merely burn on and make no motion to assist me (61).

Further in this text Jefferies describes animals as being "anti-human" (64), yet Jefferies at times reflects nature as generally being "anti-human" as he emphasises the destructive capabilities of the climate and seasonal contrasts. Jefferies refers to the "great sun" in "Golden Brown," the aptly titled narrative of two women fruit pickers. Within the story, the sun permanently taints the skin of the two women as they labour; creating a natural tattoo that identifies them with the field. The face of the eldest is described as "torn and scarred by time and weather; wrinkled, and in a manner twisted like the fantastic turns of a gnarled tree-trunk, hollow and decayed" (23). In "The Downs" the narrator refers to the death of man following the "dread snow-tempest of 1880-81" and concludes: "Such miserable events are of a rare occurrence, but show how open, wild, and succourless the country still remains" (201-202) as the seasonal contrasts which characterised the "great depression" are reflected. Perry concludes: "Whatever were the basic causes of the depression, those most closely caught up in it were strongly inclined to stress the part played by adverse seasons" (54). Jefferies identifies and stresses this, and further implicates the unforgiving nature of the natural world as a cause of the depression. Perhaps the most striking contrast to the "beautiful wheat" is most notable in "The Idle Earth" in which Jefferies writes: "the fatal truth is that moderate farms do not pay because the earth is idle a third of the year" (211). The word "idle" implicates the land as redundant and passive and provides a stark contrast

to the troubled and active life of the labourer, as the relationship between man and nature becomes increasingly turbulent. In his autobiography *The Story of My Heart,* Jefferies emphases this notion:

> There is nothing human in the whole round of nature. All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass. If the entire human race perished at this hour, what difference would it make to the earth? What would the earth care? (62).

In his attempt to document the "great depression" Perry frequently refers to the "burden of the land" (60), a contemporary euphemism for rates, taxes, and tithe in the period, yet within Jefferies' texts the "burden of the land" is not merely economic influences but surely the destructive influences of the natural world, as the beauty of the wheat develops a more threatening character.

During the "great depression," as a reaction to the adverse seasons and foreign competition, many British farmers moved into the fresh milk trade where there was no threat from abroad (Perren 13), yet within Jefferies' writing, animals are portrayed as unhelpful beings. In *The Story of My Heart*, animals as described as being "so distinctly opposite and anti-human" (64). There is a sense of irony in this, as livestock farming appears to have been a safer trade in the period as there were far more options open to the animal farmer than to the growers of wheat. Jefferies does indeed recognize the benefits of dairy farming and reflects in *The Hill and the Vale* that "nearby lives a dairy farmer…this tenant does good work, both for himself and for laborers, the landlord, and the country" (144), yet Jefferies goes on to mock the influx of dairy farming in *Hodge and his Masters*. He writes: "the draper said he was just going to sell off the business and go into dairy farming, which was the most paying thing out," yet as the narrative continues the draper looses all his money and ends up "tramping the country" (22). Ironically, Jefferies thinks that the "wheat is beautiful" and animals are

"anti-human" but in the "great depression" surely these roles are reversed and if animals are "antihuman" then it takes an experienced agricultural labourer (the Hodge which is contrastingly mocked and defended by Jefferies) to achieve success and survive.

If the "idle earth- on which man dwells, has a much easier time of it" ("Idle Earth" 207) then what Hodge and his Master experienced whilst laboring upon it must be considered. The agricultural laborer or "Hodge" as he is known is a complex and highly documented character, not only by Jefferies but also by Thomas Hardy in *The Dorsetshire Labourer* (1883). As Pugh states: "The story of Hodge in the nineteenth century is not a happy one" (54) and representations of him by both writers reflect this hardship. In Jefferies' "The Wiltshire Labourer" "Hodge" is described "as the most peaceful of all men" (268) and in "One of the New Voters' Jefferies gives Hodge a name by introducing Roger the reaper for whom, "Trust is dead; Bad Pay killed him" (117). Roger's life is depicted as a cycle of labor, beer and sleep amid the picturesque landscape, a revealing piece which concludes with "behind these beautiful aspects comes the reality of human labor – hours upon hours of heat and strain; there comes the reality of a rude life, and in the end little enough of the gain" (132). In his study of the English rural laborer of the late nineteenth century, Fussell argues, "The position of the farm laborer had indeed become so serious that it was time that something was done to improve it. Nobody was in any doubt of his evil condition, and many were exercised about it" (95). It could be argued that rural critics such as Jefferies and Hardy formed part of this "many" and did seek reform for "Hodge" by documenting his conditions. Hardy remarks of Hodge that, "misery and fever lurk in his cottage, while, to paraphrase the words of a recent writer on the laboring classes, in his future there are only the workhouse and the grave" (252). It is firmly believed that Hardy is referring to Jefferies here but unlike Jefferies; Hardy states he is strongly against the stereotyping of "Hodge." He criticizes: "But when the class lies somewhat out of the ken of ordinary

society the caricature begins to be taken as truth" (252). Ironically, Hardy takes this standpoint and then moves on in his text to do just that. However, the stereotyping of Hodge appears unavoidable and a purposeful technique in the critique of the "great depression" and those it affected.

Writing on Jefferies, Raymond Williams states: "For all his claims of a fair and impartial spirit, Jefferies was no neutral observer. At times, clearly, he wrote what his readers wanted to hear" (194). In light of Williams' claims, the representation of Hodge and its reliability must be questioned. In relation to documenting the consistency of sources from the "great depression," Perry states:

The period just beyond living memory is a notoriously difficult one for the scholar; objective truth and uncertain hearsay recollection are confused and intertwined: documentary material is abundant, but it is uneven in quality, and access is sometimes restricted (13).

Both Jefferies' and Hardy's depiction of Hodge and Master do indeed reflect this "uncertain recollection" which is frequently "confused and intertwined." Initial confusions can be made between Jefferies' Roger the reaper from "One of the New Voters' and a letter written to *The Times*. In "One of the New Voters" Jefferies sympathies tend to lean towards the Hodge-like character of Roger, as opposed to the Master-like character of John Bull. "Jovial John Bull" is criticized by Jefferies: "offering his men a bucket of oatmeal liquor is not a pleasant one. Such a John Bull ought to be ashamed of himself" (118). In contrast, in his letter to *The Times*, Jefferies writes: "I can confidently say that there is no class of persons in England who receive so many attentions and benefits from their superiors as the agricultural labourers" (quoted in Looker 87). Similarly in *Hodge and His Masters*, which should perhaps be renamed "Hodge versus Master," Jefferies takes the side of the Master continually criticizing Hodge. Correspondingly, the representation in "Field Play" contradicts the earlier view of laborers as "the most peaceful of all men" ("The Wiltshire Labourer" 268) as Dolly, a

young laboring girl, is physically and mentally tortured by her fellow laborers and depictions of rural peace and unity are quashed. He writes: "It is difficult to convey an adequate idea of the desultory nature of village life. There is an utter lack of any kind of cohesion, a total absence of any common interest, or social bond of union ("Field Play" 23).

Jefferies is not alone is this contradictive manner as Hardy too in *The Dorsetshire Labourer* contributes to the stereotypes he is aiming to avoid. He states: "Hodge is a degraded being of uncouth manner and aspect, stolid and understanding, and snail-like movement" and "Hodge hangs his head or looks sheepish when spoken to, and thinks Lunnon a place paved with gold" (252). In *Richard Jefferies: Man of the fields* Looker argues:

If we are compelled to note a certain lack of sympathetic feeling in Jefferies' attitude towards the lower animals, we can claim on the other hand that no recent writer has more humanely and powerfully exposed the injustice, and furthermore the danger, of the harsh treatment accorded by society (83). Looker's defense of Jefferies and contradictive argument, alike to the representation of Hodge reflects the multifaceted nature of the "great depression." Perry warns, "there is no single chronology for the depression" (39) and similarly there appears no chronology of Jefferies' views. Perhaps his later work does demonstrate a more mature and reflective manner, but his views throughout remain inconsistent.

Both Jefferies and Hardy treat the laborer in the "great depression" in divergent ways. They criticize his manner and lifestyle, yet as developments to Hodge's status were made, one would presume that their response would be positive. The 1867, 1884 and 1885 Reform Acts gave the vote to most agricultural laborers and education was increasing, as "the peasant was educating into a man" (Williams 20). The 1870 Education Act, assisted compulsory education and near universal literacy and for Hardy in *The Dorsetshire Labourer*, he reflects positively: "language instead of being a

vile corruption of cultivated speech, was a tongue with a grammatical inflection" (254). Similarly in "The Wiltshire Labourer" Jefferies remarks on the improvements but not without a negative observation: "the Wiltshire labourers have only moved in two things - education and discontent" (252). Perry proposes that: "Literacy enhanced the selective character of rural depopulation, strengthened the position of the rural agitator, and in many cases exacerbated already uncertain personal relationships between master and man" (17). Arguably, the education of Hodge which Jefferies strove for, does not satisfy and adds to the "great depression." Jefferies acknowledges:

Education increases the struggle for more wages. Knowledge adds to man's social stature, and he immediately becomes desirous of innumerable trifles which, in ancient days, would have been deemed luxuries, but which now seem very commonplace ("The Wiltshire Labourer" 254). For Jefferies "human life is labor" but as an enhanced life was becoming a possibility through increased education and voting, the agricultural laborer began to migrate to the towns and cities in search of better work. Merryn Williams summarizes:

> the agricultural labourers had shown quite clearly that they refused to stay on the land if there was any alternative. The growth of industrial towns had offered them better-paid jobs; railway had given them a means of leaving their native villages, and education – it was claimed- had made them dissatisfied with their conditions. (1)

Jefferies considers the migration of rural laborers in "The Wiltshire Labourer," from the view of a laborer, he writes: "We cannot stay if a chance offers us to receive wages from any railway, factory or enterprise; if wages are offered to us in the United States, there we must go" as the laborer feels "the push of the world" (252). The necessity for migration not only to towns and cities but also abroad, reflects how the laborer appears rejected by the beauty of his homeland and essentially neglected by his own government. Jefferies remarks: "It is only at home that the agricultural labor is

despised" ("The Wiltshire Labourer" 267). Similarly in *The Dorsetshire Labourer* Hardy reflects his pessimistic view of "Hodge's" migration and its effect, stating: "But picturesqueness apart, a result of this increasing nomadic habit of the labourer is, naturally, a less intimate and kindly relation with the land and hills that existed before" (263). Hardy reflects that migration can be negative upon the laborer's behavior: "With the uncertainty of residence often comes a laxer morality, and more cynical views of the duties of life. Domestic stability is a factor in conduct which nothing else can equal" (264). For Jefferies the lover of nature and Hardy, the critique on Village life, migration is reflected as a forced and negative element of the "great depression" and ironically, it is partly caused by the very improvements that they strove for.

In *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1867-1927*, Allen considers the effect of the "great depression" upon other sectors. He writes: "Between 1851 and 1891, the percentage of males over the age of 10 employed in agriculture and fishing declined in the country of Norfolk from 48 percent to 34 percent in response to increasing new world competition" (29).

As Allen's statistics demonstrate, fisherman, like the agriculture laborer, were also affected by the great depression. Jefferies' own description of British fisherman is similar to that of the agricultural Hodge. In "Sunny Brighton" Jefferies depicts a group of unemployed fisherman. He describes them stating: "they look down at the site of the fish market…hands in their pockets" as "no man in this world knows how to absolutely do-nothing, like a fisherman" (78). In contrast to the British fishermen Jefferies writes: "far away a French fishing lugger is busy enough" as British boats "are idle"(78). Once again the word idle is emphasized; yet this time it is associated with a nation rather than the land. Shrewdly Jefferies moves on to consider the "trumpeting" of the Fisheries Exhibition in London of the same period. Rather ironically the exhibition of 1883 that celebrated fishing appears to have ignored the problem that Jefferies is documenting in "Sunny Brighton." Thomas Huxley, president of the *Royal Society and Inspector of*

Fisheries in his *Inaugural Address* to the Fisheries Exhibition declared: "there are few means of enterprise that present better chances of profit than our sea fisheries. And it is satisfactory to reflect that the sea which shuts us in, at the same time opens up its supplies of food of almost unlimited extent" (1). In contrast, in "Sunny Brighton" there has been no herrings for two years, and it appears any profit that is made by British fisherman is found by sending their fish to Paris. Jefferies ponders "It is fifty miles to London, and 250 to Paris; how then can this be?" (80). Jefferies is able to reflect upon steam navigation, the reduced price of ocean freight and taxes and furthermore their effect upon the British fisherman. These developments in shipping are represented negatively and passionately by Jefferies, and he returns to the topic in "Red Roofs of London." Within this narrative ships possess an almost hypnotic power over the narrator: "Masts are always dreamy to look at" (275). Jefferies goes on to allude to the masts as trees: "Ever and again the sunshine gleams now on this group of masts, now on that; for they stand in groups as trees often grow" (275). The allusion to trees could be reflecting the destroying of British agriculture by ships from abroad, and the fruit on the land is recreated on the sea. Although the ships appear to have appealed to the narrator in "Red Roofs of London," this is surely not Jefferies contradicting himself, but may be an attempt to reflect the temperament of Huxley and his companions in London, who appear hypnotized by the excitement of a new age of shipping, while ignoring its effect upon the British agricultural laborer and fisherman.

To recognize the depiction of the "great depression" in Jefferies' work is to consider the sharpened differences and heightened contrasts of the wheat and labor, man and nature, and Hodge and Master, yet the overall depiction is of the rural landscape as a overlooked place. Perry states: "The countryside could easily be forgotten: Irish home rule, the navy, India, the increasing power in international competitors, were evidently more interesting and more important topics" (17). Within this forgotten landscape, the stereotype of Hodge appears to have been continually

distorted and the effects of a reduction in shipping taxes upon agricultural laborers and fisherman have been ignored. Perhaps an adequate example of this neglect is in "One of the New Voters" as Roger the reaper compares himself to an Englishman in India: "In India our troops are carefully looked after in the hot weather, and everything is made as easy for them as possible; without care and special clothing and coverings for the head they could not long endure" (125). In contrast, he considers the English laborer: "the English simoon of heat drops suddenly on the heads of the harvesters and finds them entirely unprepared; they have not so much as a cooling drink ready; they face it, as it were unarmed (125). Conclusively in Jefferies' writing "life is labor" and not just at home but abroad, but the depression which Hodge and his companions are experiencing appears masked by seemingly more important topics of the day. As Jefferies wrote in "The Wiltshire Labourer," "The village feels it, but the world does not see it" (250). Both Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy were major contributors to the social history of rural England, yet their depiction of the Hodge in this period reflects a conflict between sympathy, pity and repulsion in his behavior and lifestyle. Their calls for advancement appear to only enhance the depression for the laborer. Rather surprisingly Jefferies never uses the term "depression" or refers to the "great depression" in his work, although he is evidently a powerful critic on its elements. For Jefferies "The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour" yet within "the years of bad seasons, falling prices, and troubles of all kinds" ("Rural Dynamite" 31), the wheat becomes a literal and symbolic damaged produce.

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Two Poems by Noel Sloboda

Transport
Through swiping wipers,
he glimpses Ranamin.
Once he hits the pitted lot,
he realizes he is bound
for another Ramada Inn,
a night sealed in
yellow sheets,
heat on high,
not enough
to warm his feet.

"Should've figured," he sighs.
Why, he wonders,
is he so susceptible
to tricks of half light?
Margaret insists
a new prescription is needed
for stronger lenses. Rose,
not so sure, wonders if
that would make a difference.
She thinks he needs something
else, maybe new contacts.

Any Other Word
In a word Shakespeare lied
any other word is false
only one can be so sweet
a letter changes a word
into a world; not some tail
pinned blindly on a donkey
that is reality; a word is
action in conception, feet
about to tread upon snow
pierce the white sugar glaze
expose brown muck beneath.

Going Up Home

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I am sitting with my grandmother in the respite care facility where she will stay for the next ten days. We are sitting close together so I can help her with a word search puzzle that we have brought along to keep her occupied. Mostly I am diverting her attention from my mom who is sorting my grandmother's clothing. Although we have told my grandmother that she will be staying here for a few days, she hasn't grasped that fact yet. When she does grasp it, if she understands why my mom is placing clothes in a strange closet, there will be a scene. Possibly a scene involving flailing fists aimed at my mom. It's best to keep her quiet until the moment when we can slip away and my grandmother can devote her full attention to the word puzzle. Senility has all but transformed my grandmother's loving personality.

I speculate about this thing that robbed her of her mind. Was it something sudden, like a fall into a well? Or was it a creeping darkness, like an eclipse? I think back on the times from my own childhood when I saw her as an active, vibrant woman, the someone before the darkness set in. On some days I think the changes in her occurred gradually. On some days I would say the woman I recognize as my grandmother has undergone an eclipse. On other days, I think the change happened overnight. In the movies or in silly books, one character might say to another, "something just snapped."

Before the darkness, she went back home every summer to Pennsylvania. "Going up home" she called it. My sisters and I often accompanied her on these trips back in time, seated next to Meme, as we called her, in a jay-blue Studebaker. Our destination in Pennsylvania was a place called Duke Center, my grandmother's hometown, the place she remembers above all others. A town like so many others in Pennsylvania, Duke

Center sits in a valley between Allegheny mountain ridges, laced by a small creek and crisscrossed with oil drilling and logging tracks.

In those days, as the era of Pennzoil waned, the land was populated with mantis-like oil pumps, rusted iron frames slaved to a powerhouse through a network of impossibly long rods. These rods were everywhere, sometimes sawing away at the floor of the woods, sometimes cut through the middle of tree trunks, sometimes set above a roadway. They worked back and forth, back and forth, moving the arms of the pumps. If you followed the rods far enough you could find the powerhouse that ran the pumps. Inside the powerhouse was a huge flywheel driving a circle of bent connecting rods. The rods twisted every which way, all haywire, a medusa gone mad. And everywhere, in everything, on everything was the smell and patina of crude. The perfume of Duke Center. This year was special. "They're going to cap a well," Meme explained. It sounded mysterious, like a ritual from my grandmother's childhood. That summer, my sister and I would witness the event, though capping wells in the old way by blowing them up was becoming rare.

With such rich images imprinted on my grandmother's memory it is no wonder she remembers with better clarity the days she spent in her beloved hills than the days she spent as a schoolteacher in Ohio. The associations of place are powerful springs of memory, as the ancients well knew. The ancient art of memory depended upon rich connections with *loci*, memory places, places where mental images were cataloged for recall. Training in the *ars memorativa* was part of an orator's schooling in both Greek and Roman schools of rhetoric. Before printed texts became the receptacles of information, when an impressive library consisted of perhaps twelve books, when books were copied by hand for the very rich, the ancient mind was an encyclopedic collection built upon architectonics of imprinted sensations. Pupils were taught to select a building, including statues and passageways, using its structure as the foundation for an architectural mnemonic. Parts of a speech were placed in these memory rooms. During

an oration, the orator walked through his mental *loci*, recalling the images placed there (Yates7-8).

Orator acted upon the ideas placed in mental *loci*, made them compelling and memorable by adding visual details that would be easy to see in the mind's eye. Instruction on memory from the ancient rhetorical handbook, *Ad Herennium*, advises students to create astonishing mental images:

> We ought, then to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active (*imagines agentes*); if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking. . . (III, xxii).

According to Frances A. Yates' seminal work on memory, the ancient *images agentes* were dramatis personae, gesticulating like actors on a stage. Indeed, some memory treatises placed the art of memory within the *loci* of a theater. Other memory systems located remembering within a wheel. Or in heaven or hell. To the ancients, memory was dramatic, dynamic, under the influence—of the divine or the demonic, take your pick. It was certainly something radically different from the modern conception of memory as a kind of storage box that can get misplaced during spring cleaning.

My grandmother's memory loss seems to be more of the dramatic kind where the actors on the stage have taken over the play. Indeed, the *imagines agentes* of my grandmother's past seem to be gesticulating to her across a great gulf, supplicating, speaking.

My grandmother sees dead people.

Once, when I stayed over night at my grandmother's house while my grandfather was in the hospital, I was cooking breakfast. While I fried eggs in an iron skillet, the kind cartoon characters conk people on the head with, my grandmother came into the kitchen, breathless, saying, "I've looked upstairs and downstairs and I can't find mama anywhere."

I have seen my grandmother walk up and down in our upstairs hallway, pushing her walker ahead of her. I have seen her pause in her haunted perambulations, turn around in the shadowy hallway to glance behind her saying, "Well I've been looking *all over* for you. What? I can't hear what you're saying."

For my grandmother, the dead are alive and speaking. From what I have observed about my grandmother, the ancient notions about memory seem to be more accurate, more substantial than those we hold today. My grandmother's memory rooms were formed in Duke Center, Pennsylvania. The memories she calls up are from that *loci*. Unfortunately, those memory rooms don't work for her life with us in Ohio.

Once, when I was growing up, Meme gave me a photo album. That year for Christmas she had given me an instamatic camera and she wanted to help me keep track of the first batch of pictures I had taken. This was in the days before photo albums had vinyl sleeves, back in the days when albums were more like scrapbooks and you had to use corner tabs to put keep your photos in place.

Meme opened the dark pages of an empty album and showed me how to use the red corner tabs to mount each picture. The corner tabs were gummed on the back and I had to lick them in order to make them stick. Gluing down each corner was tedious and frustrating. I could never get the pictures straight.

My first photos were of our family trip to Hawaii that year. There were snapshots of my sisters wearing moo-moos in the International Marketplace, my brother snorkeling at Hanama Bay, my cousin on a Honda moped.

"You'll want to be sure to write underneath each picture the names of the people and where the picture was taken," Meme advised, though it seemed unlikely that I would ever forget our family's trip to Hawaii. I said as much. "You'd be surprised at how quickly you forget," Meme replied.

I still have the photo album and look through it from time to time. It strikes me as a supreme irony that the very thing I labored over—ordering all the images so as to ward off the effects of time—was eventually sabotaged by time. All the corner tabs have come loose. Whenever I open the album, pictures of the Aloha tower in Honolulu airport and pictures of Seaworld of San Diego come spilling out, mixing together. Dolphins jump through hoops next to white gravestones of Punchbowl Cemetery. Two family vacations, two different years all jumbled together in a hodgepodge with dried out red corner tabs still attached to the corners of my photos but not to the album pages.

This must be what my grandmother feels every waking moment. Hiking up on the hill, swinging on a homemade swing, picking lupines, living in Duke Center – the corner tabs of her memories have all come loose. She hasn't lost them; they have just come unglued and when she remembers, all of them come at once. So, in a way, her memory loss is like losing the corner tabs on her mental *loci*.

This was the summer we would get to see Pennzoil cap a well. The drillers and pipe fitters were working on a site not too far from where we were staying at my great-grandfather's place. The road to the well site ran past the house my great-grandfather had ordered from a Sears catalog. This was the summer we would experience something of my grandmother's childhood.

We walked part of the way to the well site. It was a hot day in July, so hot the orange jewelweed at the side of the logging track had wilted. Thankfully, Uncle Tom came by in his mud-spattered Jeep and offered a ride. Uncle Tom was a jolly man, somewhat of a rogue. He worked for Pennzoil. Like a happy Vulcan at his forge, Tom

fired up the powerhouse on the lease and started ‘er up every morning at 5:00 AM.

Uncle Tom picked us up in his jeep, arriving at a clearing in the woods the center of which was deeply scarred with tracks from the drilling rig and trucks. Men in hardhats conferred with men seated in the cabs of Jeeps. Uncle Tom joined the group of men. There wasn’t much to see except for a bald spot in the woods where there had been some trees now reduced to a few scattered woodchips.

Eventually Uncle Tom came over to us.

“Better move back,” he warned. “They’re dropping the nitro.”

“What’s nitro?” I asked.

“Nitro glycerin,” Meme explained. “They drop it down into the well and it blows away all the rocks and dirt so the oil can come up.”

It sounded fun. Dangerous. I wanted to drop some nitroglycerin. I expected to see something like a container with the letters TNT painted on it like in a Road Runner cartoon. I couldn’t tell when the nitro glycerin actually fell into the well shaft, but I knew when it took effect. It produced a low rumble somewhere directly beneath my feet. The rumble rose to a crescendo. At the center of the clearing, a spray of large rocks shot straight into the air about 50 feet, then a white plume of water, then an anguished gush of creamy black crude. Petals of oil spattered down onto the leaves of the woods around us. The geyser sounded furious about rising to the surface after so many millennia of peace and quiet. When the crude started to flow, the men burst into a frenzy of effort to stem the tide. The crude was capped and cupped, a first step toward the gas tanks of a million jay-blue Studebakers.

On some days, I think whatever happened to my grandmother’s memory happened like the dropping of nitro into a Pennzoil well. The rupture in her mind must have been as sudden, as irreversible as the geyser of crude that came out of the Pennsylvania hills.

I think I know when that was.

It was a November day, before I was born, in a time that I have heard about, speculated about. I find remnants of that time scattered throughout my grandmother's house. A boy had lived there once, a young boy who dreamed of Dick Tracy and had collected pictures of airplanes from World War II. I find traces of him everywhere. In the black and white movie he shot of his bees working in and out of the beehive he made. In the maple tree he planted in my grandmother's backyard. In the photographs my grandmother has of my mom when she was a little girl and of the spaniel named Taffy and of a younger brother. Of Richard. He looks out at me from the gold frames of the photos that line my grandmother's mantel. It seems he has the same color of eyes as mine, though it is hard to tell because the photos are black and white, as if he prefers to hang back in the world of gray and silver.

It was a November day. Maybe dark with the threat of snow. A November day that, in Ohio at least, retains the scent and feel of summer but is cold with the portent of arctic air. It is late afternoon. Richard shrugs into his winter coat, heads across a stubbled field toward the woods along the creek not far from home. His mother, my grandmother, is teaching at Longfellow Junior High School. She teaches English – Homer and the great poets. Keats. A book is open in her hand as she writes the title of the poem on the board. "Ode on a Grecian Earn."

Richard crosses Wales Road. No school today. At least not for him. He has the day off to go hunting. The weight of the barrel presses into the flesh of shoulder. Even through his jacket he can feel the weight of it. She can feel the weight of the book in her palm, the page open to Keats' famous ode about youth and immortality.

"'Fair youth,'" she reads aloud, pausing to make the stanzas sound beautiful, as poetry ought to be read, "'Fair youth beneath the trees, thou canst not leave Thy song, no ever can those trees be bare.'"

He crosses the field, stepping between rows of broken corn stalks. Bright grain has spilled across the earth. Here. There. The squirrels have been busy, he sees.

"'Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu; And, happy melodist, unwearied, For ever piping songs for ever new.'"

No one knows what really happened. There was an investigation. A police report. A ruling called it An Accident. When Richard failed to show up for dinner, when phone calls to friends and neighbors failed to produce him, the police were summoned.

He died in the woods on a November afternoon. The police said it was a hunting accident. It was the blast that rocked my grandmother's world.

I try to imagine what she did, how she survived after the news came crashing into her life, how she coped with the loss of a son. An only son. The apple of her eye.

She must have gone up home in her mind a million times, consoling herself in the memories of happy moments there, of sunny walks with Richard through leafy hills, her "fair youth, beneath the trees." She must have seen him like that in her mind. "Thou canst not leave thy song."

I sit with her, waiting for my mom to finishing hanging the housecoat and sweaters we have brought. My mom tries to stay hidden behind the narrow closet door so my grandmother can't see what she is doing with the clothes. A nurse has come by to strap an alarm around my grandmother's ankle because, as we have found out by experience, when we leave her at the respite care for a few day, my grandmother will try to escape, will try to drive back to Duke Center. Back to Papa's house. In her mind she needs to "go up home."

On days like this I believe that our notions of dementia and memory loss are completely inadequate. My grandmother has not suffered a memory *loss*.. She seems

lost *to* her memories. They have taken her hostage. Nitro in a well. A bullet to the brain brought down her son; but it also brought down a mother, a woman full of Pennsylvania sunshine whose inner eyes see spectres that gesture to her from a shadowy stage. She sees dead people, but, remarkably, Richard is not in the cast of characters that she sees. "Is Richard dead?" she asks, even though she already knows the answer.

As I sit beside her now, I try to locate the woman who was my grandmother, the woman who taught me how to touch coiled jewelweed to trigger a spray of fall seeds. The one who taught me to listen for the sea in a conch shell, to love toads and granite rocks and white clouds. How do I draw her back from the memories that overwhelm her?

As I sit beside her, I silently wish for her a forgetting to remember instead of remembering to forget.

Beyond the Postmodern Long Poem:
Campbell McGrath's "The Bob Hope Poem"

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> I have found in Marxism all that I need –
> (I on my mother's side of long-lived Scottish peasant stock
> And on my father's of hardy keen-brained Border mill-workers).
> It only remains to perfect myself in this new mode. (218)

Hugh MacDiarmid published these lines in 1943 in *Further Passages from "The Kind of Poetry I Want*," an extension of the expansive poetic project which came to include the massive *In Memoriam James Joyce*. MacDiarmid's commitment to Marxist doctrine proceeded from his assumption that he could adopt a system of thought which would alleviate the social problems he saw around him. In the last two decades of the twentieth-century and into the new millennium, the American poet Campbell McGrath has extended the Marxist project which figures like the Scottish MacDiarmid championed, but the nature of the Marxist inquiry differs considerably. MacDiarmid remains an unacknowledged precursor to poets like McGrath, due to MacDiarmid's unjustified critical neglect in the U.S. In *Repression and Recovery*, Cary Nelson has shown that, historically, Marxist poets in the U.S. were intentionally marginalized. It became accepted that outstanding poets like Thomas McGrath (not related to Campbell), whose long poem *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* has only recently been collected as a whole (1997), were categorically denied critical attention or academic positions because of their political commitments.[1]

[1] See Sam Hamill's Preface to *Letter* for a discussion of McGrath's blacklisting (i).

But Campbell McGrath's poetry stands apart from the High Modernism of MacDiarmid, or the Late Modernism of Thomas McGrath. Campbell McGrath has been engaged in a project which is at once both Postmodernist and post-Postmodernist (as problematic a term as that seems). I'll attempt to delimit what I mean by this distinction as I go on, particularly as I see it being enacted in the centerpiece of McGrath's 1996 book *Spring Comes to Chicago,* the complex long work entitled "The Bob Hope Poem." As McGrath's third collection, *Spring Comes to Chicago* recapitulates many of the themes that dominate his two earlier volumes, *Capitalism* (1990) and *American Noise* (1993). "The Bob Hope Poem" follows those books by continuing McGrath's analysis of contemporary culture, particularly America's preoccupation with wealth and materialism. Not only does the long poem mark the apex of McGrath's early lyric style before his verse modulated into the prose poems of *Road Atlas* (1999) (in fact many of the very long lines in "The Bob Hope Poem" seem quite close to prose already), but it also illustrates a further step in the development of the American long poem, an institution that began, for all intents and purposes, with Walt Whitman's 1855 edition of "Song of Myself" and continued in Modernist and Postmodernist incarnations.

Indeed, McGrath's poem owes a debt to Whitman's, and he pays this debt in "The Bob Hope Poem" by directly quoting Whitman.[2] Roy Harvey Pearce noted in 1961 that Whitman created "an American equivalent of an epic" (83). More recently, Jeffrey Walker has analyzed the rhetorical tradition initiated by Whitman and imitated by Modernist long poem writers. Thomas Gardner has chronicled Whitman's influence on a number of contemporary poets of the long poem such as James Merrill and John Ashbery. Whitman's poem reveals a capaciousness which Margaret Dickie sees at the core of Modernism. She writes, "what is American Modernism? It is the long writing of the long poem." (162). She decides the long poem is "long in the time of composition,

[2] Joel Brouwer contests McGrath's similarity to Whitman in his essay-review "Accordion Music and Raw Profusion," although Brouwer's frame of reference does not appear to be the tradition of the American long poem.

in the initial intention, and in the final form" (6). McGrath works within this tradition, one which places value on epic ambitions, but also adopts a lyrical approach, as Charles Altieri notes: "[t]he most distinctive feature of the Modernist long is the desire to achieve epic breadth by relying on structural principles inherent in lyric rather than narrative modes" (653). With its long lines, lyrical intensity, but gesture toward epic breadth, McGrath's poem clearly follows in the tradition of the long poem in America in the twentieth-century.

Other studies of the long poem include M.L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall's *Modern Poetic Sequence* which prefers to speak of "sequences" rather than "long poems," as well as Michael André Bernstein's evaluation of the "epic" in Modernist American poetry. Specific treatments of Postmodern long poems – the immediate predecessors McGrath's builds from – include Joseph Conte's book on experimental poets and, more recently, Brian McHale's *Obligation Toward the Difficult Whole*, a work focusing on a more varied collection of poets than Conte's study, but one that addresses the generation prior to McGrath's and thus does not examine "The Bob Hope Poem."

Viewing "The Bob Hope Poem" as the inheritor of Modernist and Postmodernist versions of the long poem opens up many useful interpretive possibilities. The poem reflects the intense allusiveness and astute erudition typically associated with Modernist works such as Eliot's "The Waste Land," Williams' *Paterson*, and Pound's *The Cantos*, as David Haven Blake has pointed out, while retaining the edgy humor and ironic self-awareness evident in Postmodern long poems such as John Berryman's *The Dream Songs*, Ashbery's "The Skaters," Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, or Armand Schwerner's *The Tablets*. McGrath's "Bob Hope Poem" covers much ground, moving among discussions of history (of Chicago, of the US), nature (especially the squirrels who playfully scurry around the poet's yard through the course of the poem), and American materialism (particularly as it is figured in contemporary popular culture). It proceeds by using epigraphs or quotes, sometimes even found materials, as

sources for meditations on life in the United States in the late twentieth-century. David Biespiel points out that, "[a]bove all, *Spring Comes to Chicago* is a descendant of the William Carlos Williams of *Paterson* – not stylistically, but in its ambition to define the nation by exploring our history and symbolism."

The United States that McGrath encounters, however, is one that Williams might have trouble recognizing. This is a country where mass-produced popular culture is dominant, one where its citizens like McGrath cannot imagine life before media-saturation. Unlike Postmodern poets such as Edward Dorn or Kenneth Koch who self-consciously integrate popular culture motifs into their long poems – 60's TV and movie Westerns in Dorn's *Gunslinger* and Disney characters in Koch's *Seasons on Earth* – McGrath takes popular culture as a given factor of contemporary existence. In terms of structure, the work is composed of six parts (recalling also *Paterson*) and its ruminations are presented while its speaker awaits the return of his wife, Elizabeth, on a single snowy Chicago day. This meditative approach to structuring the long poem is similar to Anglo-Welsh poet David Jones' Late Modernist work *The Anathemata* which details the thoughts that occupy its speaker as he attends a Catholic Mass. As McGrath's title implies, the poem uses Bob Hope – its speaker finds an article on him in a *People* magazine – as the locus for his study of America of the past and present.

As might be expected from a poet as relatively young as McGrath (he was born in 1962), the ghosts of past literary figures loom large over "The Bob Hope Poem."[3] Not only does McGrath make explicit reference to outstanding achievements of American literature which his own poem enters dialogue with (*The Cantos*, *Paterson*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Moby-Dick*, and *U.S.A*, for instance, are cited in the fifth section of the "Hope" poem), but he also casts himself in the role of the public poet based on figures like Whitman, Carl Sandburg, and Allen Ginsberg. The commercialism which began to

[3] See Joel Brouwer's biographical sketch, "About Campbell McGrath."

pervade American culture in Sandburg's time (his long poem *The People, Yes* is a strong indictment of the new commercialism in face of past folk culture) and which Charles Olson spends a good deal of *The Maximus Poems* decrying, becomes the center of McGrath's struggle in his own long poem. The speaker asks himself (and us), "Am I a stooge of the popular culture machine? // I want it / all! I want / it all. I / want it all?" He concludes, "I am a veritable / Walt Whitman / of ambivalence." McGrath is aware of the privileged social status being a poet brings him, however, and concedes that "ambivalence / is a luxury / affordable to few, while // utopianism / is an American tradition!" (*Spring* 46). Inclusiveness, the modus operandi of Whitman's long poem, is undone by late twentieth-century Capitalism – only a "few" are awarded the "luxury" of "ambivalence." "Ambivalence" is indeed the best word to describe the mood of McGrath's poem as the speaker negotiates his conflicting feelings about his culture.

Charles Olson's work offers a useful contrast to McGrath's. Olson, in one version of postwar poetic lineage, is seen as a prototypical Postmodernist.[4] Compare the high rhetoric and extreme feeling of Olson's rejection of what he saw as the homogenous nature of American commercialism with the cooler tone and specialized vocabulary of McGrath's commentary on chain-store commodity fetishism: "What was Main / street are now / fake gasoline station / and A&P supermarket / construction / the fake / which covers the emptiness," Olson writes in *The Maximus Poems* (599) as opposed to McGrath:

> Today, I'd as soon shoot myself as shop at Sears!
>
> Today one must navigate daunting loops of expressway misnomers out to
>
> some suburban circumlocution

[4] Witness Olson's place in the important anthology *The Postmoderns*, edited by Donald Allen and George F. Butterick, as well as his position as the opening poet in Norton's current *Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry: Vol.2 Contemporary Poetry*. Olson himself is often credited with being among the first to use the term "postmodern" – see, for example, Charles Jencks' *What is Post-Modernism?* (14).

> in order to ransack the latest jumbo, discount, wholesale Wal- or K- or
>
> What-the-Hey-Mart,
>
> which is not so much a store as a merchandizing organization disguised as
>
> an aircraft hangar lumped full of bulk commodities. (35)

McGrath clearly emphasizes wit over the kind of passionate denouncement Olson offers. The short, truncated lineation of Olson's poem contrasts with the long, "luxurious" lines of McGrath, lines which mimetically gesture to the more relaxed attitude of its speaker, almost a "bourgeois" complacency, in the face of the apparent commodification of America.

But like *The Maximus Poems*, "The Bob Hope Poem" is framed by the personal: the speaker patiently awaits his wife's arrival as snow falls on the Chicago streets. The importance of the individual is itself a convention in American long poems. Like Pound in the *Pisan Cantos*, like Berryman's Henry of *The Dream Songs*, like JM in Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, the personal frames the public, the global by the local -- a key strategy of the long poem initiated by Whitman's apparently autobiographical speaker in "Song of Myself." Conversely, the reification of the "local" in terms of landscape, geography, has a place in the tradition of the long poem as well: Williams and Paterson, New Jersey, Olson and Gloucester, Massachusetts, and, of course, Sandburg and Chicago, the center of American commerce, "Hog Butcher for the World" Sandburg declares (*Complete Poems* 3).

McGrath distinguishes himself from more self-assured Marxists like Hugh MacDiarmid by tempering his examination of the current cultural atmosphere of the United States with self-awareness. McGrath reflects the Neo-Marxist strain of contemporary theory in which older notions of ideology come under scrutiny. This might best be seen in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* where Slavoj Žižek revises Marx:

> The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. And at this level, we are of course far from being post-ideological society. Cynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*. (33)

Here Žižek engages Marx's well-known paradigm of ideology from *Capital*: *"Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es" ("they do not know it, but they are doing it,"* Zizek translates [28]). In Žižek's structure, cynicism may be used – that most Postmodern of attitudes -- to "distance" the individual from the machinations of ideology. Yet attempts to distance the self will always be in vain, because, in the end, even if the individual is conscious of "doing" ideology, s/he is still, nevertheless, doing it. The individual remains inescapably implicated within the larger ideological structure of society.

McGrath knows this. "What's become of us, / America, / our Bob-ness, our Self-Hope? // Do all roads lead to the materialistic apotheosis," he asks (*Spring* 25). McGrath intimates here the lack of agency the average American feels; individuals have lost themselves within the systems – or, to be more precise, never had themselves to start with, interpolated by the system(s). Twice in his poem, McGrath repeats the lines,

> There are systems and there are systems.
> There are systems within systems
> ◊
> There is no system! (21-22; 63)

Despite his desire to reject "system," McGrath finally admits "To understand / America, you must first understand the system" (66). Like any culture, America is structured through an ideological system – or, perhaps more precisely, multiple ideological systems -- which implicates the poet despite any social commentary he may issue forth.

Louis Althusser notes, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (155). McGrath interrogates this very "relationship." Around midway through the poem he offers a number of rhetorical questions which go to the heart of the individual's place in American ideology:

> Materialism is our genius; must we bow down our heads in shame therefore?
> Why apologize for seeking fulfillment in the satiation of our hungers?
> What engine drives human history if not the elevation of physical comfort?
> What other principle conforms to the contours of individual desires?
> Is it not our Jeffersonian right and obligation to pursue the fleeting figure of happiness? (*Spring* 36)

The materialism at the center of the American view of the world, McGrath argues, if not justifiable, is reasonable. "To understand America you must understand the dream," McGrath also says, and understanding this dream implies understanding one's place within the dream, within the materialism of Capitalism (59). One cannot, in other words, proceed from the assumption that a non-materialistic utopia can be achieved, as Marx contended. Instead the need for material goods must be tempered with a self-conscious recognition of the impulse toward materialist excess. Nevertheless, McGrath agrees with Marx that the danger arises with the possibility of individuals becoming functions of commodities; the poem implies that the "materialistic apotheosis" which would contribute to creating our anonymous "Bob-ness" must be avoided.

Balancing his poem between a concession to the necessity of creature comforts on one hand, and a recognition of the seemingly insatiable appetite for commodity and spectacle endemic in American public life on the other, reveals McGrath to be dubious of fully adopting a Marxist perspective. As Jean-François Lyotard argues, Postmodernism may be distinguished by its "incredulity toward metanarratives," one

of which is surely Marxism (xxiv). McGrath's ambivalence toward both Capitalism and Marxism illustrates the position of the current subject, one who is able to identify the problem of ideology, but who is also caught within it and unable to escape. Cynicism may be used in attempt to distance one's self from the problem, as Žižek says, but the ideological structure remains. Nevertheless, the individual is aware that the old metanarratives no longer wield the explanative powers they once did.

McGrath's meditation on "the fleeting figure of happiness" in his poem modulates into a recapitulation of Carl Sandburg's poem "Happiness." Working in picaresque mode, the speaker of Sandburg's poem moves among different echelons of American society, especially those who control cultural capital – "professors," "famous executives," – only to find happiness among "a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and children and a keg of beer and an accordion" (*Spring* 36). This is a populist declaration not surprising to anyone even remotely familiar with Sandburg's work. McGrath responds,

> Yes, Carl, how beautiful
> a poem,
> how telling, how fine.
>
> But can we subsist on a diet of accordion music and raw profusion?
> Is the solace of material enough to sustain us?
> At what cost has it been purchased? (36).

Here McGrath gestures toward a middle ground between the naïve valuation of folk culture over capital – monetary as well as cultural – which Sandburg suggests on the one hand, and recognition that Sandburg is partly right: "happiness" is an abstraction understood differently by different groups.

Sandburg's populism offers no steadfast solution for McGrath. Likewise, America's religious fervor is held with the same skepticism as its materialism in "The

Bob Hope Poem." McGrath cleverly juxtaposes a found religious text with everyday junk mail in the fourth section of his poem:

What if you died today?

Even while reading this tract, you could be having a slight pain in your chest or head; but
WITHIN A FEW HOURS YOU WILL BE DEAD!
……..
YOU CAN'T ESCAPE DEATH

No matter how good you are, God says, YOU DESERVE TO BURN / IN THE LAKE OF FIRE FOREVER & EVER! (49)

On the next page the reader finds:

URGENT MESSAGE --
YOU HAVE WON!
YOU ARE ALREADY A LUCKY WINNER!
DON'T MAKE US GIVE YOUR MONEY TO SOMEONE ELSE! (50).

This juxtaposition accentuates the over-heated rhetoric common to both Christian and Capitalist discourses and the two are ironically conflated in a concluding line, recalling the language of the King James Bible: "Ed McMahon giveth and Ed McMahon taketh away" (51). McGrath analyzes the use of ideology's primary tool – language – to reach its desired ends. Language also happens to be McGrath's weapon against un-self-reflective materialism. Examining the way language can be manipulated to serve Christian or Capitalist ends similarly draws attention to McGrath's own language, which is self-consciously modeled poetic discourse. The collision of so many discursive styles forces the reader to reflect on the validity of even the most basic of McGrath's assumptions. In other words, there is no assurance of authority, even in the position of the socially-conscious poet who is cognizant of his place within "systems."

With his concern for religion, McGrath furthers the work of James Merrill in his New Age long poem *The Changing Light at Sandover*. *Sandover* details conversations held between its speaker and his partner with creatures from the Otherworld through the kitschy device of an Ouija Board. Merrill shows how traditional forms of religious belief are re-incorporated in popular culture in order to survive in the present age; McGrath similarly illustrates the desperation of street evangelists to disseminate their message as they resort to scare tactics. Both cases are examples of re-packaging past beliefs to gain the attention of today's "consumers."

McGrath can be heavy-handed, however, in his interrogations of culture, and the parallel he constructs between Christian extremism and junk mail sensationalism bears this out. In his other work, McGrath addresses many of the same issues as "The Bob Hope Poem." "Capitalist Poem #36" is a good example. Here a government welfare worker monologizes on handing out that most basic of foodstuffs, cheese. "We've got this cheese down here to give away, / tons of thousands of pounds of cheese," the speaker declares, "We're trying to establish procedures and specifications, / rules to discourage speculation and hoarding, / guidelines to foster the proper use of this / extraordinary resource. What we need is a system" (143). In the last two lines of the poem the speaker appears exasperated at the daunting task of distributing the cheese: "I mean it. Not one damn piece of cheese / leaves here until we get this thing figured out." While the poem is certainly funny in its satire of that most basic of human characteristics which becomes amplified by a government -- that is, the desire for control -- it fails to offer the richness of thought evident in "The Bob Hope Poem." "Capitalist Poem #36" also lacks the imagery so plentiful in "The Bob Hope Poem." It is a purely discursive poem, one rooted in the language of bureaucratic rhetoric. And again, our recourse to "system" is foregrounded.

The superficiality of American popular culture finds its symbol and expression in "The Bob Hope Poem's" major trope: Bob Hope himself. After several passages

examining the public, thoroughly kitschified, figure of Hope, McGrath finally asks near the end of the poem,

> Would you believe it, if I told you, that even now, as I write these lines, as
> I dance this little caffeine-buzz shuffle,
> word comes over the radio that Bob Hope has passed over to the great
> beyond, gone to fetch his eternal reward,
> retired at last to vaudeville Valhalla, that heavenly Pro-Am, that never-
> ending celebrity roast in the sky? (73)

McGrath applies the irony heavily here -- "vaudeville Valhalla," "celebrity roast in the sky" -- to emphasize the cheap and superficial way Bob Hope let himself be presented to the public. Hope, of course, is only a symbol of the celebrity-making machine which popular culture is, and McGrath astutely points out that popular culture was the inevitable byproduct of the United States' basic materialist orientation.[5] The speaker concludes that "What matter if it's true, if it's inevitable? / If not today, tomorrow; if not tomorrow, yesterday." (73). Of course he's right: poetry is always written for the future, and McGrath's poem acts as a timecapsule of the last decade of twentieth-century. McGrath puns on the death of Hope, that Hope itself is dead, and his poem is a process of elegizing the great hope Americans have had in the inherent value of materialism.

The last line of the poem – "Hope springs eternal" (77) – is both a tongue-in-cheek statement on this belief in materialism and an acknowledgement that we cannot do without some of kind of hope. The deep ambivalence McGrath feels for Capitalist culture itself comes with the awareness that he too is implicated within its ideological matrix. The momentary freedom which the speaker feels as he dances around his apartment is provided by those products of materialist culture: the radio, the "caffeine buzz" which, while it only offers a fleeting happiness, is as much as can be asked for,

[5] Celebrity culture in McGrath's poem is analyzed in David Haven Blake's essay. Blake observes that McGrath becomes "a type of representative spectator" in his long poem.

McGrath seems to say. The love the speaker feels for his partner, Elizabeth, is at the base of the poem and for all the problems of commodity fetishism, relations between people obviously matter most: "With any luck, I'll be finished in time to meet Elizabeth at the train, walk her home, attend to the business of stoking the furnace," he daydreams as the poem stretches to its final lines (76). Here the metanarrative -- Marxism – by which the poet can gauge his culture is secondary to interpersonal relationships.

In "The Bob Hope Poem," McGrath uses a public voice that in the end only uses Marxism as tool for making us look closer at ourselves. The Marxism espoused by figures such as MacDiarmid does not work anymore: if we wish to entertain systems of thought, such as Marxism, we must do so self-consciously "The Bob Hope Poem" teaches. A blurb from the back cover of *Spring Comes To Chicago* argues that its poems show "McGrath to be a writer who could help save poetry from academia and get the rest of us reading it again." As dismissal as the assumption is, namely that only academics read poetry, McGrath does establish a voice which uses technical jargon ("commodity fetishism," etc.) in way that is easily accessible for the non-initiated reader, and his sharp sense of humor saves the poem from being lost in earnest polemics. With his allusions to past public poets – Whitman, Sandburg – it becomes clear McGrath wishes to pick up the mantle of poet of the people, but in a highly modified way, beyond previous models of the public poet. His model is one ironically aware of his culture, a culture he both critiques and celebrates with a characteristic ambivalence that distinguishes his work overall.

All this serves to push the American long poem beyond the poetics of Postmodernism, opting for a new, as yet unnamed mode of expression. The hallmarks of Postmodernism are present in McGrath, but as means to an end: the self-reflexivity associated with Postmodern literature is taken as a given in McGrath; so too is the inclusive nature of ideology and one's place within it; McGrath pushes beyond that

catchword of literary studies today – subversion – to a place where one can lead an examined existence without the high rhetoric of unexamined resistance. He abandons Postmodern indeterminacy of meaning to put content back into the poem. McGrath wishes to speak to and for his culture, but he realizes that past manners of doing so, Sandburg's populism especially, must be avoided. Whether McGrath will be able to live up to the high expectations he has set up for himself or not remains unclear. His *Florida Poems* of 2002 finds him engaging the Sunshine State -- his current residence -- with the good humor and guarded affection that he holds for the US generally in "The Bob Hope Poem." But his long poem "The Bob Hope Poem" remains the place where we find McGrath best addressing his culture in all its sadness and glory.

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Memoirs of a Bathroom Stall:

The Women's Lavatory as Crying Room, Confessional, & Sanctuary

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The stereotypes concerning bathroom behavior are deeply embedded in our minds and reflected in the products we create, consume, and conform to – the common joke that women always travel in pairs to the bathroom, that men know (and follow without failure) proper urinal etiquette, etc. Plain and simple – the public bathroom is just one among many gendered spaces culturally constructed in our sexually *un*repressed society. My argument is that our cultural artifacts (popular films, television shows, advertisements, even old fashioned print literature – my focus here) have been writing, reflecting upon, and critiquing these restroom regulations – that our society has actually given us a plethora of performative moments that act as a memoir containing delightful nuggets and societal instructions pertaining to bathroom norms in modern America. The subtitle of this essay (perhaps the result of leftover baggage from being raised a "good" Catholic girl) says it all – that women have been socialized to envision the public restroom as a crying room (a place of amplified affect, of purging, performing, and playing with emotions), a confessional (the ideal location to carryout their "natural" oral tradition or gossip culture), and a sanctuary (a linoleum and tiled escape where the public and private blend together, where the four walls of the individualized stall allow a moment of sometimes anxiety ridden solitude). It is my claim that looking at the ways in which these three facets of women's bathroom culture interplay, how they are represented, and how women are beginning to talk back at them (women's art and graffiti within the bathroom stall, for example), we can begin to see that a lot more is going on behind the scenes of bathrooms that we might at first

think – that the women's restroom is actually an ideal site for the developing of a feminist politics and the housing of oppositional art.

The Women's Bathroom as Crying Room. In her theory on gender, Judith Butler argues that one becomes a woman (and therefore carries out socially accepted womanly acts) because one is under the "cultural compulsion" to do so (12). Butler defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (43). My thoughts are that these "repeated acts" are often highly wrapped up in the expression of affect. Women are socialized to be expressers of their emotions, talkers of feelings, weepers, huggers, touchy-feely creatures in tune with their inner-sensitivity. The public restroom tends to be an occasional stage for this "cultural compulsion" to express emotion – a female masquerade scripted by society. In fact, the ladies room may be the best locale to see hyperbolic affect performances of all kinds (even those not involving actual tears).

Upon reflection most women can recall situations in which they have observed (or participated in) the ritual of bathroom blubbering. Vanities across the country have been home to women dabbing away mascara streaks from their eyes, re-fixing their face (and facades) to carryout their catwalk back to their companions outside of the bathroom realm. Bathroom dwellers have witnessed not only sob fests but the explosion of other emotions as well: humiliation, anger, betrayal, etc. These mirrored palaces have broadcasted many pep talks, catfights, and soul searching. But why? Because society instructs us that this semi-private zone is the place to do it and our cultural artifacts reinforce this.

The notion of the bathroom as crying room is evident in J.D. Salinger's novel *Franny and Zooey*. This story of two siblings coming to terms with the consequences of their "freakish upbringing" is told in two sections – one focused on Franny and the onset of her nervous breakdown, and one on her brother, Zooey, and his struggle to

help her conquer it although he suffers from much of the same ailments (Salinger 199). These two were the youngest members of the Glass family, intellectual prodigies educated in religious philosophy by their older brothers, Seymour and Buddy. This enlightened rearing has had a detrimental effect on the brother-sister pair. Toward the end of section one Franny, ridden with feelings of guilt, self-contempt, dissatisfaction with her life path, her current beau, the material fakeness of the world, and her inability to reach her idealistic religious goals, escapes to the ladies' room at Sickler's to temporarily purge herself of these emotions so that she can carry on with her charade of normalcy:

> It was unattended and apparently unoccupied when Franny came in. She stood for a moment – rather as though it were a rendezvous point of some kind – in the middle of the tiled floor. Her brow was beaded with perspiration now, her mouth was slackly open, and she was still paler than she had been in the dining room. Abruptly, then, and very quickly, she went into the farthest and most anonymous-looking of the seven or eight enclosures… Without any apparent regard to the suchness of her environment, she sat down. She brought her knees together very firmly, as if to make herself a smaller, more compact unit. Then she placed her hands, vertically, over her eyes and pressed the hells hard, as though to paralyze the optic nerve and drown all images into a voidlike black. Her extended fingers, though trembling, or because they were trembling, looked oddly graceful and pretty. She held that tense, almost fetal position for a suspensory moment – then broke down. She cried for fully five minutes. She cried without trying to suppress any of the noisier manifestations of grief and confusion, with all the convulsive throat sounds that a hysterical child makes when the breath is trying to get up through a partly closed epiglottis. And yet, when finally she stopped, she merely stopped, without the painful, knifelike, intakes of breath that usually follow a violent outburst-inburst. When she

> stopped, it was as though some momentous change of polarity had taken place inside her mind, one that had an immediate, pacifying effect on her body… She washed her face with cold water, dried it with a towel from an overhead rack, applied fresh lipstick, combed her hair, and left the room. (Salinger 21-3)

However, despite this cathartic moment of crying/regrouping, minutes later she collapses in the lobby of the bar and sufficiently ends her section of the novel.[6] Salinger's text simply records one of the normative uses of public restrooms – a place to rid oneself of excess emotion, a place to pull oneself together, a public place (only *somewhat* outside of the public eye) to make sure that one is capable of playing out the feminine role (without unneeded emotional outbursts) outside of the ladies room in the masculine sphere.

The Women's Bathroom as Confessional. As stated earlier, society has instructed women that emotions are highly intertwined in our ability to talk about them – enter the oral tradition or gossip culture. The women's room is frequently cast as the spot for ideal chitchat, bitching, gossip, and a play-by-play on what is occurring outside of its walls. (The emotional intensity and interest level of these conversations often depend on whether the site in which they are located holds a profitable liquor license). For a lover of eavesdropping, the inconspicuous bathroom stall (with feet levitated slightly off the ground) is a fabulous spot for carrying out this particular hobby. Another literary text provides a stellar example of women's oral tradition via the toilet.

Clare Boothe Luce's play, *The Women*, is a satire about New York society women. This all women cast features the fractured universal woman – each of the women within represent one basic feminine stereotype: Sylvia (the bitchy gossip), Peggy (the naïve

[6] Ironically the second half begins in a bathroom, as well. Zooey is bathing in a steaming tub, reading an old letter from his brother Buddy, and thwarting off the bathroom intrusion (and the corresponding taboo) of his mother's insistence that he counsel her on what do about Franny's breakdown with only a flimsy shower curtain separating them. However, since that deals with a private household bathroom, I will leave that scene for a different discussion (Salinger 50-91).

newly wed), Edith (the eternally pregnant housewife), Mary (the happy, much-envied housewife), Nancy (the unmarried, feminist writer), Crystal (the gold-digging, other woman, cheating with Mary's husband), and the Countess (the flamboyant, rich, habitual bride of boy toys). Being a dramatic work intended for stage, it should not be surprising that entire text is talk, but what makes it exceptional is that it is a text that gives voice only to females. Though there are a few key male figures alluded to in this piece, their words are only recapped through the mouths of their wives, servants, or secretaries. What makes Luce's play fit into this discussion is that its entire interweaving plot climaxes in a final scene set none other than (you guessed it) in a bathroom!

Act II, scene 5 opens in the "Powder Room at the Casino Roof" where a parade of women (or extras) stroll in and out discussing the problems of themselves and others (Luce 82). For example, one woman (2nd Woman) self-proclaims "I'm heartbroken," while another girl (2nd Girl) discusses the audacity of her lover's wife to interfere in their relationship, while a mother-daughter pair argue about socially accepted behavior patterns (Dowager and Debutante), and another (Girl in Distress) races into the restroom cupping her right breast, desperately in search for a safety pin, stating: "I was never so embarrassed!" (Luce 82-86). Next the focus of the scene shifts to the central characters (Mary, Sylvia, Crystal, and The Countess) and the eruption of their layered love triangles. In the beginning of the play, Crystal was the primary cause for the breakup of Mary's happy marriage to her husband, Stephen. Crystal, now his wife, has been cheating with western star, Buck, the youthful husband of the Countess. Mary has discovered the affair and strategically finds a way to weasel a confession out of Crystal (with the help of loose lipped Sylvia) while the Countess (who is within ear shot) can hear it all (Luce 87-90). The play ends with the following dialogue:

SYLVIA. Mary, what a dirty female trick you played!

CRYSTAL. Yes! From the great, noble, little woman! You're just a cat, like all

> the rest of us!
>
> MARY. Well, I've hade two years to sharpen my claws. (*Waves her hand gaily to Sylvia*) … Good night, ladies! (*Exits, leaving Crystal and Sylvia alone. As curtain falls, Crystal raises her bag to belt Sylvia, and Sylvia backs fearfully away.)*
>
> CURTAIN FALLS – *Then rises to find Crystal and Sylvia pulling hair.* (Luce 90)

This scene quite obviously showcases the bathroom as confessional in the most dramatic sense. However, it is more regularly a confessional on a smaller scale. (Note: if one stops to ponder the architectural similarities between bathroom stalls and the traditional Catholic confessional booths this will be all the more entertaining).

Bathrooms act as confessional spaces where one woman vocalizes her personal concerns to another woman (or woman group) who responds with the requisite advice giving. In another scene from *The Women* two characters (Edith and Peggy) are discussing the jealous reaction of Flora (The Countess) with the knowledge that her husband has been cheating on her:

> PEGGY. *(Goes for her wrap.)* Flora was disgusting!
>
> EDITH. But it was funny. Even the kettle drummer was laughing. (*Sadie gives Edith and Peggy their wraps.)*
>
> EDITH. My dear, who could stand the life we lead without a sense of humor? But Flora is a fool. Always remember, Peggy, it's matrimonial suicide to be jealous when you have a really good reason.
>
> PEGGY. Edith, don't you ever get tired of giving advice?
>
> EDITH. Listen, Peggy, I'm the only happy woman you know. Why? I don't ask Phelps or any man to understand me. How could he? I'm a woman. *(Pulls down her corset*.) And I don't try to understand them. They're just animals. Who am I to quarrel with the way God made them? I've got security. And I say: "What the

> hell?" And let nature take its course – it's going to, anyway (*They exit.)* (Luce 85-6)

Edith, the sage of the restroom, clearly dishes out some of society's most regurgitated advice for the female species: laugh it up, remember men are from Mars, women are from Venus, just keep your mouth shut, don't forget you need those men folk for financial reasons, etc.

This play houses another life lesson through the laborious lips of its players. This scene takes place right after Crystal has been tricked into spilling the beans about her affair with Buck, the Countess's husband:

> CRYSTAL. *(To Mary, fiercely.)* You're trying to break up my marriage!
>
> SYLVIA. The way you did hers, you floosie!
>
> CRYSTAL. (*Nasty.*) Well, maybe you're welcome to my – leftovers.
>
> MARY. (*Calmly*). I'll take them, thank you.
>
> SYLVIA. Why, Mary, haven't you any pride?
>
> MARY. That's right. No, no pride; that's a luxury a woman in love can't afford. *(Enter Countess…)* (Luce 89).

This bathroom moment discloses a harsh life lesson that Mary has learned – the cliché of all is fair in love and war, for certain, but also that many sacrifices must be made in those patriarchal pursuits as well. To be clear, all bathroom escapades are not quite as rambunctious and rowdy, nor are they always social in the traditional communal sense.

The Women's Bathroom as Sanctuary. Prior examples already demonstrated how the bathroom exists as this safe haven for many damsels in distress (Franny crying solo in the stall, the Girl in Distress literally fleeing to it after her inadvertent strip tease at the dinner table). However, the solace provided by the actual enclosed bathroom stall needs to be prodded further. Sure, women often dialogue across the metallic walls of

the stalls (continuing the dispatch of emotion, confession, advice), they handover toilet paper to strangers in need, they battle with the performance anxiety that may result in publicly performing a private act, but overall the solitude of the stall often allows women to escape the obligatory social nature of the ladies' room. In fact, it is within the stall that the most common subversive bathroom acts are often carried out – graffiti (or feminist art/dialogue).

A text that highlights the bathroom stall's ability to turn from sanctuary to politically charged artist enclave is Laurie Halse Anderson's young adult novel, *Speak.* This is the story of Melinda Sordino, told almost completely through the inner-dialogue that runs through her active and observant mind. The summer before her freshman year of high school Melinda was raped by a popular youth at a party and as the result of this experience she has disappeared into her own thoughts virtually mute (with the exception of basic need-driven communication). The need to *speak* her story in some other fashion surfaces again and again throughout this novel. She accomplishes this in a private way through her artwork. However, concern for an old friend who is now dating her attacker, Andy Evans, drives her to a more public forum – the graffiti on a bathroom stall within her local high school. This scene is taken from a portion of the novel entitled "Little Writing on the Wall:"

> I reread the graffiti. "I luv Derek." "Mr. Neck bites." "I hate this place." "Syracuse rocks." "Syracuse sucks." Lists of hotties, lists of jerks, list of ski resorts in Colorado everyone dreams about. Phone numbers that have been scratched out with keys. Entire conversations scroll down the bathroom stall. It's like a community chat room, a mental newspaper… I hold the cap in my teeth. I start another subject thread on the wall: *Guys to Stay Away From.* The first entry is the Beast himself: *Andy Evans.* (Anderson 175, italics in original).

In one of the last sections of the novel entitled "Chat Room," the main character returns weeks later to the stall and sees the results of her impulsive scribble:

> GUYS TO STAY AWAY FROM
>
> Andy Evans
>
> He's a creep.
>
> He's a bastard.
>
> Stay away!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
>
> He should be locked up.
>
> He thinks he's all that.
>
> Call the cops.
>
> What's the name of that drug they give perverts so they can't get it up?
>
> Diprosomething.
>
> He should get it every morning in his orange juice. I went out with him to the movies – he tried to get his hands down my pants during the PREVIEWS!!
>
> There's more. Different pens, different handwritings, conversations between some writers, arrows to longer paragraphs. It's better than taking out a billboard. (Anderson 185-6)

When I first read this portion of the novel I was struck by the unacknowledged power of graffiti. Although the 80s and 90s brought attention to graffiti in urban areas as a form of oppositional art I could not recall any attention the notion of graffiti as writing, as communication, as memoir. So I started to track such chat room-like correspondences in bathrooms on my own college campus. Once a week I would frequent the same stall and see how different threads had built up and altered themselves. There was the normal "I love so and so" and the expected response of "who cares," the "for a good time call…" with various comments corresponding, the religious preachers: "god is great," the grammar police: "then you should capitalize His name," political pitches

fitting the election year, and the amateur sketchers perfecting their erotic art with pen on metal media.

Now I am not advocating the vandalism of public restrooms but I am arguing that what is there is worthy of attention – just as any other text is. The bathroom stall is yet another space where women are able to talk back. (And this, of course, is the case in the men's room also… only I hear the "conversations" are much livelier). The bathroom stall is an underused spot for feminist dialogue, for politically charged artwork, for objects of thought and reflection. Advertisements for the next sorority bash find themselves plastered on the insides of bathroom stalls, but not contemplative artistic works or women's discourse.

The benefit of politically motivated public art has long been acknowledged. I will cite just one example of such endeavors. In 1998, Andy Cox, the founder of Together We Can Defeat Capitalism "purchased advertising time on the Commuter Channel screens in two stations of the BART system – the train system connecting the city to Oakland, Berkeley, and outlying suburbs" (McCarthy 231). These pieces functioned as inserted video, simple messages broadcasted silently to passengers awaiting their connections (McCarthy 231). The message was simple, the slogan was purposely designed with graphics that made it look identical to the BART standard announcements that housed passenger travel information, and it read: "Capitalism stops at nothing" (McCarthy 231). As Anna McCarthy notes, the beauty of this political advertisement is that it grasped the viewer's attention effortlessly in a venue where people might be sick of the cyclical nature of work and commute – capitalism driven forces (232). This, of course, is not the only incident of public art with the purpose of promoting social activism. In "Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy," Rosalyn Deutsche looks to various artists, such as Mary Kelly, Cindy Sherman, Silvia Kolbowski, Connie Hatch, and Barbara Kruger who have invaded the public sphere with their politically charged pieces. What would happen if instead of housing such works on billboards and bus

panels, artists developing a feminist politics situated their products in public restrooms across the nation? Imagine sitting enclosed in the safe confines of a public women's room stall and being confronted with a Barbara Kruger image stretched across the door. (I am thinking of "Your Body is a Battleground," "We Have Received Orders Not to Move," "You are Not Yourself," "I Will Not Become What I Mean to You," or "Use Only as Directed"). What reflection could those images bring, what conversations within and outside the bathroom stall could they spark? The powder room could become much more than a space to paint on a fresh face for the public sphere, it could become a covert command center where strategies for battling patriarchy are drawn up, discussed, and acted out. (Ah, to dream.)

Quite obviously the memoirs of a bathroom stall exist in our country today. Our texts are recording, reflecting, and even parodying our practices within these gendered spaces. However, the bathroom is also becoming a site for the crafting of a different written record – the daily diary entries of women in bathrooms across the nation. Scholars would do well by looking to both types of bathroom texts (those that reflect and those that seek to reform restroom and non-restroom regulations) and realizing that these blurry public-private spaces may present us with the most ideal site for feminist dialogue yet.

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Poem by Martha Wickelhaus

Pie

This is her pie
in the sky, her last ditch
pitch of caution to the wind.
She's driving the distance
to nowhere, stops for a little
sweetness, a little wedge
between the road and her
loneliness. Outside
trucks smoke and whine
in the cold like coyotes
at the moon. Inside
the waitress grows fat on
small tips and bad country
songs. She reels off
the list like a prayer
or a curse: apple, blueberry
lemon delight, plump hearts
of strawberry bleeding
their sweet juice, pillowy
cream of coconut quivering.

Our friend makes her choice;
the one-armed man cuts it
dishes it out. She lifts
forkfuls, licks the drips,
watches truckers call from
tabletop phones, making
their connections. They sip
coffee bitter as the sleep
she'd have in their arms,
the tattooed names of old lovers
whispering in her ears all night.

When she's done the one-armed man
makes her change. His stump
brushes her arm, bringing
goose bumps. She takes the coins
from his one good arm. She feeds
the hungry bear of a jukebox
in the corner. She's had her
pie, she's ready to eat it too.

The Lifelong Dinner Guest from the "The Negro Vogue": The Influence of Theatre on Langston Hughes's Dramatic Monologue Poems

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With the publication of *The Weary Blues* (1926), Langston Hughes, at 24, became a key voice in what he himself somewhat cynically dubbed the "Negro vogue" of the 1920s (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 223), referring not so much to the African American-centered Harlem Renaissance, but its interrelation with the wider, white-dominated literary and artistic worlds. While Hughes expressed some apprehension about this vogue, it nevertheless was a wellspring of opportunity for him to experience and experiment with various other art forms and to team up with a variety of innovators, from fiction writer Zora Neale Hurston to jazz pioneer W.C. Handy. From these opportunities, either supported financially by white patrons (Hart 613) or philosophically by black non-profit groups, came early works for the stage. Throughout his career, Hughes frequently left his solitary poet's desk and dived in to the polycracy of the theatre. His works for the theatre and their influence on Hughes's poetry have not been explored to any degree by the critical community.

Hughes's poetry remains the genre by which critics define his greatest artistry and his place in American letters, despite his forays into drama. Typical of the critical evaluation of Hughes's body of work is Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s assessment that the poet's finest achievements are to be found mostly in his earliest published collections of poetry during the Harlem Renaissance (x), *The Weary Blues* and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927). These collections introduce the world to a poet whose contributions, among others, brought the panoply of African American-influenced musical forms to bear in his work (Tracy 86). There is certainly no doubt that Hughes's poetry and its relationship to blues, jazz, bebop and black folk music are an endless source of critical

study (Manuel 79). Hughes biographer Arnold Rampersad goes so far as to call Hughes's exploitation of the blues in his poems as "the only genuinely original achievement in form by a black American poet" ("Hughes's *Fine Clothes to the Jew*" 67).

However, from the age of 19, Langston Hughes was an active participant in the creation of works for the theatre, both commercial and non-profit. In each decade of his adult life Hughes wrote dramatic material, producing everything from vaudeville sketches to opera libretti to several full-length dramas. Hughes published his first play, *The Gold Piece*¸ in 1921, the same year his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was published in *The Crisis.* The former went virtually unnoticed. The latter started Hughes's climb to fame as a poet.

These two literary pursuits continued on near-parallel paths throughout Hughes's life. It is significant to search for the nexus where the two forms met. An analysis of representative first-person poems from the first four of the five decades in which Hughes published will show an evolution from purely "poetic" forms, marked by traditional attributes like identifiable meter, rhyme scheme and imagery, to works that: benefit from stage directions; include many of the devices of the drama; and create a hybrid form of dramatic monologue. This hybrid is uniquely Hughes: steeped in African American vernacular, still influenced by the power of music, but undeniably tuned by an ear for theatricality.

In the first period of Hughes's published poetry, before Hughes had any noteworthy success as a dramatist, he treated all the performing arts in his poetry with the same distanced eye and ear. He was a young poet soaking up every inspiration he could find and recalling them when he could to create poetry that was groundbreaking in its use of idiom, but not necessarily in form. Hughes makes reference to theatre in some early first-person poems, but these references are used in predictable ways. He uses performance and performers as motifs or symbols of the double consciousness of African Americans as articulated by W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (2). "A Black

Pierrot," (1923) for instance, uses a time-honored, though some say timeworn (Rampersad, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* 622), character from the commedia dell'arte to paint a picture of lost love, African American-style.[7]

"The Jester" (1925) also relies on a familiar and overused theatrical image: the traditional symbols of the dramatic art, the masks of comedy and tragedy. The nineteen-line poem begins by painting a familiar image of the jester holding one mask in each hand. Hughes cleverly finds rhyme between the ends of lines two, "I hold tragedy," and four, "Comedy" and lines six, "Laugh with me" and eight, "Weep with me." He sets up the duality of mask versus emotion in the order of these lines; the expected rhyme scheme of lines two and six actually link "tragedy" with "laugh," while lines four and eight connect "comedy" with "weep." The poem then overtly expresses the irony of double consciousness by juxtaposing the mask's expression with the player's real feeling:

> Tears are my laughter.
> Laughter is my pain.
> Cry at my grinning mouth,
> If you will.
> Laugh at my sorrow's reign (lines 10-14).

The speaker then reveals himself as the Black Jester (15) and declares himself as the "booted, booted fool of silly men" (17). One can hear the echo of another theatrical influence here, that of the archetype of the Fool character as both seer and victim. Lear's

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[7] The Pierrot character was much in vogue in the 1920's, showing up in everything from a revue song by Noel Coward, made famous by Gertrude Lawrence, called "Parisian Pierrot," to a dramatic take on the classic Pierrot/Pierrette pairing by fellow poet Edna St. Vincent Millay called *Aria da Capo*, first performed in 1921 (Rampersad, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* 622) It is likely that Hughes would have seen, or at least heard of, these entertainments. "Pierrot" (1926), is another use of the character in Hughes's early canon.

Fool is abused by his master, a fool himself whose foolishness brings disaster. So, too might the dominant, racist world bring disaster upon itself by ignoring the wisdom of those it victimizes. The poem extends the Fool trope in the final two lines: "Once I was wise. / Shall I be wise again?" (18-19). Shakespeare's Fool speaks truth that no one heeds and suffers the same fate as that of his master. In contrast, the Black Jester expresses a muted hope for a day when wisdom might prevail.

"The Jester," with its hackneyed use of the comedy and tragedy masks, reveals a youthful reliance on theatrical symbols. Moreover, there is no sense in the poem's construction that it was created for performance, or that anything more than a standard oral recitation of a traditional poem could be expected of the piece. As Hughes develops as a playwright, his first-person poems will begin to include theatrical elements that only a poet working in other genres could have devised, and that indicate a need for performance, if only in the mind of the reader.

Given that these poems were first anthologized in 1926, the same year his fame provided entrée into the world of New York theatre[8], the next phase of his poetry will begin to show a hybridization of styles as he creates poetry alongside plays. In that year, Hughes was asked to create his first work for the theatre: he wrote lyrics and sketches for a proposed "intimate Negro revue" financed by a white socialite named Caroline Dudley.[9] In addition, the New York Times announced that year that Hughes would contribute lyrics to the score of a play with music called *Goophered,* written by a "black doorman" at Broadway's 42nd Street Theatre, with music by famed musical arranger Hall Johnson[10] ("Play of Negro Rural Life" 27). Spending days in close quarters

[8] Hughes's pre-1926 plays were written at Cleveland's Karamu Theatre and were not produced commercially.

[9] While the revue, tentatively titled "O Blues," drawn from a line in "The Weary Blues" (Rampersad, Hughes's *Fine Clothes to the Jew*" 59), was never produced, Hughes was included in all the creative sessions, held at Dudley's home, and was paid for his work (Hughes. *The Big Sea* 255-256).

[10] The play may have been performed in Harlem, under the aegis of the NAACP, but it was clearly aimed at a blacks-only audience, the playwright's Broadway "connection" notwithstanding.

with theatrical collaborators gave Hughes his first taste of what it was like to share creative control, a new experience for a poet.

Hughes was in good company during this intense period of artistic crossover. Other artists who came to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance saw their dramatic works reach a white audience for the first time. For most, however, this would be the only time. Garland Anderson's *Appearances* (1925) is the first full-length work by an African American to be produced on Broadway (Abramson 46). Despite favorable reviews and a great deal of publicity, much of it brought about by the efforts of Anderson himself, this courtroom drama about a black man falsely accused of rape failed to provide Anderson with a platform for future success; it was his only produced play. Actor Frank Wilson, star of *Porgy* by the white DuBose Heyward, had been writing plays for Harlem theatres since 1914 (Abramson 48). His first full-length play, *Meek Mose*, opened on Broadway in 1928, at the height of Wilson's fame as an actor. The production, which, like some of Hughes's theatrical works, combined song, dance and drama, was greeted with disappointment by white critics. Brooks Atkinson's review celebrated the possibility of a Negro repertory but dismissed *Meek Mose* as "childishly naïve" (qtd. in Abramson 48).[11]

Faring no better was Wallace Thurman. Thurman had begun to make his name on the printed page, serving as editor of several magazines, including *The Messenger* and the one issue of *Fire!!* [12] Literally at the hub of the Harlem Renaissance (his home, dubbed "Niggerati Manor" by Zora Neale Hurston, became a haven for Hurston, Hughes and other luminaries ["Harlem Renaissance"]), Thurman collaborated with

[11] One humiliation Hughes was spared that other black playwrights endured was the white press's consistent references to the menial jobs—like "black doorman"—these writers were known to have held. Despite being an acclaimed actor, Wilson, for example, is described by Atkinson as a "sometime negro postman;" Anderson was dubbed "the bellhop playwright," a moniker the writer exploited himself for its publicity value.

[12] Both publications were the first to publish Hughes poems. Among those first published in *The Messenger* are "New Year" (1926) and several under the pseudonym "J. Crutchfield Thomson" (Rampersad 630). Railroad Avenue" (1926) and "Elevator Boy" (1926) both debuted in *Fire!!* (Rampersad 632).

white playwright William J. Rapp on a play aptly titled *Harlem* (1929), which failed to launch him as a voice in the theatre. He, like the other writers, was provided one chance to capture the white audience's attention by white producers eager to exhaust all possibilities for cashing in on the Negro Vogue. As the Vogue waned, so did their opportunities.

Meanwhile, Hughes first formally studied playwriting in 1930, when he spent several months at the Hedgerow Theater, an African American theatre, under the tutelage of playwright Jasper Deeter. It was here that Hughes began work on his most successful play, *Mulatto* (1935). At the same time, he had been collaborating on a full-length play with friend and fellow rising literary star Hurston. The play was called *Mule Bone* (1930). Throughout the 1930's Hughes continued to write plays for non-profit as well as commercial theatres, and even worked on two screenplays (Rampersad, *Collected Poems* 10-11). None of these works reached a wide audience except *Mulatto*, which became the longest running Broadway play by an African American playwright to date (Swortzell 139). Hughes was by this time attempting to write plays as seriously as he had been writing poetry, with some success.

As Hughes devoted more time to playwriting, once can see the hybrid start to take form in his poetry, leading to a new period in which he developed the dramatic monologue. This hybridity did not exist in a creative vacuum. Hughes was by this time an acknowledged member of the literary vanguard in America, which was primarily white. He wrote what James Smethurst terms his most "literary" work, including that which the critic sees as representative of modernism, for a predominantly white audience (142). However, Smethurst does not include any of Hughes's dramatic monologues in this category, seeing them rather as "uplift" poems written for a primarily African American audience. This overlooks the fact that these monologues begin to employ some of the fundamental techniques of modernism, most notably elements on the page that fall outside the body text of the verses itself. Excluding the

dramatic monologue poems from modernist interpretation denies Hughes one of his most striking roles in American literature, that of a clear African American voice working within one of the most seminal forms of twentieth century poetry.

It is important at this point to be specific in defining "dramatic monologue" as a poetic sub-genre. The term itself was first applied in literary criticism to poetry in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Culler 366). Dellita Martin writes about the dramatic monologue as "a lyric poem which reveals 'a soul in action' through the conversation of one character" (97). Martin fails to note that a monologue can take place with another character present, as is understood in Browning's poems, or it can replicate the purpose of the drama's soliloquy, where the character reveals his or her innermost thoughts to the audience but not to the characters onstage, a device used in drama for centuries.

A soul in action provides the first example of Hughes's employment of theatrical monologue in a poetic form. "The Colored Soldier" (1932) is from a volume entitled *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations* (1932) , which is the first time Hughes refers to a poem as a "dramatic recitation**.**" The poem begins with an introductory prose note that includes theatrical suggestions on lighting, casting and incidental music: "to be done in the half-dark by a young brown fellow. […] Martial music on a piano, or by an orchestra, may accompany the recitation" (introductory paragraph).

The printed poem is divided by a vertical line from an italicized set of directions from the poet/playwright. Most of the directions written in the left margin of the poem reveal a neophyte dramatist behind it; instead of specifics on actions, movements or setting, as are common in play scripts, these notes suggest how the character is to be played. Here Hughes assumes the role of director, coaching an unknown actor in the role of the soldier. During the first stanza of the poem, as the soldier recounts how his brother and he joined the war effort, Hughes instructs the reciter to say the lines "*Proudly and expectantly, with head up, shoulders back and eyes shining.*" When the soldier's

dead brother appears in a dream, recounting his hopes that his sacrifice gave the living a chance to come back to a free and tolerant U.S., the margin notes instruct that the dead brother speak "*with his face full of light and faith, confident that a new world has been made.*" While recalling the bitter truth of a still-racist America, the reciter is instructed to do so with "*a half-sob.*" Tellingly, these directions all fall directly beneath a capitalized heading Hughes terms "THE MOOD."

Hughes's indication that the poem have a musical composition accompanying the text might be seen as merely as an early example of Hughes's ongoing use of musical motifs in his poetry. However, in the experimental and commercial theatre of the 1930s incidental music was often used to underscore the action of a dramatic play. This element, along with the left-margin directions, is another example of the incursion of theatrical norms into Hughes's poems.

This blending of music, directions and poetic text shows how experience in creating for the theatre can produce a modernist hybrid. Hughes presents us with a dramatic monologue that still remains squarely within the realm of poetry, regardless of the marginal notes. As the right-hand heading has it, "The Colored Soldier" is indeed a "POEM." Here still are the rhymed couplets. While the meter is uneven, the stanzas remain formally poetic. A steady beat threads through the poem, perhaps reinforcing Hughes's suggestion of martial underscoring. One hears it in lines such as "They told us America would know no black and white; / So we marched to the front, happy to fight" (lines 11-12). As the rage of the survivor builds, so does the emphatic beat of the lines:

> It's a lie! It's a lie! Every word they said.
> And it's better a thousand times you're in France dead.
> For here in the South there's no votes and no right.
> And I'm still just a "nigger" in America tonight (41-44).

This foray into dramatic recitation, as he termed it, coincided with another opportunity from the stage, or at least the lecture hall, for the poet. This poem, along

with other dramatic monologues from the same collection, *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations*," was performed by Hughes himself in reading tours aimed to bring "uplift" to an African American audience (Smethurst 143).

The symbiosis of Hughes's creative output in poetry and theatre worked both ways. Just as poems like these were read aloud to appreciative audiences, Hughes's dramatic work on the printed page sometimes yields pleasure as poetry alone. One of his comic sketches for the stage from this experimental decade, *Scarlet Sister Barry* (1938), reads nearly exactly as one of his published dramatic recitations. While this dramatic sketch may never have been performed, it has been included in anthologies of Hughes's plays. Its absence from poetry anthologies is regrettable, since it easily takes its place in form and style alongside monologue-style poems like "The Colored Soldier." It revisits the motif of the masks of comedy and tragedy; unlike "The Jester," however, this monologue gives the motif a fresh and funny perspective. Only three pages long, short even for a sketch, *Scarlet Sister Barry* reads like a classic Langston Hughes poem of the middle period.

Scarlet Sister Barry is a wicked satire on the 1930 dramatization of a critically acclaimed book from the 1920s entitled *Scarlet Sister Mary.* The dramatization of the novel had starred Ethel Barrymore, a white grande dame of the theatre, performing in blackface and portraying a woman who is branded for bearing illegitimate children. Hughes neatly captures the irony that surrounded the mainstream theatre of this time: the "race question." After the brief flirtation with hiring African American playwrights in the 1920s waned, this issue was once again in the hands of white playwrights like O'Neill or Connelly. In *Scarlet Sister Mary* even the lead character was played by a white woman. This appropriation of black subject matter – and its attendant robbery of artistic opportunities for black artists – fueled Hughes's outrage.

The sketch begins with a brief stage direction that, read on the page as if poetry, provides a terse and vivid indication of the writer's point of view:

CAST

ONE ACTRESS AND HER VOICES

Time: Oh!

Place: Realm of Art (lines 1-4)[13]

Hughes skewers the pretensions of Broadway's high-minded whites while giving a trademark Hughesian "Oh!" to let the reader fill in the blanks by seeing/hearing what follows. He then introduces his fresh take on the mask motif with a brief stage direction: "THE ACTRESS, *who is blond and pale on one side, brown-skin and colored on the other, in race and makeup half and half, emerges from the center folds of the curtain, her white side foremost."* For the first part of the monologue, the white-faced actress attempts to convince the public of her credentials. Written in rhymed verse, this portion has a formality and structure similar to "The Colored Soldier:"

Dear public: In my time
I've played everything
From Juliette to the Twelve Pound Look—
Now I want to play a Negress
From a Pulitzer Prize book.
    Of course, you know it runs the danger
    Of being slightly déclassé
    But the first Lady of Our Theatre
    Has a right to do just what she may" (1-9).

The white speaker then switches her profile to the audience, revealing the character she intends to portray. Her dialect shifts accordingly, too, from overly cultured (with the use of words like "déclassé") to exaggerated Negro dialect. A stage direction indicating the sound of a steam whistle is followed by the actress singing a snatch from "Way

[13] Due to its unusual form and this context, this work's citations are deliberately done in MLA format for poetry.

down upon de Swanee Ribber" (21). Then, the "evidence" of her mastery of dialect is given in a rambling, exaggerated passage in which she acts both the part of the heroine Lula Mae and her husband:

> Oh, river! Ah hear his gentle voice calling me, Lula Mae!—Cherio, Lula Mae!—His voice says, Lula Mae, Lula Mae, here's July!
>
> July de 4th? says I.
>
> Naw, your husband, July.
>
> What do you want, July? says I.
>
> You know what I want, honey.
>
> Un-huh!
>
> You beengwine—gone—going-go—gone too long, July.
>
> Ah ain't been no whar but down de ribber, honey. (20-28)

Ironies pile up. Hughes shows the inappropriateness of Barrymore's casting as a black woman by having the actress stumble on that most problematic of words in the history of African American dialect, transliterated by white authors and songwriters from Twain to Foster: "Gwine—gone—going-go-gone." Dialect is prevalent throughout Hughes's canon of poetry, of course, but rarely used to such satiric effect.

The "dialogue" between July and Lula Mae continues. As with "The Colored Soldier," there are now musical interjections. Far from the "martial music" suggested for the somber poem, the sketch suggests that comic punctuations be used:

> Who was his father?
>
> You think I'd a-named him what I did if I'd a-knowed who his father were?
>
> What did you name him, Lula Mae?
>
> I named him—Mark.

Mark who?

Question Mark!

(Cymbals)

Lawd-a-mercy, Lula Mae! I'm goin' away agin.

(Whistle)

The cymbals and whistles suggest the vaudevillian rim shot of the snare drum, underscoring the ridiculousness of the actress's undertaking. The stage directions and musical suggestions of *Scarlet Sister Barry* bear a direct link backward to the "THE MOOD" of "The Colored Soldier" and forward to the complex and specific musical cues of *Ask Your Mama.* This arcane work by Hughes is slight as a work of theatre—and Hughes probably meant it to be—but read alongside his other dramatic monologues, it provides both a bridge and a counterpoint to those poems.

The sketch also provides a glimpse into the times and the extent to which the Vogue was over for Hughes's fellow artists. W.E.B. DuBois's Krigwa Players (later the Negro Experimental Project) and the Federal Theatre Project may have served as creative havens for writers like Georgia Douglas Johnson and Regina Anderson. They rarely served as a springboard to wider commercial production, however. Hughes, on the other hand, maintained relationships with white producers who continued to offer creative opportunities long after the Vogue had passed. He was determined to continue making a living as a writer: "Poetry became bread; prose, shelter and raiment. Words turned into songs, plays, scenarios, articles and stories. Literature is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pulled" (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 335).

Despite his own self-interest, Hughes knew that African American theatre voices were fading, and he used his poetic art to express his outrage at the co-opting of these voices. As the Vogue waned but plays about "the race problem" continued to be of interest, commercial dramas featuring African Americans were once again being written by

whites. Beginning, as Hughes notes, with the well-meaning but patronizing *The Green Pastures* by Marc Connelly (1930), a bizarre appropriation of black culture appeared on Broadway. Hughes encapsulated the new trend in his 1940 poem "Note on the Commercial Theatre":

> You also took my spirituals and gone.
> You put me in *Macbeth* and *Carmen Jones*
> And all kinds of *Swing Mikados*
> And in everything but what's about me— (lines 8-11)

This period saw white creative artists like Orson Welles give audiences a production of *Macbeth* set in Haiti and cast with African American actors; it was dubbed the "voodoo Macbeth." Oscar Hammerstein II wrote new lyrics to the opera by Bizet, changing the famous "Habanera" aria into "Dat's Love" for a steamy all-black musical called *Carmen Jones.* And Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* got a revamping, with jazz-influenced arrangements and a "sepia-toned cast" (Atkinson 18**)** courtesy of the Federal Theatre Project. Aside from the performers, none of the creative forces behind these reinventions was African American.

Hughes admitted that "colored actors began to go hungry, publishers politely rejected new manuscripts, and patrons found other uses for their money" (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 334). This is not to imply that artistry is dependent on commercial production. Indeed, works by Johnson and Anderson, for example, are being reexamined as the texts emerge from obscurity. However, this trend silenced the voices of artists less able to negotiate the waters of commercial theatre at that time.

Hughes, however, continued learning from the ways of the theatre, and continued applying these ways to his poetry. Beginning in 1943, Hughes gave no written stage directions or musical cues to his next experiment in fusing soliloquy with first-person poetry. Instead, he applied a keen ear for character-driven dialogue to create a sixteen-poem series of dramatic monologues centering around one of his most

theatrical characters: Alberta K. Johnson, or "Madam." The Madam poems are far from modernist; these poems are all in the strictest of structures, most in ABAB rhymed quatrains. Yet there is an unmistakable ring of theatre speech in them. The cross-fertilization continues, but this time Hughes, who by this time had finished several more non-commercial plays for the Karamu Players and Harlem Suitcase Theater as well as a screenplay called *Way Down South* (Rampersad, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* 11), uses his deepening awareness of the power of the spoken word to reveal a character's inner life.

Madam is a feisty survivor who takes on everyone from the phone company to her white employer, in poems that alternate between direct confrontations to reflections. The confrontations are generally with representatives of white authority: the rent man, insurance man, phone company, census taker. The reflections, presumably to a black confidante (Martin 97), tell of Alberta's experiences with romance and fortune.

In "Madam and the Phone Bill" (1949) the heroine haggles with an unseen telephone operator about paying for long distance calls made by her cheating boyfriend, Roscoe. In this, a later "Madam" poem, Hughes creates dramatic tension by a line break between the stanza and the final line, adding theatrical punch to Madam's one-way conversation:

> Un-humm-m!...Yes!
> You say I gave my O.K.?
> Well, that O.K. you may keep—
>
> But I *sure* ain't gonna pay! (Lines 37-40)

We get a clear picture of Madam, as well as a sense of her primary auditor, the presumably white telephone billing operator. In a few efficient lines, we know about her boyfriend, about her circumstances and perhaps most of all, her role as a black woman in a white society.

Madam also gives her trusted listener soliloquy-like reflections. In "Madam and the Movies" (1943), she reveals the longing underneath the bravado:

Then I come home
And unlock the door –
And there ain't no
Romance any more" (lines 13-16)

"Madam and the Charity Child," (1943) about Alberta's experience as a foster mother, offers a succinct retort to a social worker's demand for paperwork:

Last time I told her,
Report, my eye!
Things is bad –
You figure out why! (lines 25-28).

The most poignant poem in the series is "Madam and the Crime Wave" (1943). Here the simplistic quatrains help evoke the pure sadness of Madam's observations. The language is unvarnished, non-ironic:

Last night a man
Knocked a woman down,
Robbed her and raped her
On the ground." (lines 5-8).

Whereas nearly all of the other "Madam" poems end with a sassy statement, like the defiant "I'm *Madam* to you!" (line 32) of "Madam and the Census Man" (1949), this poem ends enigmatically:

With your money gone
Where is death's sting?
(Course you always got
That other thing.) (13-16).

To what thing does Alberta refer? Is Madam revealing a dormant belief in the afterlife? Read as a series, one senses that Madam views religion, like everything else, with wary suspicion, as in this passage from "Madam and the Minister" (1944):

He said, Sister
Have you back-slid?
I said, It felt good –
If I did! (lines 17-20).

Even here, though there is rich ambiguity. After her exchange with the minister, Alberta admits I felt kinder sorry

I talked that way
After Rev. Butler
Went away –
So I ain't in no mood
For sin today (lines 28-33).

Madam's black vernacular humor and pathos appear on the poetry scene at roughly the same time as Jesse B. Semple of Hughes's comic "Simple" stories. This is probably not coincidental. Modernism was taking a different turn, one that avoided references to things essential to Hughes's voice: race, politics and popular culture (Smethurst 155). Almost in defiant reaction to this, Hughes turns out folksy, character-driven poems, plays and stories, rich in African American cultural specifics and freely informing each other across genre lines. Smethurst typically sees this as another opportunity to note the references to black-influenced musical forms in Hughes's work (154), but fails to note the stylization of dialogue so important to both Simple in fiction and Madam in poetry. The only theatrical influence on Hughes's work of the 1940s that Smethurst notes in "Adventures of a Social Poet" is Shakespeare (152), seeing Simple as the Shakespearean Fool the poet Hughes left behind in "The Jester." However, Hughes freely moved from one genre to another during this period. For instance, Jesse B.

Semple later came to life onstage in the musical play *Simply Heavenly*, and, it can be argued, the Madam poems cry out to be performed. One reason they have not may have to do with how and where the poems were presented and published. Hughes himself only published twelve of the sixteen poems together in any collection of his work prior to his death. [14]

By the 1950s, the influence of having written theatre works for more than twenty years is apparent, even in a work of poetry where Hughes's musical influences prevail as never before: *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951). One poem in the collection, "Deferred," is a deft assemblage of potent, minimalist monologues. As the collection's title promises, it is a montage of voices, each expressing a yearning for something just beyond reach, sometimes seeming to comment on each other, sometimes appearing wholly separate. Smethurst rightly asserts that the full-length work represents modernism as manipulated by the African American sensibilities of Hughes (160) and does note that the plethora of voices in the work as a whole is reminiscent of Hughes's "verse plays." There the comparison to theatre ends for Smethurst.

"Deferred" begins with an upwardly mobile voice in rhymed italics wondering what life will be like after taking twenty years to graduate high school. The italics give the reflection a kind of aspiration to greatness, despite the speaker's admission that he or she "*Dropped out six months when I was seven, / a year when I was eleven, / then got put back when we come North*" (lines 3-5). The next voice, in more prosaic Roman type and irregular pattern, is a middle-aged mother still dreaming of a white enamel stove after eighteen years, even though "where we're moving / there ain't no stove__" (lines 20-21). Hughes returns to italics for a dream about studying French, then to Roman for a short

[14] Their individual original publishing dates and venues were varied, with ten appearing in Negro Story from 1944-1945, and others published elsewhere. There were also two that were sent to the American Negro Press but perhaps never published. In fact, as late as 1981, critic Dellita L. Martin refers to "twelve poems" (97), referring to those published as a cycle in Hughes's collection *One Way Ticket* (1949). All sixteen poems are anthologized (but not as a cycle) in the *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1995).

passage about buying two suits at once. And so it goes, with each stanza evoking a character, a setting, and a dream. Hughes shows his ability to reveal character's intentions through speech: dreams of acquisition, romance, achievement and, in the only overly musical stanza, a dream of heavenly reward expressed as a four-line hymn, are articulated in highly dramatic mini-monologues. While each stanza is a dramatic monologue, the poem as a whole could easily be a staged reading, peopled with strivers and the obstacles in their paths. These monologues truly express "souls in action," however impotent and restricted by the world around them the people themselves remain **(**Barksdale 99**)**.

Hughes's last major works, while an apotheosis of many Hughesian poetic features, including his own brand of modernism, rarely venture into dramatic monologue. Hughes's love affair with music, however, flourishes. He continues to produce complex, scored works like *Ask Your Mama* and *12 Moods for Jazz*. He records his own work, backed up by musicians who inspire and complement these works, and performs with them in nightclubs. These jazz performances may be collaborations but, unlike his theatrical collaborations, Hughes's writing is in the forefront, and Hughes, even given his musical illiteracy, directs the score.

Music pervades his final works for the theatre as well. Here, though, the music is a reflection of popular tastes. Gospel, not jazz, is the idiom that receives attention from Hughes the dramatist. As another era is ushered in and playwrights like Lorraine Hansberry and Amiri Baraka redefine African American theatre, Hughes the playwright falls back on his ability to tap into a vogue. As with his early opportunities, these later works for the theatre depend as much on the popular tastes of white theatergoers as they do on African American themes for their final form. The white audience, accepting of Hansberry's domestic drama *A Raisin in the Sun* more than the

rage-infused work of Baraka[15], responded as ever to an amalgam of black music and uplift. Gospel music, with its more accessible melodies, inherent dramatic potential and pious intention, fit this bill. Whereas jazz, Hughes's personal musical passion, still evoked images of smoky dives and drug dens, gospel was more benign. Bebop remained a largely secret language (and a muse for Hughes the poet); gospel seemed to welcome all comers.

Hughes's last works for theatre all included gospel music. In 1960, the same year Hughes published *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*, *Black Nativity* was produced on Broadway. A success, it was a loose assemblage of gospel turns that tell the Christmas story from a rather quaint African American perspective. Hughes also wrote *The Prodigal Son*, described by Rampersad as a "gospel play" (*Collected Poems* 17). In 1964 *Jericho Jim-Crow* appeared; a more passionate gospel work inspired by the civil rights movement, it was produced off-Broadway and was warmly received by critics (18). These are the last of Hughes's produced works for the theatre. Less plays than concatenations of musical theatre moments and poetic segues, these works underscore Hughes's inability to succeed as a playwright on the same level as he does as a poet. However, they have been credited with starting the trend toward gospel musicals (Burdine 74) that continues to the present day.

As Hughes's theatre works turned more and more into musical pastiche, their impact on his poetry waned. Gone now are the dramatic recitations, the stage directions as to delivery or setting, and the inner thoughts expressed in vernacular conversation, as in the "Madam" poems, or in heightened soliloquies like those featured in "Deferred." A 1965 poem in the first person contains no character subtext, except perhaps one Hughes did not intend: his own exhaustion. Despite his place of eminence

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[15] Hughes himself attacked "obscenity and profanity in the new militant black writing" (Rampersad, *Collected Poems* 19) in an article in the New York Post, titling the essay "That Boy LeRoi," a reference to Baraka's given name, LeRoi Jones.

as a kind of cultural interpreter to the white world about all things African American, Hughes was facing criticism from the black community for his perceived irrelevance. "Dinner Guest: Me" reflects a resignation and passivity, along with a poignant acknowledgment of Hughes's continuing role as the last vestige of the Vogue:

I know I am
The Negro Problem
Being wined and dined,
Answering the usual questions
That come to white mind
Which seeks demurely
To probe in polite way
The why and wherewithal
Of darkness U.S.A. – (lines 1-9)

The narrator, surely Hughes himself, delineates his ironic situation as spokesperson for his race. By the 1960s, Hughes was indeed one of the few African Americans whites turned to for answers as the country burned with black rage. The problem, of course, was that Hughes, a staunch critic of violent protest, seems barely able to make sense of the times to himself, much less to others. Still, his life had always been about expressing African American ideas and ideals to a wide audience. Part of that life included invitations to a world of white patrons. The narrator ends with a weary conclusion questioning how much has been accomplished, and one hears an aged Hughes, in one of his final monologues, admitting his own failings:

To be a Problem on
Park Avenue at eight
Is not so bad.
Solutions to the Problem,
Of course, wait. (19-23)

By the time of this poem's writing, the "race problem" had indeed become a Problem with a capital P. Despite Hughes's discomfort with the most radical voices of the Civil Rights movement, his poetry continued to evolve until his death; his later poems express rage in forms and styles as fresh as the times demanded. His theatre work, however, rarely gave the world a unique African American voice or a bold new dramatic form. From the heyday of the Vogue to the turbulent times of the Sixties, Hughes embraced popular theatre forms, like the melodrama of *Mulatto* or the hybrid musical revues of *Black Nativity.* The collaboration so essential to theatre proved too often to be a source of compromise for the poet, and often let to his capitulation to popular taste. Left alone with his poetic muse, Hughes could continue to experiment and add to an overwhelmingly prolific body of work that said whatever he wanted said.

He could do this, of course, because of his pride of place as eminent spokesperson from the Harlem Renaissance. What allowed him to keep producing works for the theatre also kept his literary name in lights and his poems in publication. Unlike Thurman, Hurston and other luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes both survived and thrived well after the Vogue had waned. By the 1960s, these earlier contemporaries were nearly forgotten, at least as far as their theatrical writing was concerned.

"Largely forgotten," "undiscovered, "lost": words like these, so often applied to African American plays of the first half of the twentieth century, testify not to the potential or productivity of African American playwrights but more likely to the limited resources available to them for production. In addition, the implication of these adjectives emanates from the perspective of an art form still dominated by white producers and writers. As mentioned, there were always forums for African American plays for African American audiences, but like the wider world in which they were situated, these forums operated outside the mainstream. Hughes's attachment to the

Vogue, and his subsequent determination to forge and maintain an image to both black and white audiences, gave him connections to the mainstream that allowed his continual connection to that mainstream.

With all his accomplishment, Hughes is and will remain primarily a poet to the world, and the primary wellspring from the performing arts from which he drew was indeed music. Hughes's theatrical works, as noted, were rarely successful, if success is gauged by long runs and frequent revivals. Like his poetry, his works for theatre evolved, but unlike the poems, the plays rarely if ever soar. From the melodramas through to the musical entertainments, the theatre pieces lack the kind of depth and innovation found in the best of Hughes's poetry.

Nonetheless, with the help of an era that facilitated artistic crossbreeding and a hunger for all things artistic, Hughes steeped himself in the world of theatre whenever the occasion presented itself. Most of his works for the theatre may not cry for revival, but his exposure to the dramatic art armed him with a new awareness of the power of the spoken word to reveal emotional truth and complex characters in his poetry. It also gave him a chance to engage in a fusion of genres that expanded the modernist framework.

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Two Poems by Allan Johnston

DePaul University and Columbia College, Chicago

Still Life with No Reflection

Even the bathers have long since left the water,
And any sail that may have graced the lake
By now is gone, has folded into the empty
Ripples of lake or land. The sky is nothing
Like a sky; plaster stuck on, the paint
Splattered by an uninspired artist
Who now just wants to finish what was begun
For some reason.
The lake gives no reflection
Suggesting anything about the sky.
The two are separate. Water is water;
Air air; and anything that lies between them
A layer of glass, or not even that, just something
Between air, earth, and water: these contingent
And unrelated worlds, unnecessary
To each other, each extending being
With nothing linking them, belying logic.

To anyone who sees this landscape: trees,
A house, the lake, the sky without a cloud,
This dirt clod sun, this empty, full, ongoing

Endless expanse of air might offer rapture
In that it all works by itself, and yet
Perhaps this brings reflection; for if water
Does not return the sunlight, if the building
And tree each cast an independent shadow,

And if the light in each thing does not rise
From anything beyond itself, or the viewer
Who maybe, looking at this scene, feels nothing,
Who turns to look at something else, or else
Is so absorbed in petty calculations
Or memories that nothing penetrates,
Nothing reflects from anything anywhere;
If the sea of relation only offers

Blank, meaningless congeries of elements
Through the lank emptiness of all existence,
Only one thing looms through the landscape
Like a thread; the mind, or not even that,
But any possible consciousness of self
Consciousness may offer, referring back
Into the simple fact that somewhere, something
Reflects out into nothingness, fills void

With the idle chatter of thought, these forms,
With air, the space between, with everything.

After Summer's Drowning

Carapaces of ice on branches
Dagger downward to surfaces
Where with the ease of dancers,
The skaters now start winter
Gliding across the water's surplus,
Defying frozen air.

In this cold-bleached atmosphere
Of blades tracing a lace
Upon the ice, all calling hinders
Any pursuit of answers
For what lies under the face
Of noncommunicable dances.

They come gliding-brief glancers
Into beauty, recrossing the trace
Of their own blades' cuttings, fixed trances
Revealing enchanted splendors
Of art for itself. Such givers of grace
Abstract thought or fear

Out of the under-surface. Here,
Above, tops spinning on glass,
Crystal harmonics of light! The wonder
Of such figured elegance

Surrenders winter to this place.
No longer do fretful glances

Linger on the hand that launches
Out of that water; the moment's waste
Becomes a remembered slant
Of sunlight drifting on the blanch
Of drunken stupor bringing the pass
Over the boat edge; whiskey and beer

Can blast memory, destroy clear
Remembrance, as a knife would slash
So easily through all the staunched
Surprise of beauty. No need to repent
The way even death is bathed
In such watery runs of romance.

The Supremacy of the Image: Urban Students and the Idea of Secondary Orality

Lance Svehla

University of Akron

The University of Akron is an urban collage. Located in the heart of downtown Akron, Ohio, the campus is surrounded by gas stations, apartment buildings, tattoo parlors, homeless shelters, four different churches, two city hospitals, a minor league baseball stadium, and numerous hotels (one a restored grain silo). Buildings owned by Goodyear, Firestone, and Wonder Bread are visible from most campus buildings. On early morning walks through the campus, the smell of baking bread mingles with that of smokestack emissions. It is an environment of strange visual disjunctures, a postmodern landscape where the chaos of construction sites sit next to the manicured calm of green spaces, where the twin bell towers of an eighteenth century Bavarian Catholic church sit next to the Inventors Hall of Fame, where dilapidated housing sits next to statuesque fraternities, and where people waiting for city buses sit under giant billboards advertising the economic opportunities of the information age. None of this disjuncture seems to bother my students in the least.

Racially diverse, mostly working class, and often non-traditional, Akron's students arrive on campus with varying degrees of academic literacy. Indeed, eighteen percent of incoming students from the Akron Public Schools require remediation, slightly more than one out of six students. However, these students also arrive with a form of literacy untapped by much of current writing instruction—the literacy of the image. Rather than engaging written texts, my students are engaged by media images. Television, movies, advertising, video games, text messages, and the Internet bombard

their lived lives. Mass media, mass marketing, and mass communication have created a hyperreality, a simulacrum where the distinction between reality and representation has faded, where "the model is truer than true," where images of the real are realer than real (Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* 8). Phenomena as diverse as a U.S. President's visit to campus, the remnants of the rust belt economy, the Cleveland Indians' Chief Wahoo logo, Iraq war protests, MTV videos, and billboards advertising everything from Goodyear tires to reproductive services have blurred into a symbolic tapestry of entertainment and consumption, what Jean Baudrillard calls a "debauchery of signs" (73). It is an environment where value comes as much from seductive imagery as from need, where digital objects so constitute identity and agency that to lose one's pixels is to lose one's self.

Such an environment has created a form of mental processing at odds with the traditional hallmarks of process teaching: drafting, analysis, revision, and recursivity. Surrounded by electronic media, incessant advertising, an interaction of pre- and postmodern architecture, and the speed of urban life, my students' environment requires the mental processing of a massive amount of information rather than focusing on detail, an attention span that enables split second decisions rather than in depth and recursive analysis, and a post-industrialized lifestyle that rewards consumption rather than critique. My students have, in other words, developed a form of socio-cognitive processing that necessarily privileges the immediacy and indeterminacy of the image, what Gunther Kress calls the multi-modal processing of the New Media Age (45). The purpose of this essay is to explore the image literacy that students bring to the University and the problems and possibilities it creates for the writing classroom. It is my contention that the new media inculcates a powerful yet potentially adversarial literacy in our classrooms. This literacy challenges academic discourse while simultaneously opening the academy to the possibilities of multiple

literacies, democratic practices, and socially aware pedagogies—even if those possibilities occasionally seem more fractured than multiple, self-indulgent than democratic, hedonistic than socially aware.

The new media presents educators with a pedagogical and ethical conundrum. To wholeheartedly embrace the image risks abandoning the strictures and power of traditional academic culture, along with, I might add, the social vision of progressive education. To reject it outright risks disenfranchising the rhetorical skills students bring to the classroom, skills they could use to become better writers and critics of the world. As Bronwyn Williams argues, "If we shut the door on television . . . we shut out of our classrooms a broad range of students' rhetorical skills and experiences, some of which can help them become better writers" (6). We must find a third way, a middle way that respects the literacies students bring to the writing classroom and, yet, challenges, expands, and shapes those literacies through contact with print culture. Rather than lamenting the new media's effect on students as always corruptive, always problematic, always anesthetizing, we should explore how image literacy can be enhanced and transformed by written literacy—*and* visa versa.

Image Literacy and the Idea of Secondary Orality

It might seem a little strange to start a consideration of image literacy by reconsidering the works of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan. There are more current theorists researching the media's social impact, theorists who take into account advances in media technology and changes in cultural epistemology.[1] My turning to Ong and McLuhan could be seen as modernist nostalgia for previous epistemologies. Yet it is exactly that modernist nostalgia that I believe we need to examine. Besides their historical importance, Ong and McLuhan represent a view of media, literacy, and learning that is still widely held within academia and without. Many academics and much of our culture believe that the barbarians are at the gate, that media is

overwhelming and ruining spaces once reserved for and revered by the academy, and, fairly or unfairly, they use the work of Ong and McLuhan to justify this belief.[2] Barbara Stafford explains:

> The end of modernity is marked precisely by this uneasy sense that literacy has come to an end. For many, meaningful sounds and coherent texts have been drowned out in the fire-hose flow of data. Pedagogy's venerable scribal skills seem defiled by hidden systems of connected, but variously formatted, electronic apparatus that manipulate, modulate, synchronize, and digitize information by numbers through endless entertainment channels. (58)

Fearing the dominance of the digital and the end of literacy as they know it, many cling, uncritically, to older definitions of literacy. Therefore, until aspects of Ong's and McLuhan's thought (and by extension modernist epistemologies) on media, literacy, and learning are fully understood and criticized, we will not engage the new media's impact in productive ways.

Moreover, one cannot really understand our field's positions on media, literacy, and the interaction of the two without engaging the influence of Ong and McLuhan. Indeed, there is probably no more respected authority on the subject of orality and literacy than Walter Ong.[3] Drawing inspiration from the work of Eric Havelock, the scope of Ong's investigations into the effects of communication technologies on literacy and cognition are unparalleled. According to Havelock, the ancient Greek's invention of a purely symbolic alphabet caused their need for an "acoustically trained memory" to subside, and "As the memory function subsided, psychic energies hitherto channeled for this purpose were released for other purposes" (101). Specifically, the invention of an alphabet allowed the Greeks to, as Lester Faigley explains, externalize memory, "releasing the ancient Greeks from the burden of memorization and offering them new

opportunities for analytic thought" (201). Thus, writing created a socio-cognitive shift in the Greeks' worldview, giving them pragmatic advantages over oral-based cultures.

Ong concluded from this shift that learning to write changed the way the brain functioned.[4] Writing was not merely an advanced form of communication; it was a technology that created advanced forms of cognition and culture. "Without writing," Ong argued, "the mind cannot even generate concepts such as 'history' or 'analysis,' just as without print . . . the mind cannot generate portmanteau concepts such as 'culture' or 'civilization,' not to mention 'macroeconomics' or 'polyethylene'" ("Literacy" 2). Given the importance and amount of writing and print in our culture, one might assume that Ong saw orality as dying out. Instead, he saw it as expanding through hybridization.

The saturation of American culture by radio and television created what Ong called a secondary orality. Secondary orality was a hybrid literacy caught between the worlds of primary orality and written literacy, what Roger Silverstone calls "a displaced orality" (148). It was, as Ong argued, "to varying degrees literate," ("Literacy" 6) but that literacy was confused, not fully formed, and dependent upon the technology of writing rather than its master. For example, while watching television afforded the opportunity to read TV listings, channels, and words on the screen, it did not require an active engagement with the creation or interpretation of those texts. Secondary orality was different from the primary orality of oral-based cultures in that the latter was severed from written literacy and higher-level consciousness it created, while the former was dependent upon written literacy but had difficulty manipulating its gift of higher-level consciousness in sophisticated ways. The media had, in other words, created a new cognitive shift, but this time a shift that harmed literacy and cognition.

And Ong was not alone in his belief that the mass media negatively impacted cognition and literacy. McLuhan also saw "a distinct psychological shift" caused by

electronic technologies, a shift from visually centered, left-brained, print empowered analytic thought to acoustically centered, right-brained, media drenched synthetic thought. Though television was obviously a visual medium, McLuhan argued that its images overloaded left-brain cognition by inducing an "alpha state . . . . [in which] your left brain slides into a nondominant, neutral state, lulled by the dots flashing sequentially across the screen at one-thirtieth of a second" (*The Global* 87). In a brain dominated by the emotional, symbolic, and nonrational attributes of right-hemisphere thinking, the detached, linear, and logical attributes of "Left-hemisphere thinking will atrophy" (92). Writing, an attribute McLuhan grounded almost completely in the brain's left hemisphere, became a causality of the mental shift caused by mass media.[5]

Thus, if one applies Ong's and McLuhan's essentially modernist epistemologies on orality vs. literacy, left-brain vs. right-brain cognition, and media vs. print to my students, then one would have to conclude that my students are culturally deficient and cognitively impaired. There is a chasm of expectations between the way my students' brains function and the way the academy teaches, between the cultures my students bring to the academy and the cultures they find there. The influence of the new media, within these frames, can only be an obstacle which students and teachers must overcome. And to be honest, my students, living as they do in a world even more saturated by multiple media modes, do have difficulty manipulating, in academically acceptable ways, the detached, analytic, and linear reasoning of print. Grounded as they are in the icon, they do find traditional writing instruction hostile to their cognitive worlds.

However, while I agree that both writing and media change the way our brains function and that writing pedagogy must be reformed to connect to students' media constituted consciousness, I do not agree that this consciousness embodies cognitive deficiency or social inadequacy. While the new media is a challenge for the writing

classrooms of postmodernity, it is also an opportunity. My students use images to create all kinds of high-level cognition, concepts, and culture. There must be a way to connect this literacy to the literacy of print, and I believe there is. Ultimately, neither Ong nor McLuhan is correct in his understanding of how the brain processes images and how that processing impacts literacy. The saturation of my students' environment with visual media has *indeed* created another cognitive shift, but this shift cannot be understood as either a regression or state of anesthetized passivity.

The Socio-Cognitive Complexity of the Image

My criticism of Ong's and McLuhan's work rests primarily in three areas.[6] First, their understanding of the brain's neurological functioning, especially how the left and right hemispheres interact, is too binary and, thus, limited. Second, this limitation harms their understanding of the positive impact media images can have on high-level cognition. In fact, I argue that today's media images not only require higher levels of cognition but may even help to produce it. Finally, both Ong and McLuhan put too much emphasis on the analytic tool of critique in their conceptualization of literacy. My students' ability to *design* media images is more important than any supposed inability to critique them.

First, images, their generation, meaning, and impact on literacy, cannot be understood with a traditional right vs. left hemisphere model of thinking, with a model that puts the emotional, symbolic, and nonverbal on the right side of the brain and logic, reason, and print on the left. Images, language, and reasoning are not particularized functions of discrete or static brain parts. They are holistic functions enabled by the rapid and dynamic interactions of the brain's dual hemispheres. As Debra Innocenti explains, "Although it was once believed that the modules for processing images were located in the nonverbal right hemisphere, scientists have

recently been discovering that both hemispheres contribute to this function, particularly the left, which also processes logic, reasoning, and language" (63). Thus, images are actively involved in the brain's highest levels of cognitive function. Indeed, without them we might lose certain conceptual abilities. Innocenti, paraphrasing the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio, explains:

> Images are not simple neural phenomena whose influence is limited to sensory input. They are actually generated by numerous, synchronous systems also responsible for perception, memory, and reasoning. For instance, we cannot physically see what our brains are not wired to understand and process. Patients with achromatopsia (damage in early visual cortices) not only lose the ability to *see* color, but also the ability to *imagine* or *conceive* color even if the damage occurs late in their lives. (63)

Images do not impede higher-level thinking (what academics sometime conflate with academic discourse); they are the very substance of it. Images drive higher-level cognition, and while this cognition may be different in important ways than print driven cognition, it is still higher-level. We do not just think about images; we think with them. This is not to say that image based literacy does not cause problems for print based literacy, or that somehow image literacy is superior to print. It is simply that images and their impact on cognition cannot be understood or engaged with a binary model that consigns them to the primitive, regressive, or passive.

Second, given their binary conception of how the brain functions, it is not surprising that Ong and McLuhan neglect the positive cognitive impact of media images. Again and again in his work, Ong reduces the positive cognitive impact of the constructed visual image to the printed word. Only the visual image of print is capable of creating higher-level consciousness. Only print leads to greater cultural achievement. Perhaps Ong's neglect of the positive impact of media images on cognition is somewhat

understandable given the date of some of his publications. After all, networked classrooms, surgery conducted through computer imagery, and the computer mapping of the Mars' surface did not yet exist during a certain period of his work. Instead, humanity explored the universes through radar, radio telescopes, and satellites "launched into space as little speaking voices" (*The Barbarian* 225). But what of the cognitive influence of visual images "broadcasted" from billboards, magazines, and televisions—mediums already so prominent in his day? What of the cognitive influence of an environment now laden with new visual technologies? How do they restructure the brain? Surely the cognitive effects of our image drenched environment cannot be adequately explained by an oral-aural paradigm, by privileging the printed word as the only visual image capable of producing higher levels of thought. As Kress argues, "the dominance of the medium of the screen . . . . [is] producing a revolution in the uses and effects of literacy" (1).

The printed word is not the most frequent, constructed, or complex visual text my students encounter. From computer generated models of DNA, cancer cells, the human brain, and planetary bodies to music videos, hyperlinks, motion pictures, digital art, high-speed Internet connections, and corporate advertising, images not only allow but *demand* higher levels of human consciousness, cognitive functioning, and creative imagination. My students are not passive receptacles into which the media pour their images, mere conduits for hyperspeed advertising. The media image has become a complex hypertext which my students have learned to read, verbalize, and analyze—just in different ways than print. Whereas print demands recursivity, linear reasoning, and detachment from context, the media image demands immediacy, schizophrenic reasoning, and sensitivity to hypercontext. My students don't regress in the face of media images. They actively engage them and they do so with such speed that many mistake that engagement for a shortened attention span.

McLuhan too, though he delved more deeply into advertising, film, and television than did Ong, consigned the positive cognitive impact of constructed visual images to the development of the alphabet. "Visual space," he argued, "is a side effect of the uniform, continuous, and fragmented character of the phonetic alphabet, originated by the Phoenicians and enlarged by the Greeks" (*The Global* 35). In other words, "visual space" was the product of higher-level cognition enabled by a person's interaction with the complexity of the written word. The impact of media images, rather than contributing to or complicating that visual space, overloaded higher-level, left-brain cognition and induced a sluggish state of right-brain passivity. Consequently, McLuhan believed that the dominance of media images resulted in the fact that "we do not live in a primarily visual world any more" (*The Medium* 45). Instead, we live in a primarily acoustic world where "the high speeds of electric communication, [make] purely visual means of apprehending the world . . . too slow to be relevant or effective" (63).

My students, however, still live in a primarily visual world, albeit a different one than McLuhan theorized. The visual does not happen to my students; they are not its victims. My students play an active, even artistic, role in the generation, understanding, and application of images. As medical doctor and neurobiologist Richard Restak argues, "Vision . . . is not at all like a camera where the eye focuses light on the retina where a 'picture' is taken and conveyed along the visual pathways to the brain for interpretation. Rather, the brain actively constructs what we 'see,' and we are at once camera, film, photographer, and picture" (31). The media image does not overload left-brain thinking; it enables a faster or hyper form of dualistic cognition that relies on the interaction of the brain's two hemispheres. It breaks the binary opposition of left-brain vs. right-brain thinking, changes the nature of sight-emphasis, liberates the visual from Euclidean thought, and challenges print as the dominant visual text. Neither a

displaced form of acoustic orality nor a half-developed form of written literacy, image literacy is a complex matrix that structures my students' thought processes and modes of expression.

Finally, Ong's and McLuhan's concept of literacy is too narrow. It places too much emphasis on a student's ability to distance herself from an object and critique it. But literacy in the twenty-first century is more about making meaning than about deciphering another's intentions. To paraphrase Kress, literacy in the New Media Age is best understood as a design oriented activity rather than a mode of critique or deconstruction (42). He writes: "Critique is anchored to the ground of someone's past agendas: design projects the purposes, interests and desires of the maker into the future. Design is prospective, constructive not deconstructive, utopian and not nostalgic" (50). A consequence of Kress' theory is that the meaning, purpose, and significance of an image are not something best understood as contained in the image sign itself; something you discover through critique. Instead, images mean because we create or design their meaning in the very act of experiencing them. An image's meaning is the product of both those who send them *and* those who received them. Rather than detached, the relationship between image and meaning is always what Kress calls motivated (42).

If Kress is right, then labeling my students cognitively or socially deficient is not only culturally hegemonic but pedagogically ineffective. It misses the point of the twenty-first century's electronic drama. Students must make the meaning of images rather then just interpret it. The cognitive shift caused by media images necessitates a reconsideration of the types of writing we ask students to do and how we ask them to do it.

Jean Baudrillard and the Spectacle of the Image

Before turning to an examination of a classroom activity designed to engage my students' image literacy, I feel a small digression on the work of Jean Baudrillard is necessary. His ideas on media and simulation have been seminal to the formation of my own and are crucial for further explorations into the media's impact on cognition and literacy. With his disdain for historical consciousness, political agency, and social progress, Baudrillard might seem a strange figure to use to argue for what is ultimately a defense of the home literacies my students bring to the writing classroom. Theorists both inside and outside of composition have criticized Baudrillard's work as nihilistic, elitist, dangerously skeptical, and socially crippling.[7] To these criticisms, I might add the potentially imperialistic impulse of Baudrillard's work. When he writes that "The Other is what allows me not to repeat myself forever," (*The Transparency* 174) he risks endorsing, even through his irony, a kind of Hegelian colonization and consumption of the Other for one's own identity. However, whatever one thinks about the ultimate worth or applicability of Baudrillard's work, he is one of academia's sharpest observers of media culture. His work just may show us what we are up against if we want to engage image literacy with print literacy and progressive educational practices.

According to Baudrillard, images from the mass media, the Internet, and other visual technologies no longer represent or even distort reality but replace it. We live in a world so flooded with images that those images bear "no relation to any reality whatever" (*Simulations* 11). They can be taken from one context, both in terms of time and place, and injected into another context without causing perceptual dissonance, creating "a hyperreal scenario in which events lose their identity and signifiers fade into one another" (Patton 2). For example, in the first Gulf War "signifiers of past events faded into those of the present (the oil-soaked sea bird recycled from the *Exxon Valdez* to warn of impending eco-disaster in the Gulf)" (2). In this hyperreality of the simulacrum,

media representation "is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 4).

The modernists' mistake (even the mistake of some mainstream cultural studies theorists) in explaining the media's influence on student consciousness, from a Baudrillardian view, is twofold. First, they trace the West's movement from orality to print to media image historically; missing what Baudrillard believes is the exhaustion of history by our media dominated hyperreality. "[H]istory," Baudrillard argues "has stopped, one is in a kind of post-history which is without meaning" (*Baudrillard Live* 95). This post-history is without meaning not because we are situated within a context or, to use Kress' language, a genre that constitutes the meanings we assign any object but because context and genre no longer provide meaningful constraints for interpretation. The intelligibility of the hyperactive object escapes even destroys context. Accordingly, historical analysis can refer neither to objective facts nor to its careful examination of modal situatedness to privilege or legitimate its narratives because "quotidian reality in its entirety . . . incorporates the simulatory dimension of hyperrealism" (*Simulations* 147). In other words, there is no place outside the flows of images from which a historical analysis can or should be made. Images do not require an actual or historical referent to signify but only the logic of their own system of simulation.

Second, Baudrillard rejects the binary oppositions inherent in most theories of representation: authentic vs. synthetic, organic vs. mechanical, reality vs. representation (in this respect his work echoes current neuroscience). Since images no longer represent or even distort what is real but replace it, understanding the image "is no longer a question of false representation of reality (ideology)." It is more a question "of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" (25). Thus, binary oppositions such as natural vs. artificial, higher vs. lower, left vs. right, oral vs. print only limit our

understanding of images and literacy. They lead to the inevitable yet unfounded privileging of one communication system over another, often with negative consequences for the suppressed half.

Now, if Baudrillard is right, we should just surrender to the supremacy of the image, find pleasure in the pieces of the deconstructed universe, and move on. However, there are severe limitations to Baudrillard's thought. For example, the context for history and the modal imperatives of genre are neither as over determined nor as easily escaped as he thinks. There is a significant difference between the argument that there is no absolute meaning and that meaning does not exist, that the constraints of genre are fluid and that they don't constrain at all. Despite Baudrillard's claim that the intelligibility of the object escapes context, his own argument, his own text, is dependent on context, on a frame of historical influence for its own intelligibility. Baudrillard is made intelligible through his connection to and our understanding of the works of Marx, Freud, Saussure, Heidegger, Nietzche, and others. Those writers initiated the discursive practices—the context or genre— that made Baudrillard's text possible, and those initiators' texts were, in turn, made possible by previous initiators of texts. To accept Baudrillard's argument is to accept the dubious notion that history no longer provides meaning within an argument that depends upon a continual reference to and critique of history for its own intelligibility. If there truly were a collapse of history's ability to provide meaning, then we could never come to that historical understanding. To notice that history has disappeared is possible only from a historical perspective.

Still, we should be careful not to reject Baudrillard's work out of hand. Many of his arguments, though extreme, offer provocative and generative insights into media, consciousness, and literacy. These arguments, if tweaked, could provide the impetus for important pedagogical changes. For example, rather than insisting that images escape

context (probably a pedagogical dead end) we could develop our students' sensitivity to an image's hypercontext. Rather than wallowing in irony and skepticism, we could use Baudrillard's theory, especially its leveling of hierarchies, to open the classroom to new literacies, to ensure that our students' home literacies are not rejected out of hand. While Baudrillard is not all that useful for implementing a Freireian critical project, he might be useful for opening a space in which that project could take place.

The Pedagogical Application of Image Literacy

Using media images in the writing classroom is hardly a new idea. Theorists as varied as James Berlin, Lester Faigley, Kristie Fleckenstein, Roy Fox, Bruce Gronebeck, Rhonda Hammer, Debra Innocenti, Gunther Kress, Peter McLaren, Thomas Newkirk, Diane Penrod, Barbara Stafford, and Bronwyn Williams have all investigated the potential of visual media. But despite the prevalence of scholarship, there are problems with the pedagogy. For example, in some scholarship students seem to spend more time learning cultural studies theory than writing about images. They have to wade through the dense terminology of semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism before they are "certified" to write. Perhaps for students at other universities texts laden with the work of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Lacan are appropriate, but such texts would be almost insurmountable to my students. They would also send the implicit message that the media literacy my students already bring to the classroom is not valid, a message that would seem to contradict much of cultural studies' stated ethos. However, as Thomas Newkirk argues, "There is a curious schizophrenia" in some cultural studies pedagogy, a distrust of the very cultures being studied. On one hand, cultural studies theorists argue "that we are culturally defined beings—sustained, gratified, and guided by the discourses around us." On the other hand, "the very cultural commonplaces, the moral bedrock embodied in these discourses, are quickly dismissed" (91).

Furthermore, the differences between image literacy and written literacy are sometimes not sufficiently problematized in the scholarship. The cognitive and communicative demands of word and image are not interchangeable. Instead, they are, as Kress argues, interactive. They push, pull, and prod each other. They compliment and complicate each other. One should not, therefore, expect that skills from written literacy will naturally apply to investigations of the image. As Kress writes, "'The world narrated' is a different world to 'the world depicted and displayed'" (2). Word and image must be placed in dialectic tension; print skills must be injected into and will be problematized by the media experience.

I also question whether the media image is best understood as having a readily available and decodable ideology waiting for our careful deconstruction (something implied by almost all cultural studies pedagogy). If Baudrillard is correct, then the image's determinate meaning, ideology, and purpose is something that constantly slips away from us, constantly eludes are analytical grasp. An interpretative context, therefore, is not something we discover buried within the image, but something that the writing classroom must construct or design for the image.

Finally, the question for me in using images in the writing classroom is not so much how do I teach image literacy to my writing students, but how do I teach "writing to a population that is becoming decreasingly print-literate and increasingly teleliterate, if not in some cases highly icon-literate" (Penrod 15). Diane Penrod's answer to this question is to respect and make explicit the differences between media literacy and written literacy, not by lecturing on poststructuralism but "by injecting controlled doses of it [media] into the intellectual world of the composition classroom" (15). While I agree with the process of Penrod's solution, I would reverse her "corrective." Rather than injecting small doses of media into the composition classroom, I would inject small doses of writing into the media experience. Rather than "using popular cultural artifacts

. . . to transform the ways students make knowledge in the writing classroom," (18) I would use the writing classroom to transform the ways students make knowledge out of popular culture, a difference in orientation rather than subject matter.

The following is an exercise designed to help my students unpack and transform the image knowledge they *always already* bring to the writing classroom. Specifically, the exercise seeks to: 1) acknowledge and respect my students' image literacy, 2) inject writing and, thus, recursivity into the media experience, 3) design an interpretative context for the image extrapolated from my students' lived lives, 4) help my students translate or "code switch" media literacy into academically acceptable writing, and 5) "decelerate temporarily the rate of speed and motion with which the messages enter our students' lives" (Penrod 18).

Using Music Videos and Home Video in the Writing Classroom

One of the most productive exercises I use to help my students use writing to unpack their image literacy is the analysis of music videos. To conduct the exercise, I videotape a series of music videos and bring them to class. Good artists to tape include Eminem, Korn, Slipknot, Gwen Stefani, Snoop Dogg, Kanye West, NWA, Kid Rock, Marilyn Manson, DMX, Mudvayne, Audioslave, Britney Spears, Fallout Boy, Justin Timberlake, Avril Lavigne, and Madonna to name but a few. Each of these artists represents a different facet of my students' lived experience: the ironic yet socially conscious rap of Kanye West, the personal and political desperation of Mudvayne, the sexually charged gender bending of Madonna. In an attempt to use writing to slow down the image experience and tie my students' reactions to academic expectations, I take my students through a multi-layered process of "reading" and "rereading" the image. I also inject as much writing into the visual experience as possible.

To being, we simply watch the videos and discuss them. I will usually show a series of four to five videos before discussion begins. These initial discussions focus on students' emotional reactions and first impressions. Do they like the videos, the artists, the songs, and why? Students often comment on a videos' style, intelligence, stupidity, and/or creativity (what they call "taking it to the next level"). Occasionally, however, students offer more socially complex comments: the artificiality of former "boy band" aficionado Justin Timberlake, the "stealing of black culture" by Kid Rock, the blatant homophobia in Eminem's videos, the gratuitous sex and misogyny in many Snoop Dogg's videos, the way Marilyn Manson and Slipknot use costumes and violent imagery to make political statements, the way Korn uses dark imagery to highlight the social pathology of child abuse. This discussion leads to our first rereading of the images. I play the videos again and, this time, ask students to write down particular impressions and reasons for those impressions.

After (re)watching the videos and giving students time to write, I put them in small groups to share they impressions. In the class discussion that follows, I play the videos again and point out many of their formal elements: lighting, camera angle, costumes, etc. To enhance analysis and recursivity, I rewind the videos and freeze frame it on particular images, allowing students to support and debate ideas. After the discussion, I ask students to revise their written impressions, this time focusing on a specific image. During the next discussion, I run the videos as background noise, stopping them whenever requested. We may now discuss the colors used in videos, the dance style (urban, rap, house, or the frenetic "moshing" of heavy metal), the quick cuts the camera makes and what this requires of attention span, the videos' fashion sense and what this tells us about race, class, and gender, the videos' materialism (from the grotesque display of wealth in some rap videos to the sparse, almost anti-materialism displayed in others), or how the videos present sexuality. Most importantly, we discuss

how writing allows us to refocus, revise, and slow down the video experience, and why the academy values such interpretive strategies. I then replay the video one last time as the students revise their writing.

A good music video to use for this exercise is Madonna's "Music." As her name implies, Madonna is an icon of our media culture, and this video is pack with irony and simulation. The video starts with Madonna and her female friends (her posse) in the back of a luxury car. They are dressed in loud, flashy, outrageous outfits, sport oversized gold chains, and drink Crystal champagne. Drunk, Madonna and her companions head to a strip club and throw money at female strippers, inverting and, thus, subverting cultural gender roles while simultaneously reinforcing them. The overtly sexual, almost grotesque dancing of the strippers mocks the dancing found in videos by such rap artist Jay-Z and 50 cent. When Madonna and her friends return to their luxury car, Madonna's driver, a racially non-distinct male with an English accent (know to his fans as Ali G), tries to impress them with his rap prowess. Sporting gold teeth and speaking in a cartoon version of Black English Vernacular, he is dressed to look like an urban rapper. He wears a stocking cap, gold chains, and clothes made by either Fubu or Mecca (both popular urban fashions). The video ends with Madonna's luxury car driving away and displaying a license plate that reads "Muff Daddy"—a sexually charged, gender bending play on the name of rap artist Puff Daddy, now called P Diddy.

What is particularly interesting about Madonna's video is that it consciously enjoys using the very clichés of which it is making fun: flashy cars, hip-hop clothes, hyper masculinity, and scantily clad women. It simultaneously wallows in imagery and themes from rap videos and makes fun of that genre's materialism, objectification of women, and appropriation of "black street culture" by white rappers. If Baudrillard is correct in his belief that the image can only refer to its own system of simulation, then

Madonna's video seems to show that circular referencing is still capable of creating meaning. While Baudrillard believes that the dominance of media images in our society has eliminated a space outside the flow of simulation from which analysis can be made, the blurring of signification could be seen as a visual intertextuality that allows analysis from within the simulation. Madonna is both a creator and reader of her own videos, a producer and consumer of her own video as text. Whether Madonna's ironic use of imagery ultimately subverts or reestablishes the materialism, sexism, and racism of some rap videos is open to debate. However, her video displays the kind of conscious and sophisticated manipulation of media that I hope my students will display in their writing. In attempting to simultaneously critique and claim a genre's images, she displays the multiple literacies I want my students to display.

As an essay assignment for this exercise, I ask students to keep a journal, for one week, of the music videos they watch. After discussing their journals with me, students are expected to write a four to five page analysis of a specific music video. Drafts of the essay are workshopped in small groups and in conference. The final part of the assignment requires students to give oral presentations, an attempt to have oral, print, and visual literacies interact. My hope in performing this exercise is that students will see the immense amount of knowledge they already have about the images that fill their lives. I also hope they see how writing can enhance that knowledge. For while I disagree with McLuhan's conception of the visual, I agree that the student "instinctively understands the present environment—the electric drama," (*The Medium* 9). Her difficulty lies in communicating or translating that understanding via the written word.

Conclusion

In 1987 Karen Burke LeFevre argued that we should see "invention as *social*, as *dialectical*, and as an *act*" (33). Invention and the inventing self are not products of

autonomous individuals locked away from the world but products of "socially influenced, even socially constituted" (33) individuals sharing "language" and "other symbol systems" with "members of discourse communities" (34). While I agree with LeFevre's conception of invention, it is no longer enough to argue that invention is a social act. Media images have changed the very nature of what the social is. Consider, for example, a room full of my students sending text messages to friends while ignoring the people sitting all around them. These students prefer "talking" with the disembodied blips coming across their cell phone screens rather than living human beings. No, my students are not just socially constituted; they are profoundly media constituted.

This alteration of my students' social constitution necessarily alters their acts of invention. Living in an environment where the image is supreme and the search for media sensation is never ending, my students' acts of invention are more manipulations of media than social interactions. Indeed, media images often efface the social, displace audience, and deaden historical consciousness. Teaching the power of writing, be it drafting, recursivity, reasoning, or invention, in such an environment requires more than either an awareness of the social nature of the self or a debilitating label like secondary orality. It requires a space in which the impact of media images on cognition and identity can be slowed down, analyzed, enhanced, and appreciated. The writing classroom, if it begins with respect, can provide that space.

Notes

[1] See especially Baudrillard, Fleckenstein, Fox, Kress, and Stafford.

[2] See especially Ong's *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies*.

[3] See Gronbeck's, Farrell's, and Soukup's *Media, Consciousness and Culture: Explorations of Walter Ong's Thought*.

[4] See also Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (78-85) and "Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought" (23-50).

[5] It should be noted that while McLuhan saw several social dangers in this shift (political apathy, cultural disenfranchisement, the death of critical analysis, etc.), he did not see right-hemisphere thinking as inherently bad. Indeed, he was more open than Ong to the playful aspects of "right-hemisphere thinking" and its pedagogical possibilities.

[6] Criticisms of Ong's work on orality and literacy have focused either on its ethnocentrism or on its association of oral culture with electronic communication. See Daniell's "Against the Great Leap Theory of Literacy" (181-93) and Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* (201-04).

[7] See especially Faigley (211), Berlin (57), and West (277).

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The Oriental Express

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Toby Lunch, wanna-be actor, wanna-be someone famous, stood with his legs clamped together on the middle rung of the ladder. He had a pleasurable thought about falling off and cracking his skull open, just to see what everyone would do. It went through his mind in slow motion. He added sound effects like women screaming, men looking baffled and children hiding their eyes. His imagination automatically reproduced it in black and white. He shifted position by relaxing his back, leaning over a bit and letting his arms hang loose, like the figurehead on a ship's prow.

Yes. He was a large ship wading through murky waters, about to crash on deep, sharp rocks, about to steer itself into legend and men's conversations. He leaned further forward and closed his eyes.

All the people below, all the heads that bobbed past divided around him to avoid the ladder. He opened his eyes and watched them for a while and soon they all looked the same, with their white collars and their dark suits. The fantasy faded. He looked down at his own clothing, which involved a yellow Aussie Lifesavers parka his mother got as a Purchase With Purchase at a perfume counter from her friend Mrs Hempline, and an apron over a pair of stonewashed Jeans West jeans. The sign above him, which his father had hung carefully over-twenty-years-ago: 'The Oriental Express' creaked like the door of a haunted house, and Toby climbed the ladder to the top and applied WD40 to its hinges.

"That'll shut that bastard up," he said.

"Toby get down before you hurt yourself," Eng Chor said. Eng waited patiently at the bottom of the ladder and noticed his son losing focus. He was worried for Toby, because the child was growing up and letting go of his manners. The child was now sixteen and was spending more and more time in the bathroom, coming home at unacceptable times and making friends with Undesirables. Toby was Number One Son. He was a gift. He would one day pass on the family name and Eng was considerably proud of the fact that Toby retained all of the fine, delicate features of the family…

1. fine, wispy hair
2. thin nose
3. coffee coloured skin
4. non-slitty eyes
5. significant height
6. large hands

…right back to Bi Mi Shen (which Toby called 'the ole Dowager') who was the first woman to wear pants and do her hair up like a tool box.

"I'm fine for Chrissakes Dad," Toby said.

He climbed down and Eng watched him stride off, but then stop, came back and sullenly help fold the ladder.

"How many times do I have to tell you? You must never leave things lying around," Eng said slowly. He pointed his finger out as his father did to him and his father to him. It was a challenge at every turn to educate and instil values into his son. The boy would one day be too old and it would be Too Late To Show Him The Ways.

And who knew The Ways? Teaching his son to follow the rudimentary values of hygiene, personal pride, competition without dishonour and obedience to elders was getting to be a task and a half. It was only yesterday when Eng was

burping the boy and reading him Enid Blyton, whom the child used to call Gnid because of the way the author wrote her signature.

Eng glared at the boy. “Please for Allah’s sakes, fix your hair and tuck in your shirt. Why does this happen to me?”

Toby came home one day last year, face stained with crying because Simon McPhee, whose skin was perfect had teased him for the acne on his face. Yes, he did have bad skin, Eng admitted. In fact, the doctor had said he had toxic lesions and should be on a course of antibiotics with a referral to the dermatologist.

“This is common in Asian skin,” the doctor said, “and he should go on Vibramycin or Retin-A. The boy should go on Roaccutane specifically, but not if he suffers from depression, and not if he’s irresponsibly, sexually active.”

Eng had exploded with laughter in the consulting room. “No!” he said proudly, “My son is not having sex with anyone.”

He couldn’t imagine the boy without trousers and a girl nearby. He couldn’t imagine that Toby would be taking sex with any of the Undesirables he went out with. And where would he have time? He only ever went to concerts, which Eng or one of the other parents like his good friend David Hemphill drove them to.

The doctor looked at Toby and Toby, after a short while, nodded.

“Yes,” Toby had said, to stunned silence. “Yes, well, I am.”

Eng asked many questions in the Cortina on the drive home to Springvale. “My Allah do the others do this? Does that Addo, Stevo, whatso make you do this from peer press? Why didn’t you say something? Do you know what to do with a woman? Is she going to take your money and use you like all loose white women? Is this where your head is? Is this your new headset?” Eng was going to start the migrant story (I came here with not two cents to rub together and

worked my back to the bone and met your mother and worked her back to the bone and started a family business which I had hoped one day to leave you once I died not without first making our life comfortable in this lucky country because I didn't want you to ever go through what I had to go through with nobody to talk to and nobody to help me and my family far away and THIS IS THE THANKS I GET…) but decided instead to pursue the details, "Well? Is it?"

Toby was quiet and Eng watched him flick on the radio and twist his fringe through his fingers. Eng noticed his son had bleached it so badly, that a few strands were orange. He thought of his grandmother, Bi Mi Shen's beautiful black knot upon which was sprinkled sesame oil. "I hope it's not that girl with the purple hair," he said, comparing the pale white girl to Bi Mi Shen's cheeks, which were dabbed with beetroot during the war to make her more attractive.

He imagined a photo of Bi in a white shirt and a pair of trousers that had cuffs at their hems, retouched with ink and muted with soft lighting. He did not mention that one of his friends did some research and found that she was actually Jewish, from one of the Russian Progroms that migrated to Shanghai at the beginning of the century. Toby was technically Jewish, but nobody was allowed to talk about that now.

"Especially, please Allah Almighty, especially not the pale-skinned, blue-eyed hussy with too many eyelashes."

All of the white girls looked the same. They were hard to tell apart. This was why they all changed their hair colour. Asian people did not have the same problems. Why couldn't Toby be a normal Chinese boy who studied like a madman and had glasses and therefore no chance with superficial women? Why was he hell bent on making 'buddies' and staring at magazines, staring at himself, obsessing over appearances?

"Calm down Dad," Toby had said.

But Eng felt ashamed and bewildered. He was not angry because his son had sown his seed and not told him, he was angry because it was a white girl who had skin so thin it was almost like boiled duck. Eng just knew it was a white girl, and white girls meant trouble. There would be more surprises where this came from.

Eng watched his son carry the ladder back into the restaurant and jam it inside the cupboard, which was once for an ironing board when they first lived on the premises.

A young man of about twenty-five entered the front door and started set-up. He was strong and took the chairs down from the tabletops with a strength and agility that Eng couldn't now manage himself. The man was a friend of a friend of Eng's wife Nancy. He had a thick brown mullet and a broad, flat nose. He wore a sleeveless shirt and Eng could see the peep of a dragon tattoo protruding from his shoulder.

"Hello Tintin," Eng called and waved.

The man didn't hear him and instead made his way to the far end of the restaurant where he started on the chairs.

Eng shrugged and turned his attention back to his son.

The boy was growing up too quickly. In one year he was now tall and thin and had knobbly elbows. He tied ropes and a pole to full soft drink crates and used them as weights. He was fixated on building his muscles and looking good. He complained about not having to shave, a blessing to anyone else. He defaced all of his precious schoolbooks that Eng and Nancy worked so hard to purchase. He came home smelling of smoke and alcohol, neither of which Eng himself ever kept in the house. He threw things on the floor that Eng and Nancy gave him, which Eng promptly retrieved. He listened to bands who swore, one of whom

was accused of inciting violence. He went to the beach and did nothing but surf or rode up and down the street in cars driven by older boys.

Eng sighed once more. The day he learnt his son was sexually active, was now a fond memory. Toby was now seeing a girl called Moaning, who would, in fact, moan now that Eng was forced to let her spend time with Toby in his room. It was better than Toby being out on the street or Allah forbid, in the girl's own house with her irresponsible parents. "How is Moaning?" he asked.

"Mona, Dad," Toby said, and walked off toward the tables.

The Oriental Express was listed in 1993 as one of Melbourne's best Cheap Eats. The newspaper article, prominently displayed, had yellowed and worn down so that over time, the words read 'Cheap Fats.' Nevertheless, Eng was very proud. His business had been steady since 1971 and such esteem and recognition was because of years of hard work and service, not to mention countless arguments with relatives whose wages were not always the same every week.

Right now he watched his son drift in and out between the tables, muttering the odd word to Tintin, folding the pink serviettes into flowers and placing them next to the chopsticks and on top of the nylon tablecloths. From his son's ear flowed a thin mobile phone wire to his pocket. Toby was talking animatedly and Eng had the fleeting image of one of his own ancestors, whose son went mad and started talking to himself. He started worrying about Toby once more and decided to venture into the kitchen to make sure the cooks were preparing everything on time. There they were; Tintin's brother Tan up to his elbows in bean shoots and rice noodles, Mrs Hemphill's neighbour, Eugene and another fierce-looking new youngster called Cecil Kawasaki. Suddenly Eng noticed that all of them had the dragon tattoo and he was amazed at the state society had been reduced to where people couldn't even cultivate an individual sign of rebellion.

"Cecil, you're very thin to have such an enormous tattoo. It has very nice colours, but perhaps your mother wondered why you wasted such a lot of skin."

The young man stopped and gazed at Eng. The others sniggered and he began to laugh, shaking the wok he was holding so that the bok choy flipped like green goldfish. Eng noticed he had no teeth.

Once upon a time, Eng remembered, Toby brought a strange girl who called herself 'Alley' to the restaurant and Nancy put chicken feet with black bean sauce in front of her. The girl immediately covered her face with her hand and started crying and Eng did not know why she was so rude. Nancy was completely insulted. If it were he, Eng would have gratefully taken the nearest piece and swallowed it, even as a sign of respect to the parents. That was what it was, a test of respect to the parents. But there she was, this Irish girl with fluffy red plaits, a shameful name, and freaky, green eyes running to the toilets and then out of the door, never to be seen again.

Mrs Lunch was making dim sum with her hands and chatting to one of the non-English speaking dish washers, Eugene, who was telling her all about his dreams of working on a Kibbutz in Israel. Her bare arms were caked with flour and some got stuck in her hair; she had wearily wiped her brow more than once. Eng watched her create a square from a drop of dough and flatten it with the heel of her palm. She then scooped up a mixture of minced ginger, pork, pork fat, soya and vinegar sauces and dolloped a tiny ball into the square. Cupping her hand, she folded the square over the ball and twisted the end deftly, placing it onto a bamboo tray and dusting it with more flour. She would make a thousand of those a day, Eng thought. What a woman, my wife.

"What babe?" Toby was talking on the phone, peering around, wondering whether he'd accidentally missed anyone's serviette. Those things were thin on

the ground when it came to his father's restaurant. Many a time was there a filthy look at a patron who just helped themselves to a serviette from another table. According to his father, a missing serviette was to ruin the whole evening. People were extravagant about them. Every extra serviette was money. But everything looked okay. He stared at the ceiling, which was a piece of art. It was made to resemble a ballroom, with mirrors surrounded by gold filigree and bronze ornaments. Even the walls, which had a roll of red velvet down the sides, had picture rails with a decent looking lick of sandy paint to them. Unfortunately, the tables themselves were made of chipboard and the chairs so old that they were almost trendy retro and there were amber cigarette trays and a red patterned carpet which if one was on acid, which Toby had often been, one might get paranoid looking at.

Toby wanted to get out of there quickly. There was a movie on at Moorabbin drive-in, a rerun of Star Wars and it was sufficiently gooey enough to make Mona want to cry and cuddle, but interesting enough to keep Toby from yawning. He loved science fiction. He loved Fantasy. He loved the books; Ender's Game, Speaker for the Dead and the Mistress of the Empire series. He loved The Dark Crystal, The Neverending Story and Legend. Most of these stories were about genocide and colonialism. They were in fact, a metaphor of colonialism, of real life, and Toby loved the old plot of indigenous peoples being civilized before someone realized that there was a poignant and necessarily equitable exchange between cultures. Everyone was an anthropologist to Toby. Sometimes he could see science fiction in everything.

Toby and Mona had a very exciting relationship thus far. Mona was a cracker and like Toby, she harboured a great desire to be an actor and had joined an extras agency to find her work. She got all the mute parts that called for a suburban barmaid and Toby got asked to play activist mathematicians or herbal

doctors. All of those only ever required stilted Chinese accents which Toby felt embarrassed to do. Mona wouldn't take shit from nobody and she had a really nice way of draping her legs over Toby's at any given moment in time. She was a beauty therapist and was the one who bleached his fringe, though she did it with benzyl peroxide from his pimple cream because her salon wouldn't let her take home a bleaching kit. She had a cute face and a round, pink tongue and referred to him as her "Ass-iarn" while she called herself his "Whitey cunt," which he always found amusing. Mona was also very spiritual and painted stark images of Hindus in dance positions on her bedroom wall and bought a large soap stone laughing Buddha for her lounge room on top of her television. She loved champagne and had a severe image problem with her weight. She understood where Toby was coming from and loved him and hated herself at the same time and she was so riddled with issues that Toby fell in love with her within two weeks of them going out with each other. Mona bought him a thousand dollar gold ring, from when she won money at the pokies which he had to hide from his father in case Eng thought something serious was going to happen. For all her blondness and her tallness and her insecurities, he believed she had more problems than he did with identity.

"Can you pick up some rice rolls for me?"

"Huh?"

"Rice rolls. No carrots. And no onions if you want kissing."

"They're Vietnamese gorge. We're a Chinese restaurant remember, Chinoiserie."

"Oh yeah," she said, "I forgot. Get them from the take-away."

Toby hung up. He loved the almost symbiotic communication he had with Mona. Sometimes they didn't even have to speak at all. Yes, everything looked fine. He took his apron off, threw it behind the register, thought twice, then went

and picked it up and hung it on one of the pegs. Outside, he waited until it was certain that his father couldn't see him from the kitchen window. Then he went next door to Yang's and told them to hurry up with his order.

"That boy's going to break my ball," Eng said. He saw the puff of his son's jacket come out of Yang's, a white take-away bag in his hand. Just through the bag, he could see a plastic container full of rice rolls. Did the boy not realise they spat in those things?

There was a protection racket going on in Springvale. Nobody said the word 'triad' but it was clear the Chinese version of the mafia was controlling half the suburb and the Vietnamese or Koreans or even the Australian police force controlled the other half. It was a turf war. Eng wasn't too worried about it. He had cousins who were married to the mob; and an aunt twice removed called Cherry who was in jail. He paid his weekly five hundred dollars in a little Lycee red packet to the Gods outside the back door and had no trouble since.

Eng saw his son cross the road, take a packet of cigarettes out from his pants pocket, remove one, light it as if he'd done it his whole life and inhale a long, loving draught even before he got to the other side. "He's going to break my ball," Eng said.

Nancy looked up from the dumplings and Eng knew she hadn't understood anything he'd said. She'd recently been to the hairdresser in Chinatown and re-permed her hair into a mass of tight curls, "Make it like black people," she always told them, so the flaps beside her ears were hard to hear through.

"What now?" she said.

"Hrrmph," he replied and stared at his son's skinny bum.

"At least it's not drugs."

A courier came to the door and Eng turned from his thoughts back to business. The courier held a large sack full of Italian bread and said, “Mr Egg Chor Lung?”

“Eng Chor Lunch,” Nancy corrected.

“Call me Frank,” Eng said. He became excited. These bread rolls were the very same offered by the Hotel Intercontinental. They came from Sydney and his patrons went crazy over them. They were good for congee, for between courses and looked great on the lazy susans in the middle of the tables. Everyone was impressed with the new item on the menu and he could charge a good five dollars for them.

Eng paid the man in flour-covered Australian bank notes from a jar on the counter before waving him away. He had to look carefully at the numbers in the corners of them first. Eng had burst in one morning telling Nancy about how the currency had changed, how Australia was the first country in the world to have waterproof, polymer bank notes and the most colourful bank notes in the history of bank notes. “Look Nancy!” he said, dipping them in the dirty dishwater. He forgot that she was colour blind. “Aren’t they just another amazing thing about this country!”

Eng remembered the day he stood at Melbourne Town Hall in a small but highly emotional ceremony, pledging allegiance to Australia and receiving his certificate of citizenship. That was the day he changed his name from Lung to Lunch and the week he opened the restaurant. It was a very sentimental memory. He’d eaten a Four ‘n’ Twenty pie afterward. He looked to the wall just to the right of the industrial stove. There it was, the certificate, next to the framed issue of proprietorship and his son’s old Year Ten swimming award. That was a proud moment in their lives.

There were many proud moments, though there were also some translation issues too. When Toby was five, they took him to the nearest demonstration school and signed him up under his real name, 'Chee Beng Lunch.'

"You can't use that name," the school administrator told them, "nobody will be able to pronounce it. How about Toby?"

So they changed it to Toby. Then when they had to return to Hong Kong to visit Nancy's great aunt and her cousins, the Fowlers, imagine their surprise when applying for Toby's passport, they found that 'Toby' was not recognized as Chee Beng's legal name. The poor boy was stunned when he realized nobody had a record of his new name and that the world insisted on calling him by his old name. And in fact, they'd spelled Chee Beng Lunch incorrectly in the first place. They'd spelled it Chee Beng Lunk because of the way Eng pronounced it back then. The poor boy walked around for days, troubled because he had no proper name. Eng paid a fortune to get all of his documents changed. Eng even asked Nancy if she wanted a new name, just for the hell of it. "May as well," he said, "think of it as going undercover for the rest of your life."

He heard a knock on the door again and Eng's good friend Bill Ballymore came in with a bag of new Arborio rice, which Eng had added to the menu to service his Japanese customers.

Bill was not a fit man. Eng observed his green skivvy, which had a collar too cumbersome for his short neck. His belly and nipples protruded from the thin material and he thought he was doing a good thing by sporting a jade-coloured, beaded bracelet and a gold Seiko watch (fake). Bill had been a very good friend of Eng's ever since the day they bumped into each other in the Oriental Express restrooms. Bill had been spending the entire evening staring at a Foster's beer while his new wife, Shirley Mendoza, whom he met on the

internet sat next to him, facing the same direction. She couldn't speak a word of English and he couldn't speak a word of whatever language she spoke. All Bill knew was that he loved her immensely. He would later tell Eng that she represented everything he ever fought for in the Korean War; freedom, liberation and victory. She was Korean and he was an ex-pat, though a re-pat now that he moved back to the homeland and brought this new, stunning looking lady with him. The Ballymores made a go of it, agreeing in nods and handshakes and even some hot, steamy sex and here they were, both making an enormous effort to make communications.

Eventually, sex went a bit off because it was evident that Bill had a low sperm count and for all intents and purposes, it looked like Mail Order had married a dud. Bill felt terribly awkward and told Eng about it. Bill's wife could be stoic at times though there was still something so delicate about her, which reminded him of huts on fire and families crouched in dark corners. She had a temper on her too, this sheila, he'd said. If Bill put a foot wrong like mess the lounge or stick his feet in her direction, there was a slap to be had.

It was Toby who rescued him that very night. Toby came out of nowhere, asked Bill how he was, patted him on the back and told him that he'd married a Philippino. "Don't worry Bill, Philippinos are an antsy race. I've got a friend who's a cheerleader for the All Blacks in New Zealand. Asian Barbie my friend. But shy as a new kitten."

It was very meaningful for Bill, who thanked Toby and then Eng (Frank), who said that Toby got his opinions from his father. Bill realized that he had a different piece of history in his hands that Toby said would eventually involve paw paw whitening soap and garlic infused peas. He went back to the table and said a few words including 'Philippines' with Eng behind him for backup. Her face lit up.

"I ruv you Biw," she said. Bill nearly started crying.

"Put them over there, Bill and get yourself a Clayton's from the fridge," Eng said, though he noticed his friend was looking out of sorts and agitated.
Once Bill unloaded the sack of rice, the two friends wandered out into the sea of tables and pink serviettes. Tintin was just laying the forks next to the chopsticks on china holders of coolies with their bums in the air. He nodded at Eng and disappeared to the kitchen.

"So how're you doing Bill?"

Eng waited for his friend to sit down before seating himself, holding his breath in case Bill disturbed the serviettes. He could tell something was wrong in the way that Bill immediately slumped his big shoulders and let his thick chin fall to his chest. Bill leaned over and Eng was reminded of a family dinner at a Japanese Restaurant in Sydney called Pearl Harbor where his own grandfather had a mild heart attack. "My Allah Bill, are you okay? Bill should I call the ambulance? Bill?"

But Bill emitted a huge sob, sat up and took one of the serviettes.

"You know," he started, "people ask me how I cope after the war. How I do things after such violence, how I go about my life." He looked into his drink. "It's about the quality of survival. I live near other Vets and it's about the way we relate to each other. It's about survival with honour, with dignity. I haven't been this miserable since the pigs ate my little sister."

Eng wasn't sure what the last sentence meant.

"It's Shirley, Frank," Bill said.

"Tell me Bill. Let's get you some tissues. Don't use those."

"It's Shirley!" Bill wailed, "She wants a divorce."

Toby knocked on the door which had a huge bronze plaque with "MACINTYRE" printed on it. He remembered his father asking why anyone would want to invite intruders into the house by having their name printed on their door. Nobody could answer him.

Stuart opened it and slapped Toby on the back. "Toy boy!" he said, and Toby felt his face go red.

"Hello Detective Macintyre," he said and looked down. Mona's father was sometimes a bit energetic.

"Call me Stuart sonny," the man said, "We're not at work! Anyone who's a friend of Mona's is a friend of her Dad's. How's your father?"

"Good thanks."

Toby followed the man into the lounge room, which was beige and full of objects the family was forbidden to touch. He recalled many a time when the MacIntyres had flown to their relatives in Townsville or up the Coast in a Maui van and he and Mona had lain on that very carpet, in the nude, smoking what she called 'marijabooby.'

"Mona!" Mr MacIntyre shouted. Toby could hear stomping from upstairs and saw Mona's twin sisters pelt down and rush toward him.

They were beautiful creatures, Mona's sisters. They were tighter versions of Mona and had buds for breasts and translucent, powdery skin. They stumbled over each other to get a look at him and Toby once again, felt embarrassed at their friendliness. "Hi Toby. Hi Toby," they said and found something hysterical.

"Hi girls," he said and watched as they looked at each other and collapsed into a blur of bare shoulders and lipstick.

Mona thankfully came down the stairs holding the rail and shooed them away. "Stop staring at his dick for God's sakes…Hi babe," she said, "Did you get the rice rolls?"

"Yep," he said and handed them over.

Mr MacIntyre smiled distractedly and hurried off in the direction of the backyard. Toby moved so he could see where he was going and saw Mr MacIntyre greet a Chinese woman who had too much make-up on.

"It was nobody," he heard Mr Macintyre tell her.

Toby saw the woman sigh with relief and recognised her as Bill's wife, Shirley Ballymore and wondered what she would be doing in the MacIntyre's backyard. Suddenly he saw her clamp her hands around Mr MacIntyre's neck and give him a violent tongue pash.

"Christ man," Toby said. He imagined his father standing beside him, shaking his head and pointing his finger. Mrs MacIntyre was always overseas. The MacIntyre grandparents were in a home and when Toby told Eng about the differences between the families, it shocked and terrified him.

"Cool," Mona interrupted his thoughts. "Let's go. You drive and I'll navigate."

The drive wasn't very far. Mona put her feet up on the dash and at certain intersections the inertia pushed her forward. Toby could see her underwear beneath her miniskirt and it made his foot heavy on the pedal. They stopped at Red Rooster on the way and then a sweet shop where Mona bought a marble-cake without thinking about how to cut it. Their friends were already waiting outside, most holding popcorn, Twisties and Coke.

"Remind me I've had rice rolls," Mona whispered.

Toby's friends consisted of Robbo (Shaun Robinson) McPhee (Simon McPhee), Addo (Andy Taylor) and Stevo (Toby never knew his real name). Everyone called Toby, Tobes or Tuck, for Tuck Lunch, and then Tuckwell for Tuck, which would be endearing when he was about fifty years old but not now that he was eighteen. They called Mona, Moans or Mons Venus and they each

had girlfriends whom they called by shortened names. His father had shaken his head when Toby told him his various nicknames.

"Why do you always have to shorten everything? Can't you just call each other by your first names?"

But friends didn't do that. Nobody the entire world over did it in the X generation. Their girlfriends were called Vetski, for Yvette, Fi, Tons for Antonia and Rad for a Russian girl called Rhada Hempline whose mother insisted she wear red and whose father took it in turns to drive them around.

"Let's go buddy," Robbo yelled. And they drove in procession to the back of the drive-in, on the other side of the kiosk so that nobody could see what they were doing should they wish not to watch the movie.

Toby watched Mona settle herself in the front seat by grabbing the bar below it and pulling upward. The seat shot backward and at the same time, she arched her back into a lying position so that she could stare at the roof of the car instead of the screen out front. She indicated for Toby to do the same and watched him struggle with the concept for a full ten minutes.

"Babe, do it gently and don't stress about it," she said.

"Yeah, yeah."

Toby knew Mona loved him though she couldn't work him out. She'd tell everyone who asked that he had a childlike, feminine quality but also this massive dose of innocence or maybe stupidity, which she referred to as The Black Hole.

"There goes the Black Hole again," she'd say. She'd tell him he was shithouse at reading maps and say "aren't you supposed to be second generation Australian?"

Mona loved his muscles. He had faint ridges underneath his sports tops and nice long thighs not to mention the natural tan through winter. He also gave

nice body hugs, she said, which Mona never got from anyone else. It was a hug she'd pay for, which she called a 'snuggle' and it made her feel safe and sleepy.

Mona reached over and put her hand on his thigh, smiling when Toby shifted, ignored the opening credits and stared fully at her. He looked past her head to Addo and Rhada in the next car and saw that they were already furiously pashing, steaming up the front window with their hot chips and roasted chicken. And then he looked onto Stevo and Tons in their Escort who by contrast looked dead straight ahead.

"I like you Toby," Mona said, a bit shy because the car made everything sound insulated.

Toby placed his hand on top and threaded his fingers through hers. "I like you too Mons," he said.

Toby knew he would be a gentleman tonight. He wouldn't stab at her or hump her thigh at the love scene or push her head down in front of the others. He truly believed she was beautiful, genuinely beautiful with all of her fat stomach (she called it her fun bag) and stretch marks. He was the only guy who saw her naked in daylight. She could have Eurasian babies by him. She trusted him with her life. As if she knew what she was thinking, Mona smiled and moved his hand higher with her own.

"Nancy. Fi-di-lah! Get the boys going," Eng said.

Nancy frowned at him, but organized the young men into pairs so they could divide the Arborio rice into servings, sort out the washed crockery for an even flow for business and prepare dishes like hot almond dessert, fish for frying with shallots, and duck's tongues.

Eng stared at the lumps of flour in his wife's nails and between her fingers as she waved them around. He believed that she would have dirty nails until she was dead and mentioned the prediction several times. He harbored the fantasy

that one day he would have his own cooking show and be as famous as Elizabeth Chong, whose father invented the Chiko Roll in Australia during the 60s. Eng wondered how he would start something like that if his wife was going to be so messy. He noticed the old oven, getting brown and burnt with use and the bamboo trays, faded with over steaming. These items would have to be renewed if a TV crew were to ever come in here. He could get Nancy to hold classes and teach neighbourhood wives how to make dim sum, chive omelettes and Singaporean chilli crab. She could talk to the camera, have everybody standing behind her as she stirred, whisked and wokked. He could manage her and take commission. It could be a real money maker.

Eng imagined himself standing in the background with his arms crossed as his wife played up to the television, calling her yum cha dishes 'Tiny Delights' and 'Chinese Surprises.' He could have a holiday in Lake Eildon with the earnings, maybe take his friend Bill with him and sit on a porch somewhere talking about women.

"She's having an affair," Nancy declared loud enough for him to hear through the double doors. Eng saw the expression on her face and knew she was at the 30 dim sum mark. The flour was hanging off her hands in stalactites.

"Be quiet Nancy, can't you see the man is in pain?" Eng said. She once accused Eng and Bill of being old baboons together. She was getting on his goat. He turned to his friend.

"Tell me Bill, what did she say again when you asked for children?"

"I asked for IVF. You know, inverted fertilization. It takes a lot for a man to ask for something like that. She turned around and asked for a divorce."

Bill described the scenario. "I want a divorce," she screamed and sobbed all the way to the bathroom where she slammed and locked the door.

"Jesus, Frank. I had no idea what to do. I was devo. I looked at all the photos of us on the fireplace and imagined all the kids we could've had. I wanted a footy team mate. I wanted my own State of Origin side. That would've been so bloody unreal all of us living in a big house full of kids and dogs and that."

Eng watched Bill scrunch his face up silently and pause before letting out a hiccup. He looked across to Nancy who mouthed again from the kitchen, "She's having an affair," before turning back to his friend and patting him on the back.

"Have something stronger than a Clayton's," he said.

"I just wanted a big English Sheepdog like on the Berger's Paints ad," Bill sobbed.

"Perhaps she's just needing space?" Eng asked. He liked to use Western notions of space. It was always welcomed with heavy nodding and sighs.

"Maybe she does…" Bill said, before sniffing. "What do I do mate? Do we go and see somebody?"

"See somebody? Who?" Eng shrugged his shoulders and looked at the clock on the wall which said 6.00pm, time to open. "I have to open Bill. Come and sit down, but don't look depressed in front of the customers all right?"

He had Bill settle at a table for one and watched him stare morosely into a little bowl with shapes of tears at the bottom of it. Those bowls were Eng's latest purchase. The light shone through the rice shapes and they glowed blue. They reminded him of Bi Mi Shen, who used to tap her chopsticks on the table together before levering the food into her mouth with the precision of a slingshot.

"I love my wife," Bill suddenly wailed, "I love everything about her. We've had some unreal times. More than any of the wives I've had before."

Eng gestured frantically to Nancy, who quickly emerged from the kitchen with a saucepan full of hot and sour soup.

"She was my flower," Bill continued, "Her fingers and toes were as tiny as these chopsticks and by Jesus that woman could pack away the food like nobody's business."

Eng patted Bill on the shoulder and tried to change the subject, spooning the soup out into the bowl. "We don't eat shark's fin soup Bill," he said cheerily, "they're extinct; sharks."

Bill sniffed and took the wide-lipped spoon from the side plate, which triggered a spasm of misery.

Everything had been eaten; the chicken, the rice rolls, the Twisties, the popcorn, all the marble-cake, which was consumed first and the Coke. And then just as Chewbacca and Harrison Ford noticed they would be better as friends, Toby felt a surge of lust for Mona. He reached across, held her face in both hands and kissed her slowly, tasting all five dishes at once. He felt her soft jaw against his neck and maneuvered her so that she could face him squarely and let him gently push his leg between hers. She raised her backside in the air and Toby knew the whole world could see up her skirt. He stopped and twisted her around so that she sat on his lap instead.

"Um, maybe we should do this when we get home," he suggested.

"Maybe honey, but my dad will be up waiting for me. We can do it in the car on the street if you like?"

Toby was well aware that Mr MacIntyre questioned Mona about everything she did with him; where they went, what they did and who they did it with. Mr MacIntyre was almost obsessive and got down to the weirdest details about what people were wearing, how much money they had and what state their cars came from. Even to the point of what tattoo they had on their arms.

"Is he gonna ask what we did again?" Toby didn't relish the thought of Mona providing explicit details. The MacIntyres were unscrupulously honest with each other.

"Probably."

Some time later, Mona was asleep and it was just Toby watching men in white kill men in black.

After awhile, Toby turned to Mona and examined her face. He gazed at her and wondered what his father would say if they married, if they had a kid called Bill and if Mona insisted on moving to Queensland where she could get more sun. His mind fast forwarded to images of himself surrounded by friends, eating nothing but hamburgers and with pictures of Eng and Nancy in a nursing home, long forgotten on a mantle piece in a room they never went into. He foresaw gifts from his parents to him thrown all over the floor, and the dilapidated and creaking sign of 'The Oriental Express' covered in cobwebs. He saw a picture of him and Mona with greying hair, in Jeans West jeans and Aussie parkas.

Toby waited until the credits rolled. Mona was snoring softly and he watched his friends wave at each other before pulling out of the drive-in, their girlfriends' heads lolling like bladders on the ends of sticks. "See ya!" he waved and waited until they'd all left. Then he turned to Mona, his beautiful girlfriend and lowered his seat back carefully and quietly, so as not to shock her.

When everything was dark and there was barely a soul left in the place, he very carefully woke her up by tracing her cheek with his fingers. "Wake up," he said.

She woke with a smile. "What Toby," she said.

"I wanna have sex right now," he said.

Make it Up, Make it Right:
Presidential Truth through Biographical Falsity in Edmund Morris's *Dutch*

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Give Edmund Morris credit for forthrightness, or at least give the credit to his publisher. The jacket flap of *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* reveals the strange presence the writer has within the text: "Morris's biographical mind becomes in effect another character in the narrative, recording long-ago events with the same eyewitness vividness (and absolute documentary fidelity) with which the author later describes the great dramas of Reagan's presidency…." Clarified, the dust jacket confirms what pre-publication write-ups decried. Morris, despite having grown up in Africa, and despite not having emigrated to the United States until 1968, writes about meeting Ronald Reagan during their concurrent childhoods, when they both lived in Illinois, in the 1920s and 30s. Which is to say, Morris creates a fictional version of himself in this biography, and that fictive personality interacts with the real Ronald Reagan on the page. Morris lies, more or less, since his fiction comes within a supposed nonfiction, in an authorized biography no less. But that lie, or creation, or authorial liberty, or violation, abomination, maybe innovation, best serves the substance of Morris's biography. Ronald Reagan was a slippery fellow, with a mutable mind to match, and a holder of an office equally shifty. As far as Reagan Reality goes, it's hard to know what happened and what was imagined As a result, the slippage between fiction and fact in the Morris biography perfectly matches the ambiguous reality of Ronald Reagan while also reflecting the imagined memory that creates the substance of U.S. Presidency in general.

Not surprisingly, many reviews of *Dutch* addressed Morris's fictive elements with more than mild criticism. The book "is beyond salvation," according to Edward Galligan in a review representative of the anti-*Dutch* camp:

> No matter how you slice it, *Dutch* is not a technically ambitious book that happens to fail; it's an intolerably silly one that no sane person should be expected to finish…. It's a nonexistent memoir of a young man that an incompetent and fictitious novelist did not write in order to save a mortified biographer from having to voice his darkest suspicion—that he and millions of Americans had been gulled by a second-rate actor. (Galligan)

Galligan, like many other critics, focuses on the fictional elements of Morris's text, a violation of nonfiction that such critics cannot forgive. From this perspective, the biography ceases to be about the actual subject—Reagan—and instead becomes a self-reflective invention by Morris, perhaps an ego-book, maybe a failed novel, but certainly not the kind of careful history expected from the official biographer of a notable president.

And, certainly, as these critics warn, *Dutch* includes plenty of fictional content: a fictional Morris, his fictional son, a fictional supporting cast. Further, Morris makes it very difficult to determine where fiction and biography separate, since he offers no obvious textual clues, nor even particularly clear endnotes; fictional characters have their own notes, just like real people. Through this graying of reality, Morris finds fellowship in the growing pantheon of discredited memoirists, and no doubt would fare as poorly as James Frey did recently with Oprah. I only casually marked *Dutch*'s fictive moments with neon Post-its, and the book quickly grew a scraggly orange beard. But the mere presence of this fiction—no matter how exhaustive—doesn't necessarily

destroy the book's credibility. As autobiographical theorists like Roy Pascal, Paul Eakin, and Timothy Dow Adams suggest, fiction, lies, or falsehoods within life writing can serve the overall validity of the text. For Eakin, fiction within autobiography can help to reveal the writer "in the moment of his engagement in the act of composition," if not the actual history of his life (22). More intriguingly, Adams suggests that lies within autobiography can both create a necessary ring of truth (16) and a greater clarity of the author's true self than facts might allow (ix). And while these theorists have previously considered the relation of truth and fiction in autobiographical writing—the story of self—their concepts of fictive validity can be applied to *Dutch*, which operates as a hybrid form of biography-autobiography; the fictions Morris adds are about himself, not his subject.

The fiction of *Dutch*, then, can be seen in part as an attempt by Morris to establish a motif of mis-remembered truth in the former president's life. He reveals that "Ronald Reagan once claimed to be able to project stereoscopes of childhood at will, running them back and forth in memory" (48). Reagan also "remained all his life an actor, a man of exits and entrances, whether the 'production' that engaged him was as short as a conversation or as long as the Presidency" (181). Maybe most importantly, Morris suggests that "imagination, not mendacity, was the key to Dutch's mind. He believed both true and untrue things if they suited his moral purpose—and because he believed in belief." Reagan's lies, then, were not exactly deception to Morris, but more the residue of an actor living within a world of perceived truth. Like his performances as an actor, the appearance of truth held far greater importance than adherence to fact. The use of fiction in *Dutch* mirrors that notion of truth, in that it allows the reader to experience reality in the same manner that Morris suggests Reagan did. Since the reader cannot easily separate the fictional portions of the text from

the factual ones—he or she sees the action of the book as clearly as a stereoscope in the mind—the reader must rely on the text as true. *Dutch* works for the reader as memory works for Reagan, as a fluid image that offers no evidence of falsity. More, *Dutch* becomes the reader's memory, a mishmash of truth and fiction that, because it looks true, makes its own reality.

In the biography, the reader faces an early moment of disclarity when Reagan transitions from radio man to actor. Morris describes the action of *Love Is on the Air* without alerting the reader to the shift from Reagan life to Reagan performance, creating an unsettling textual transition. At first, the blur resists attention, then only gradually emerges. Reagan is called "Andy" or "Mr. McCaine," as he was called in the film, and it is only with time that the reader realizes that the described action comes, in fact, from the movie. Morris, no doubt, meant to create such confusion, and particularly wanted to obscure the borders between life and film, since their easy blend serves Morris's point about the Reagan brand of memory. That point becomes clearer later in the biography, when Morris describes a more serious conflation of film and reality. In conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Reagan, now President, claimed to have personally witnessed the liberation of German concentration camps following World War II, when in fact Reagan had only seen the film footage while working for the First Motion Picture Unit (465). Morris defends Reagan's mistake, suggesting that for the President,

> raw film is the same as raw experience. Of course he was "there" at Buchenwald with Owen Crump and the combat camera crew. Do we not speak of being *transported* by great drama, *moved* to pity? What matters, surely, is that one of history's worst truths registered upon Ronald Reagan half a

> century ago, with a primacy that affected him the rest of his life. (465)

Remembered reality is reality, Morris argues, with distinctions rendered merely semantic, since images offer enough power to impart seemingly real memory. And since seeming reality is as good as the "real" thing, Morris here offers both defense of Reagan's faulty memory and validation of *Dutch* as a biography, as non-fiction. Since imagined memory can be as real as experience, then fictive action can be as real as reportage.

Of course, part of the reality Morris dealt with in the writing of *Dutch* was the mercurial nature of Ronald Reagan. As Steven Weisman points out, Morris struggled to draw information from his subject, even with his status as official biographer. "In the end," Weisman writes, "the access was of little use, since Reagan devoted most of their conversation to tired anecdotes, tall tales and evasions" (7). The president, in effect, performed his life to Morris, offering not the all-access detail assumed in an authorized biography, but instead a self-consciously manipulated rendition of events. Reagan became the arbiter of his life's truth, with his version of events, full of mis-memory and conflation, standing in as the "official" truth. By usurping Reagan's control through fictive inclusion, Morris helps to reveal the tenuous relationship of fact and fiction within his subject's memory. Further, in so carefully blurring the lines between reality and fiction, Morris creates difficulty for the reader hoping to unpack the "validity" of the text. There, too, Morris forces a mimetic act within the reader: he or she must carefully consider the stories of Reagan's official biography, just as he or she should carefully consider the stories of Reagan's presidential memory. Any or all of the biography could be true or untrue, just as any or all of the "facts" of Reagan's life could be true or untrue. So while Morris on one hand offers a "ring of truth" in defending Regan's mistaken memory of Nazi

concentration camps, he also renders all claims of truth, whether they ring true or not, at least partially suspect.

Here, then, Morris has offered an implicit critique of Reagan, biography, and political office. In each, truth comes not through careful scrutiny of fact, but is instead ascribed to memories and recollections that seem to fit. The issue, at least in part, lies with the creation of identity or, more, of the control over that creation. For Morris, who works as a biographer or writer of another's life, the physical object of the book creates identity. Without *Dutch*, Morris does not exist to the reader. With *Dutch*, Morris literally exists, both as physical writer and fictive character. In the same fashion, Reagan lacks identity without performance. As Michael Rogin has pointed out, Reagan often appropriated lines of movies as his own, collapsing his own physical identity into the remembered performance of his acting life (*Ronald Reagan the Movie*). In extension of that merge between film and reality, Regan also created fictive memories of presumed threats to drive his politics as President: Star Wars, Iran-Contra, the Cold War in general. The very political identity of his Presidency was predicated on the faulty memory of cinematic Inertia Cannons as real-life missile defense systems. But since Reagan's memory of his film roles functioned alongside the non-celluloid world, he stood fast when real-world facts threatened to undermine his political aims. It mattered little, then, that the Star Wars missile defense system was neither practical nor possible. He believed in the memory of the Inertia Cannon, and by clinging to that belief nonetheless bankrupted the Soviet Union, which was forced to develop a real response to the impossible Star Wars program.

Dutch as biography could not then help but succumb to the Derridian absence inherent within signs. The moment any writer sets words to paper, he or she has altered moments to fashion a text. For a biography to deal with Reagan's

complex remembered reality, the gap between sign and signified widens. The textual Reagan of *Dutch* becomes a secondary identity with no real presence, operating only as a sign of a sign of a man, a perfect Baudrillardian simulacrum that hides the absence of anything real beneath it (Baudrillard 170). Morris, too, operates as a doubly-created identity, an author and character that cannot exist without the doubly-created identity of Ronald Reagan. For *Dutch* to exist, Reagan had to first invent himself through mis-memory, then contract Morris to serve as the official biographer of the mis-remembered life, so Morris could recreate both Reagan and himself within the pages of the text. It comes hardly as a surprise, then, that Morris would find tremendous attraction to Reagan and his life-story:

> Memory. Desire. What is this mysterious yearning of biographer for subject, so akin to a *coup de foudre* in its existence? Yet so fundamentally different from love it its detachment?…Yet still I feel that gravitational drag, the product as much of disproportion as convergence. Before we recede to our respective darknesses, I must allow these floating fragments, these dusts of myself, to sparkle in his waning light. (xix-xx)

Morris, in the prologue to *Dutch*, here suggests the very existential nature of the biographer-subject relationship. Both disappear without the other, the subject to obscurity, author to voicelessness. Together, they allow identity to reside on the page, while each exacts a distorting pull on the other. Further, each requires an outside agency to validate identity, a reader or viewer to receive and, thus, bring to life. Reagan, as actor, needs a public to see his performance, just as Morris needs a reader to see and believe his performance of the Reagan performance.

In part for this reason, Morris creates a fictional son in the biography, to whom he ascribes the role of Berkeley radical. Gavin, as created son, offers Morris both a character to respond to Reagan's early political life as California governor and a connection to Reagan, a "dust" of himself that draws the relationship of writer-subject closer. The fictive Gavin lives in a world counter to Reagan, orchestrating violent protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, supporting black militants. He offers the writer Morris a way to populate Reagan's political world with a created audience. But Morris also creates Gavin to lose him, writing that his son disappeared into the underground, "where there is no light at all….And it was you, Dutch, who sent him there" (365). Gavin disappears from the biography and, in fact, with him goes most of Morris's fictional intrusions into Reagan's life. As sacrificial element, the figment of Gavin helps Morris to both show an individual affected by Reagan and diffuse the author's admitted attraction to his subject. If he blames Reagan for the death of his son, the reader must assume Morris would not succumb to mere glorification of the former President.

But such a move is only an empty fictive gesture, absent the reality of emotion that comes with the loss of a real son. It is a textual memory of a created son, employed to better validate the textual memory of a created Presidential figure. Reagan, in a sense, did not exist, not as Morris presents him in *Dutch*, nor as the public saw him during the actual presidency, nor, in fact, in the memories Reagan himself carried. His identity was one of textual creation, a mis-memory that nonetheless affected real lives. Yet at the same time, the politics of any presidency offer little more adherence to so-called reality. The office itself demands oratory, demands that the person in the office be Presidential by acting as such. Not coincidentally, modern Presidents spend the end of their days forging a "legacy" that need not adhere to the actual policies of the

administration. The remembered image of a President matters far more than its forgotten actuality. Biography, too, demands a veneer of believable mis-memory. It must be Biographical, following the elusive standards of the genre.

Dutch, however, reveals the illusion of the standards of both presidency and biography as it flaunts biographic convention to trumpet presidential mendacity. Though the specifics of Reagan's difficult relationship to truth would seem to disqualify him as Presidential, *Dutch* helps to show that any rigid Presidential standard serves only as a signifier for an absent ideal. Because the Biographical violations of *Dutch* so clearly mimic the factual violations of Reagan Reality, the flawed biography becomes a perfect biography. Perhaps the Presidency must always entail remembered truth, and perhaps biography must always somehow fictionalize reality, both Dutch and *Dutch* succeed despite and because of their transgressions.

Fitting, then, that Morris chooses to end his biography of Ronald Reagan with a deeply-convoluted lie: he admits that he had been saved from drowning in an Illinois river by the young Reagan, at the time offering the fake name of Jim Raider, Rocketeer (672). That Morris never gave the false name, and that he never nearly drowned to be never saved by the Reagan he did not then know offers the perfect ending. Absence governs the final image of the text, just as absence lies at the remembered heart of Reagan, of Morris, of the Presidency and biography.

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A Beautiful Game of Chicken

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My hands are clammy despite the crisp frigid night air and I chastise myself for being nervous. I dig them deep into my pockets as my boots crunch the freshly packed snow. I pause, looking at the house, pensive. I wonder what awaits me and if I can handle it or not. The porch-light comes on suddenly, startling me and then, the front door opens.

There he stands, visibly smiling, in his gray over-sized SEMO hoodie and my insecurity is momentarily buried under affection. We run towards each other and meet on the last step of the porch. I plan to lecture him on running out into the snow without shoes, but we embrace tightly first, squashing the cigarettes in his sweatshirt pouch. "Murray," he says in a tired, uncharacteristic mature voice, "It is great to see you."

Not loosening my embrace in the slightest, I agree. "It's been a while."

"Too long," he responds, ushering me into the house. I begin to take my wet shoes off and immediately, I can feel the strong furnace as my body is instantly warmed. I'm barely into the foyer when I see him. Dan politely takes my coat and drapes it over a nearby antique armchair. I notice that his living room houses the same couches as my grandparents, and also Dan's father, who lie in a twin bed beside the blazing portable heater.

"Murray," he introduces grandly, "this is Dad." Dan walks forward about ten steps and plops down beside his father. "Hey Pop," he says softly, but not condescending, "Murray's here."

His father doesn't say a word, though his unsteady frantic breathing says volume about his pain. His hairless head is draped over his blue and white

checkered feather pillow and his mouth is slightly ajar. From where I stand, parked awkwardly in the doorway, I can see his pale shivering small frame, swimming in his large white stained t-shirt and hospital blue pajama pants, uncovered and awkward in the puddle of sweat formed in the middle of his public living room bed.

"He's resting up," Dan informs me. "He's already sat up once today, and I am pretty confident that we're going to have another talk soon." As he tells me this, I begin inching my way toward the bed. I had promised myself throughout the drive that I was going to be natural and strong. Dan needs me right now. I take a deep breath and my nostrils take in the smell of medicine, antiseptic, and vomit.

I am powerless. Visions of my past, my mother, frail and sweating, shivering and silent cloud my vision and I am momentarily paralyzed. I forget where I stand. I can see the stares. I can hear the nurses talk to her like she was a mere child, incapable of adult conversation and truth. *She's still a person,* I wanted to scream. *She's no different than you.* I can remember hearing my mother gag and seeing the chemo-spit, as we used to call it, dribbling down her chin as she lie oblivious and aggrieved in her hospital bed, the white walls unbearingly flushing her sunken cheeks. I can see first-time visitors cringe; No second visit offered. I can see the bags under her eyes and the way her eyes pleaded with me to make it all end. I can feel my preacher wordlessly, helplessly pat me on the shoulder as the fear in his eyes reveal that she was beyond the reach of the gospel. I feel my insides swelling as a tremendous heat runs through my chest. I am clammy. My fingers tremble and my knees feel weak.

Dan's father coughs hard and painful as a spot of green liquid comes out onto his chin. I know this green liquid. I know it too well.

Uncomfortably and sadly nostalgic, I stop short of the bed and focus on family pictures that grace the plain white walls. I pretend, I'm sure unconvincingly, to inspect my best friend's, third grade class picture. I want to make a comment about his silly haircut and his dorky glasses, but I can't articulate a single syllable. Out of the corner of my eye, as I am trying not to blatantly stare, I see Dan wipe his father's chin. Morbid commentary runs through my guilty head as I watch his father's game of chicken with mortality, terrified, but mesmerized.

"You want up Pop?" Dan asks his dad gently. His dad kind of grunts and Dan accepts this to mean yes. He slides his left arm beneath his father and hoists him up to perch beside him on the bed. Dan's left arm keeps his father steady. His arms shake from over-exertion and I notice that his eyelids are swollen and red from an obvious lack of sleep. Nonetheless, he sits, patient, nearly salivating for one more fatherly word.

I want to sit next to Dan and his father and naturally tell stories and laugh. I want to let Dan know how loved he is and let his father know that it's okay not to be well. He's still a man, and a good man at that. He's still a father, a good father. He's still a friend and a husband. I want to open the Bible that lie upon makeshift Tupperware nightstand and find the words that would heal them both- at least for the night. I want to be the friend I never had. I want to be the daughter I never was.

But, I stand motionless, as Dan's third grade haircut and glasses all blend into one teary abstract painting.

Dan watches his father intently for a moment. His father, then, momentarily looks kind of angry. His eyes narrow slightly and his mouth purses, tight and shut. His nose flares a bit. "What's wrong Dad?" Dan inquires concerned.

I can barely hear his father's response, but I hear something about smoking. Dan looks at me. "He's mad because I smell like smoke," he explains with a smile. "Pop, are you mad, or jealous?"

"Both," he father responds in his throaty voice with a slight smile.

Dan's face brightens. He regains some of his color, obviously happy to see his father smile. "Murray's been trying to get me to quit," Dan tells his father. His father tries to look up at me but his neck is too weak. I take a deep breath. *He's still a man*, I say to myself. I walk a few more steps and sit on the other side of him.

"I like her already," his father says barely audible and weak, only certain words producing any sound. Dan didn't have to translate. I knew what he said.

I place my right hand on his left leg as I laugh a free natural laugh. I take a deep cleansing breath and let life fill my chest as the beauty of the situation fills my heart. Overwhelmed, I can't help but feel the spiritually magnificent weight of an existence sustained by the hope of one more five minute talk with your son, whose high school throwing arm envelopes your weak body and holds you steady as he cups your chin with his free hand and pours sip of water into your dry throat.

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Miss Abigail

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Two and impulsive,
I climbed upon the cherry coffee table
hoisting Miss Abigail over first.

My clutched fingers cradled the plastic-headed cloth-
bellied baby-doll against my complete heart.
My petite, size four feet
pounded, plodded past the center candle
preparing to freefall two and a half feet
to the depths of the green shag carpet.

No pictures documented this momentous occasion.
Yet, just like Aunt Rita's grape jelly meatballs,
the tale has visited our holiday table
at nearly every fancy forks and tablecloth dinner since,
by cool lips aimed at my red face.

My busted nose.
Once white, now bloody, ruffled blouse .
Curly brunette pig-tails pulled below my ears.

My concern for Miss Abigail always
outweighs my pain.
Steals the show.
Awwwwwwwww's
slip and echo through the red-lip-sticked mouths
of mothers who would hoist their babies over first.
Not one of them asks where my mother was
when I was on this quest for liberty.

No family anecdotes of my mother's head in her hands
hair hanging in a way that hid her bloodshot eyes
and colorless cheeks as they rested upon the cold porcelain lid.
Instead, mashed potatoes are passed to Aunt Agnes.

And for the life of me, I can't see this cherry table
or the nick on the corner from my baby's impact.
And Miss Abigail was sold at a church yard-sale
for a quarter to a mother to be who
nestled Miss Abigail into her breasts and
said, *She would be perfect*.

Each year climbs my face more crimson
as I shrink into the depths of the kitchen chair.
My story grows to be a stranger.

That stranger's concern grows hysterical
and her mother's concern
more Hysterical
and she becomes *more* endearing
and her blouse grows *more* blood
and the table grows and so does the doll
more and More

until one day
when she will hit her head on the ceiling
and fall
without getting back up.

But One thing will never change,

she was two
        and impulsive.

Matters of Fact: Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* and the Romance of Realism

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> Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

The argument of this essay takes as its point of entry Mr. Gradgrind's desire to be in possession of the "Facts" as a representative phenomenon of early Victorian prose writing. Victorians were excited by facts. They cited them, taught them, exhaustively collected them, debated them, subjected them to statistical analysis, and, perhaps, were eventually convinced that they constituted objective representations of reality. In time, they allowed themselves to be observed by those who gathered facts and regulated by "experts" (doctors, scientists, civil servants, public officials, engineers, social planners) whose professional training authorized them as factual interpreters. Facts, or at least statistical facts, as social historian Harold Perkin informs us, "were to industrialism what written language was to early civilization: at once its product and its means of self-expression (326).

This demand for a language of verifiable quantification, together with a concomitant interest in factual referentiality (the need for some consensus as to what constitutes a fact and how facts are to be known) became, with the 1832 Reform Bill, a directly political issue. This was certainly noted in retrospect. The *Quarterly Review*, for example, could claim in an 1854 analysis of the Reform Parliament that "the generation which has arisen since 1832 is one which especially clamors for facts, and is hardly satisfied to take a pin without being

conducted through every room of the manufactory" ("House of Commons" 1). The early compilers of factual information themselves took for granted that the possession such knowledge would prefigure changes in how political debate was to be understood. James Kay-Shuttleworth's 1832 report, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* affords an early example of the search for a new methodology, a new language capable of both self-definition and self-authorization, yet fully persuasive in its public appeal:

> … when any emergency demands a special inquiry, information is obtained by means of committees of the Commons, whose labourers are so multifarious, as to afford them time for little else than the investigation of general conclusions, derived from the experience of those supposed to be most conversant with the subject. An approximation to truth may thus be made, but the results are never so minutely accurate as those obtained from statistical investigations, and, as they are generally deduced from a comparison of opposing testimonies, they frequently utterly fail in one most important respect, namely – in convincing the public of the facts which they proclaim. (19)

Kay-Shuttleworth's comments mark an important moment of transition in the nature of political "truth." Once, he suggests, "truth" came from generalization and debate. Now it comes from facts. It is no wonder that the 1830's saw the establishment of the statistical office of the Board of Trade, the Register-General's Office, as well as Statistical Societies in all of the major cities (Manchester – 1833, London – 1834).

The fact, then, as a touchstone of verifiable reality, was a powerful means of societal self-knowledge made necessary by the 1832 reconstitution of the

public sphere. Yet what is knowable, what declared factual, presented to Parliament in a blue book or marketed to the public through newspapers and journals, is not only a function of objects – of what there is to be known. It is also and perhaps more importantly, as Raymond Williams notes, a "function of subjects, of observers, of what is desired and what needs to be known" (17). Thus the social construction of facts in the period alters the language of political discourse and, in the process, becomes available to assist in the ideological work of class formation. The process by which self-knowledge becomes class identity is also illustrated in Kay-Shuttleworth's report:

> Self-knowledge, inculcated by the maxim of the ancient philosopher, is a precept not less appropriate to societies than to individuals. The physical and moral evils by which we are personally surrounded may be more easily avoided where we are distinctly conscious of their existence and the virtues and health of society may be preserved with less difficulty when we are acquainted with the sources of its errors and desires. (17)

Kay-Shuttleworth had begun his report by assuming a part of society that observes and knows, and a part of society that is observed and known. Observation produces knowing that is both physical and moral; the "virtues and health of society" are conflated. This moral project works itself out in his text as the need to distinguish between the virtuous and undeserving indigent populations. Kay-Shuttleworth's self-knowledge begins to look like an authorization to classify – to define class.

The intent of this essay is to suggest something of the interconnected social circulations in place authorizing the construction of factual documentation in the early Victorian period. In doing so, I also hope to suggest important changes in our conceptualization of literary realism. In Ian Watt's classic account,

The Rise of the Novel, a unified subject (the rising middle class) possesses a technology (formal realism) capable of performing the ideological work of self-definition, self-authorization, and self-expression. Yet "realism" was not present as a strategy even in 1832, waiting for the new MP's, ready made for the Boards of Health, Poor Law officials, and Blue Book Committees. It was not obvious, for example, that the language of eighteenth century public debate had to be replaced by the language of the expert. By viewing realism as a contested, contaminated field (mixed, for example, with satire, the picturesque, eighteenth-century notions of the sublime, nostalgia for the past, etc.), rather than a straight forward technology, I wish to open up the possibility that its analysis ought not to attend only to minute details, but to their eclipse, their waxing and waning according to the semiotic currents of the narrative.

Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* serves as a test case for this approach. The novel, published in 1837 (the same year its author is first elected to Parliament), appropriates the increased production of government documents, reports, and commissions to appeal to the popular intelligence newly enfranchised by the 1832 Reform Bill. He does so through emphasizing the education of his ingenuous hero, Egremont, his seriousness, his dedication, what we might call his professionalism. He begins, as Watt claims Modern Realism does "from the position that truth can be discovered through the senses" (12). In projecting the possibility of a new Parliament – one of leaders "above" politics, of public servants in a newly defined sense, of M.P.'s who read documentation and evaluate evidence-- Disraeli, in effect, writes a new, Tory history of the public sphere. In doing so, he goes beyond claiming a certain realism of description ; he invests it with a political agenda, the classification of the facts becomes a definition of class – the realism of the rich and the poor, the "Two Nations" of Great Britain in the 1830's and 1840's.

Structurally, Disraeli's novel has much in common with today's "docu-drama," a filmed (usually for television) fictional story woven into a pseudo-documentary of current news events. Early reviews of *Sybil* tended both to stress and minimize the newness of its techniques. The *Atheneaum* reviewer, for example, begins with its newness, recalling how *Coningsby* had "startled the public" ("Review" 10). That novel, he reminds his readers, was immediately accepted as a "short and easy way of reading politics" (10). *Sybil*'s publication merely confirmed the effectiveness of that method. Yet the same reviewer also found Disraeli's approach – a combination of fiction, fact, and politics – so transparent as to be unproblematic. For him, the novel remained "largely a political treatise, a warming up of speech materials, a transcript of Blue-Book incident and adventure" ("Review" 10). He judges *Sybil,* as fiction, to be too episodic to be effective. While he praises its satiric scenes and admits as factual the Blue-Book evidence (which had been recently reviewed in the *Athenaeum*), he also declares the author heavy handed in his attempts to capture working class life in the manner popularized by Dickens.

What interests me most in the *Athenaeum* review is how much its author takes as obvious and transparent just this conflation of the factual report and the fictional context into a "short and easy method of reading politics." The reviewer both emphasizes and denies the importance of *Sybil*'s appeal by separately considering these aspects of the novel. Of course, the *Athenaeum*'s reviewer has only to look at the table of contents of his own journal, or of the *Quarterly Review*, or the *Westminster Review* to see just such a mixture: factual statistics on manufacture, technical writing explaining the latest inventions, travel and adventure, reviews of poetry and fiction, political controversy. Disraeli takes these tables of content seriously – as the basis of his appeal, his career, and

Young England's political platform. *Sybil* reaches just such a public sphere, newly redefined by the Reform Bill.

In his Preface to the novel, Disraeli indicates the direction his appeal will take. The Reform Act in itself, he tells his readers, has not placed government in better hands, nor has it "elevated the tone of the public mind … or public debate" (56). Yet the "indirect influence of the Reform Act has not been inconsiderable," he states, because it

> … set men a – thinking; it enlarged the horizon of political experience; it led the public mind to ponder somewhat on the circumstances of our national history, to pry into the beginnings of some social anomalies … insensibly it created and prepared a popular intelligence to which one can appeal, no longer hopelessly, in an attempt to dispel the mysteries with which for nearly three centuries it has been the labour of party writers to involve a national history. (56-57)

"Thinking," "pondering," "prying," "dispelling mysteries" – Disraeli's analysis not only looks like an explanation of the reasons one might subscribe to the reviews, it also contrasts to his satiric portraits of an older Toryism, which, as pure theatricality, was not adaptable to current conditions. Consider, for example, his depiction of Sir Vavasour's "political vision":

> Picture us for a moment, to yourself going down in procession to Westminster for example to hold a Chapter Five of six hundred baronets in dark green costume – the appropriate dress of *equites aurari*; each not only with his badge, but with his collar of s.s. belted and scarfed, his star glittering, his hat white with a plume of white feathers; of course the sword and gilt spurs… (78)

This display is, for the baronet, "after all, the question of the day" (78). It is against this vision of aristocratic irresponsibility that Disraeli authorizes the writing of his own book: *Sybil* has a title page with a title, B. Disraeli, M.P. – Author of *Conings*by.

Disraeli takes pains to outline the nature of his authority in the Advertisement prefacing the novel and addressed to the "general reader whose attention has not been specially drawn to the subject which these volumes aim to illustrate, the condition of the People" (*Sybil* 24). There is nothing in the book he informs his audience that has not "the authority of his own observation, or the authentic evidence which has been received by Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees" (*Sybil* 24). By thus conflating his own personal observation with the "authentic" evidence certified by Crown and Parliament, Disraeli goes beyond claiming a certain realism of description: he invents realism in relation to his political agenda and therefore invests it with a political content. As with James Kay-Shuttleworth, realism is actually class definition – the realism of the Two Nations. What follows is that Disraeli's observations are the source of narrative description for Society, the scenes of Parliament and upper-class life, while Parliamentary Blue Books are the basis for *Sybil*'s descriptions of lower-class conditions. Although both forms of authority are united in Disraeli's signature, two distinct styles of realism emerge in the novel, styles which assist in class formation.

Sybil is constructed in parallels, neatly illustrating its theme of the "Two Nations." As the plot moves between these alternating scenes of rich and poor, the relationships between the scenes vary from descriptive (landscapes that contain and bind desire), to causal (actions in one scene / class cause reactions in the other, to parodic (actions of the poor parody the actions of the rich). Of even greater importance, however, are the framing techniques themselves. The upper-

class scenes, for example, almost always start with dialogue, *in medias res*. We learn about character first through dialogue, much as we do in Austen or Scott. The reader hears voices; scenery is then sketched in as necessary, coded French or European, a table that once belonged to Mortemart, and paintings with the "lurid hues" of Watteau and Boucher slide into the voices of De Vere, Latour, and Egremont. The upper-class landscapes reduce themselves to commodities and brand names – to canes and wines, paintings and horses – not because that is all to describe, but because that is what there is to exchange in conversation. Aristocratic titles and governmental preferments are similarly bought and sold.

These scenes are largely fields of continuous speculation. The novel opens with anonymous voices speculating on horses, and the dialogue is then repeated *mutatis mutandis* with substitutions for houses of cabinet ministers, eligible heiresses, vacant titles, possibly vacant titles, economic opportunities, upcoming elections, wills, or the King's health. The speculative quality of the upper-class scenes contrasts starkly with the documentation strategies of the Second Nation. The connection between the two will be Egremont, or more exactly, something that novels allow readers to call the growth of Egremont's mind. If one class forms Egremont as subject, the other class is constituted within the dynamics of the plot as the object of his understanding.

If the aristocratic scenes aspire to stage, the working-class scenes aspire to uncover their subject layer-by-layer, Disraeli taking much of his description directly from government documents (Smith 115-123). Most often they begin not with voices, but with general descriptions, with the sun or moon, the sky, the clouds. They next work down to the village, then the street, the room, the clothes, the thoughts, and the, perhaps, to the citation of a voice. These openings are like camera shots, continually narrowing the focus, reframing their subject. Thus the working-class is continually trapped within concreteness of detail. The reader,

like the Parliamentarians studying their documents, is always outside the picture, looking in. Realism is a class privilege. To work for wages implies supervision, a special kind of attention applied by the employer and implied in the gaze of these chapters. Thus a description of Mr. Trafford's factory authorizes both its accuracy and its point of view: "But the moral advantages resulting from superior inspection and general observation are not less important: the child works under the eye of the parent, the parent under that of the superior workman, the inspector or employer at a glance can behold all" (*Sybil* 225). Narrative description not only works to construct class but to authorize its representational techniques.

Such attention is focused on the Warner abode, which serves both the reader and Egremont as an introduction to life in the Second Nation. "It was a cloudy, glimmering dawn. A cold withering east wind blew through the silent streets of Mowbray. The sounds of the night had died away, the voices of the day had not commenced. There reigned a stillness complete and absorbing (*Sybil* 149). The work day begins. Consciousness comes to the scene, as to the workers, in the form of a man with a long pole who taps at the windows – the wake-up service. The reader follows this man through narrower and narrower streets "stooping through one of the small archways" until he reaches the Warner's window. We learn that the wake-up service is no longer needed – Harriet has gone. Warner retires, leaving the widow open. We follow and enter:

> It was a single chamber of which he was the tenant. In the center, placed so as to gain the best light which the gloomy situation could afford, was a loom. In two corners of the room were mattresses placed on the floor, a check curtain hung upon a string if necessary concealing them. In one was his sick wife; in the other, three children: two girls, the eldest about eight years of age; between

> them their baby brother. An iron kettle was by the hearth and on the mantle-piece some candles, a few Lucifer matches, two iron mugs, a paper of salt, and an iron spoon. In a farther part, close to the wall, was a heavy dresser; this was a fixture, as well as the form which was fastened by it. (150)

Such a description models closely the definition of realism given by George Levine in *The Realistic Imagination*, a "self conscious effort, usually in the name of some moral enterprise of truth telling and extending the limits of human sympathy, to make literature appear to be describing directly not just some other language, but reality itself" (8). In other words, Levine sees both an ideological aspect of language, a "moral enterprise of truth telling," and a technique attached to it "to make literature appear to describing … reality itself." Disraeli's description is just such a language, a coded message, a set piece of early Victorian prose repeated again and again in the 1830's and 1840's. These rooms find their way into writings by Kay-Shuttleworth, Edwin Chadwick, Henry Mayhew, Elizabeth Gaskell, into the texts of the moral reformers, the spokesmen of the Sanitary Movement, the Chartists, and the Benthamites. Warner's room says "moral poor." The loom at the center represents a skill and a readiness to work; there is no mention of filth and dirt, no promiscuous misuse of beds, no traces of alcohol. Here, at least, the moral or "deserving" poor is represented by emptiness.

Yet Disraeli's realism is far from consistent in the application of its gaze. Rather, it fixes upon some things and overlooks others. Approaching the Warner room through those progressively smaller archways, Disraeli reminds his readers that they have already been furnished with a description of the slums. These are archways, he says, which "we have before noticed" (149). The earlier account on the working class living conditions (in Book II, Chapter 3) was taken

almost verbatim from the 1843 Chadwick Commission on Sanitary Conditions (Smith 115-123). Its emphasis was on filth. Disraeli packs pages of Chadwick's evidence into two paragraphs of condensed dirt. We are informed that a home "looked more like the top of a dung heap than a cottage," that "foul pits" spread into "stagnant pools," that "dissolving filth was allowed to soak through and thoroughly impregnate the walls," that roofs are "putrid," that "contiguous to every door might be observed a dung heap on which every kind of filth was accumulated," that one was inevitably greeted with "a mixture of gases and from reeking dung hills" (*Sybil* 80-81).

Again, this "realism" is clearly a language. Metonymically we witness a human sewer filled with peasants "expelled" from their farms. Beds take on a moral significance as whole families gather to "sleep without distinction of age or sex or suffering" (81). Yet all this disappears as Disraeli returns us through the narrow archway. We can infer that Sybil must walk through this filth, but we are not shown it. Nor is Warner metonymically contaminated. There are now simply different things to be "realistic" about – iron utensils, a loom, and sturdy oak furniture rather than dung heaps. These "realisms" form a pattern of what is uncovered / exposed and what is hidden. A pattern emerges that, because it cannot be resolved in class terms, is projected onto the narrative register – the novel's realism, its uncovering the "facts" about the poor, and its romance, the mysteries surrounding the beautiful Sybil.

Our first account of the slums, the one drawn from the Chadwick Sanitation Reports, takes its significance from the novel's construction of "Merry England," a key component of Disraeli's political argument. Disraeli contrasts the town's picturesque setting to its current condition:

> In a spreading dale, contiguous to the margin of a clear and lively stream, surrounded by meadows and gardens, and backed by lofty

> hills, undulating and richly wooded, the traveler on the opposite heights of the dale would often stop to admire the merry prospect that recalled to him the traditional epithet of this country. (80)

Immediately, however, Disraeli's uncovering gestures reveal Merry England to be an illusion: "Beautiful illusion! For behind that laughing landscape penury and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population! The contrast between the interior of the town and its external aspect was as striking as it was full of pain"(80).

The effect Disraeli creates is that of realism dispelling the mysteries of the merely picturesque. Yet the effect of the Chadwick citations, I would argue, is also to cover "Merry England" in dirt and filth rather than to uncover it as an illusion. Merry England has a certain existence in the novel; we know it exists because it can be destroyed. However illusory, Disraeli must insist on its availability to Egremont and Sybil; the ruins of Marney Abbey serve to locate them both politically and romantically even as the myth of a heroic English past transform their love into socially responsible action. These descriptions lead directly into Egremont's visit, the description of the Monastery and his learning the Abbey's history and the monk's early stewardship of the region. The "illusion" of this narrative act of uncovering is contradicted by the "reality" of Disraeli's historical account, which stains the current owners, the present day Marneys and Mowbrays, with the contamination of Chadwick's filth. Lord Mowbray can relate to the Marney estate as symbolic of an older, purer England only by blindness to the conditions Disraeli has just described to his readers.

Disraeli's use of the language of realism works to similar purpose in the Warner scene. After the descriptions of the working-class rooms quoted above, such touches simply disappear as soon as Warner sits down to work. There are no descriptions of his working, his loom, how it works, or what it produces. Nor

are there accounts of the physical and bodily effects of his labor. Instead there are five paragraphs of political history, produced by Disraeli as though they were Warner's reverie. By informing us of what is missing, Warner's thoughts provide another version of Merry England. Again, realism gives way to romance. By the time Egremont arrives a few moments later, attention is focused on Sybil rather than the condition of Warner's house.

The novel, I have suggested, asks its readers to consider the conditions of the poor from a certain perspective, a realism of description that Disraeli authorizes for himself by borrowing the authorization of the government experts. Yet Sybil, covered by the dark, hidden behind the veil of Catholicism and the Convent, whether standing in the romantic evening shadows of a ruined Abbey or the squalid corner of a poor workers cottage, always resists objectification. On the level of the plot, this is not a problem. The reader is given enough clues not to expect Sybil to be treated as just another lower-class woman. She will be revealed as aristocratic in blood and lineage. Yet, in spite of such protection, the novel continually raises the possibility that Sybil will be treated like a lower-class woman. Morley, a working-class man, threatens to marry her. Lord Mowbray lusts after her. Such possibilities remove the boundaries, among them Sybil's purity, that keep the novel's two worlds separate. The class differences represented by Sybil are differences that cannot be described without revealing them to be a product of narrative point of view. Thus, when Sybil's journey through Nighttown seeking out her father in the Chartist underground threatens to put her again under the microscope reserved for the lower classes, Disraeli's realism is generically contaminated. At the moment such a possibility emerges, the novel shifts to gothic horror, a horror from which Sybil can and must be rescued. She is saved from the gaze of the police, the crowed, the courts,

even from the narrative consciousness itself just as Disraeli's "examination" of the condition of the poor breaks down the boundaries of the realistic genre.

Disraeli's inability to examine Sybil realistically underlines the novel's central ideological contradiction: its constructions of gender continually undermine the documentary treatment reserved for the lower classes. Thus, in the Wodgate mining scenes, where the mining girls are lower class and are subjected to the uncovering gaze of Blue Book documentation, the narrative idealization of female virtue and domesticity cannot exist. If the mining girls were to share in the idealization and protection accorded Sybil, class boundaries would be threatened in the sense that they would be revealed to be merely narrative constructions. Because the mining girls are significantly differentiated from Sybil, however, the idealized female who can serve as a class boundary for male desire gives way to the Malthusian nightmare of the Wodgate riots and fires. In other words, this differentiation reveals that all women – merely be being women – cannot serve the function of the ideal woman, who exists only in narrative. *Sybil* attempts to resolve this contradiction as a paradox of narrative style: while the conditions of the poor must be uncovered, the mining girls must, like Sybil, be covered up. What is desired cannot be described realistically, as if by a human gaze, because it does not exist in reality. What is desired exists only as an effect of writing, as that excess that writing produces.

Ultimately, *Sybil*, as it enters circulation, becomes such an object itself. The contradictions inherent in the text are reproduced in the history of its public reception. *Sybil* cannot hide the fact that it, too, is placing its virtues on the market as a political chip to trade and barter. The *Athenaeum* review concludes by noting that "even if benevolence, and generosity, and liberality are traded in (as the most simple cannot but suspect) the very fact that they are marketable says something for the health and progress of mankind" (477). *Sybil* not only

uncovers the "facts" of the Condition of England Debate," but must also expose to the reader the self-authorizing voice behind them.

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Submission and Subscription Information

EAPSU Online: A Journal of Critical and Creative Work (ISSN 1548-1964) is published annually online by the English Association for Pennsylvania State Universities. Current address is 1871 Old Main Drive, Shippensburg PA 17257 (http://www.eapsu.org). *EAPSU ONLINE* accepts scholarly or critical articles on any aspect of English studies (literature, composition and rhetoric, film), pedagogical articles aimed at teaching professors, and creative work of all types. Each submission undergoes a blind review with at least two readers. The annual deadline for receiving submissions is **April 1**. Format, according to MLA in-text citation style sheet, and save as a Word document. **Please send double spaced, Times Roman 12, italicize rather than underline.** Send by email attachment to Kim Martin Long, Editor, kmlong@ship.edu, with personal information in your email message (name, address, phone, affiliation). Do not put identifying information on the paper itself.

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